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## State Transformation and the Rise of China as a World Power: A Discourse on the Realist Paradigm

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### **Abstract:**

*The State generally has been conceived to be a politically organised body of people occupying a definite territory which ideally, has a legitimate government in power to steer its affairs. Of a truth, no State, be it diminutive or gigantic, desire to be economically backward let alone seen as a less powerful country within the international community. Thus, visionary political leaders over the years have seen to the implementation of sound economic policies that have transformed their country from an underdeveloped to a developed economy as was the case for the four Asian Tigers from the 60s. Politically, the People's Republic of China, taking into account the tangible and intangible indices of power, can no longer be regarded as a sleeping giant but a rising power on the world stage. This paper therefore has two objectives. Firstly, to point out the nexus between state transformation and China as an emerging powerhouse. Secondly, to critically assess China as a rising power within the framework of the realist paradigm. Going by my findings, the pursuit of national interest and the augmentation of State power were identified as the driving force behind China's recent behaviour on the international plane, which theoretically, is the thrust of the realist paradigm. The historical and analytical approaches were adopted in the course of this study with secondary sources of qualitative data as the research methodology.*

**Keywords:** State transformation, power, realist paradigm, national interest, People's Republic of China, South China Sea, People's Liberation Army (PLA), Silk Road, One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative

### **1. Introduction**

Since the Treaty of Westphalia took effect in 1648 which brought an end to the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the State has traditionally been regarded as the main actor in the international system. Although a number of contemporary I.R scholars have come out to rebuff such state-centric argument as being obsolete considering the proliferation of non-state actors that equally are playing a major role in the dynamic and complex nature of inter-state relations. The State, irrespective of this development, still remains an indispensable player and unit of analysis in international relations.

"The starting point of international relations is the existence of states, or independent political communities, each of which possesses a government and asserts sovereignty in relation to particular portion of the earth's surface and a particular segment of the human population" (Bull, 1977). Presently, modern States as a subject matter of enquiry has for more than three decades been an area of interest for many researchers in international relations, and the reasons for this are not far-fetched. From the problematic issue of failing States to the protracted challenge of the underdevelopment of nation-states in some part of the world, many-a-scholar have been preoccupied in their ivory towers with the drafting of logical explanations to these problems as well as to proffer a lasting panacea to them. On a more positive note, they have taken a keen interest in the miraculous transformation of States over the years. Economical speaking, nation-states with visionary political leaders who formulated and saw to the implementation of sound economic reforms have, catapulted their country from the category of Less Developed Countries (LDCs) to that of the Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs) as was seen from the 60s in the four 'Asian Tigers' – Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea. Politically, States that were once regarded as sleeping giants, are fast becoming a force to reckon with on the world stage - India, Brazil and more importantly, the People's Republic of China.

"Very few developments in international relations today are as dramatic, consequential, and uncertain as the rise of China, which is defined as the rapid increase of China's economic capability, military might, cultural influence, and political power" (Wang, 2009a, p.155). "The rising importance of China in world affairs and especially in Asian countries represent a major change in Asian Affairs in the early-twenty first century" (Sutter, 2006). Much as China's take-off as a rising power is not a new phenomenon in international politics, it however has brought about the perception of a "China threat" which has been prevalent in the West since the 1990s. Embedded in the logic of traditional realist Western IR theories, this perception is that as an unsatisfied rising power, China is bound to challenge the dominant position of the hegemon, the United States and thus, disrupt the international status quo (Wang, 2009b). This leaves us asking several mind bugging questions: "Will China's rise be more peaceful, or will it threaten the regional and global stability? Will China use its growing military power to assert its territorial claims, or will it be constrained by economic interdependence? Will a rising China challenge the rule of the international community, or will it comply with the current international

regimes? These questions have been heatedly debated by Western scholars and analysts” (Liu, 2010). To address these salient questions, this paper has advertently been compartmentalised into the following sub-themes: conceptual clarification and analysis, theoretical framework, state transformation and the rise of China as a world power: a discourse on the realist paradigm and lastly, concluding remarks.

## 2. Conceptual Clarification and Analysis

There are but three concepts capturing the whole essence of this paper. Clarifying each and every one of them would afford us a solid intellectual background to the study of state transformation and China’s ascent as a world power from the perspective of the realist paradigm.

### 2.1. State

“Today, the concept of state is so widely used in an uncoordinated way that one begins to wonder what it means because the way scholars/philosophers/theorists have been using and analyzing the concept makes it so general that it is not specifically meaningful” (Fadakinte, 2013, p.552). The word ‘State’ is a derivative from the Latin word “*status*”. It was the Italian and father of modern politics, Niccolo Machiavelli that first used the words *La Stato* which when translated to English is, the State.

To Garner, a State is ‘a community of persons more or less numerous, permanently occupying a definite portion of territory, independent of external control and possessing an organized government to which the great body of inhabitants render habitual obedience’ (Gaubu, 2003). Harold Laski on his part, saw the State as “a territorial society divided into Government and subjects claiming within its allotted physical area, a supremacy over all other institutions” (cited in Kumar, 2011). Having clarified the concept of the State, what then is state transformation?

Succinctly, state transformation is the change in a polity’s status following the implementation of feasible plan of action towards the actualisation of a given end. Such change could be political, economic or social in nature. It is when nation-states undergo this transition process from, in most cases, an undesirable old status to a new one that it can be said to have been transformed. From the 60s-certain underdeveloped Asian countries were already on the path to economic development. Beginning with the four Asian Tigers – South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan, these countries through export promotion experienced an ‘economic miracle’ which catapulted them from the level of Third World countries to Newly Industrialised Countries (NICs). Still in Asia, we are witnessing yet another State being transformed, this time around in a political sense. The People’s Republic of China, once seen as a sleeping giant is now a rising world power which a number of countries the world over looks up to. The unprecedented rise of the ‘red dragon’ to power on the world stage is traceable to nothing other than the economic prosperity of the country which began from the early 80s.

### 2.2. Power

“For the student of international relations few concepts are more important than that of ‘power’. Yet its meaning is difficult to pin down” (Reynolds, 1991, p.5 cited in Watts, 2011). “The concept of power is absolutely central to any understanding of society” (Hauguard and Clegg, 2009, p.1) be it the domestic or international society. But much as it remains a germane concept in the study of societies and at large international politics, the concept of power has been ‘one of the most troublesome in the field of international relations’ (Gilpin, 1981, p.13).

Derived from the Latin word ‘*potere*’, the concept ‘power’ has in time past and in recent years been defined by several notable intellectuals. For the mathematician Bertrand Russell (1938), “power is the ability to produce intended effects” (cited in Gauba, 2003). To Richard Sterling, power is influence. In other words, “power in politics is the ability to influence phenomena of a different order: the attitudes and behavior of human beings relevant to such matters as voting, legislation, forms of government, ideological values, alliances, treaties, peace, and war” (Sterling, 1974, p.25). Stoesinger (1979) thinks otherwise. Left to him, power is the “capacity of a nation to use its tangible and intangible resources in such a way as to affect the behavior of other nations”. These tangible and intangible resources are what many-a-scholar refer to as the ‘indices of a power’. For the tangible resources of power, we have: demography, geographical location, military capability, and economic strength. The intangible resources on the other hand include: the style of leadership, national morale and national character.

There are several typologies of power to have been put forward by I.R scholars. Of them all, the most popular is that of Joseph Nye Jr. – i) hard power, ii) soft power and, iii) smart power. As touching the perceived power of a State, onetime CIA boss, Ray S. Cline formulated an all-inclusive formula which he wrote as  $Pp = (C+M+E) \times (S+W)$  were: **Pp** - Perceived power; **C**– Critical Mass; **M** – Military Strength; **E** – Economic Strength; **S** – Strategic Purpose; **W** – Will to pursue National Strategy (Cline, 1975, p.11). With Ray’s formula for calculating States perceived power, China as a rising world power would be analysed.

#### 2.2.1. Critical Mass

Geographically, China is ranked the third largest country in the world after Canada in second place and the Russian Federation as the largest of them all. China’s territorial land mass covers half if not more of South East Asia territories by the Pacific Ocean. It shares a border up North with the Russian Federation and Mongolia. To its North-Western region are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan. By its South-Western region is the largest democracy in the world, India as well as Nepal, and Pakistan. To its South-Eastern region, the neighbouring States of Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Bhutan. Lastly, to its North-Eastern region is North Korea in the Yellow Sea. The People’s Republic of China is the most densely populated country in the world with 1.3 billion people out of the estimated 7 billion persons living around the world. Despite being the most populous country in the world, China is faced with the

problem of an aging population as its next door neighbour, Japan, which may prove to be a challenge in the projection of China's economic and military power in the nearest future. In 2015, the CCP government of China put an end to the 36-years-old 'One Child policy' with the hope that it would correct her aging population crisis.

### 2.2.2. Economic Strength

"The rapid rise of China as a major economic power within a time span of about three decades is often described by analysts as one of the greatest economic success stories in modern times" (Morrison, 2003). "China's "rise" is made possible by a relatively rapid and sustained economic growth rate" (Roy, 2013, p.2). After the late 1950s fiasco of the "Great Leap Forward" as initiated by Mao Zedong (which was to be a shortcut to the industrialisation of China through communal farming and production of steel), China under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping underwent major economic reforms in the late 1970s. With the 'Open Door policy' which opened up China's economy to the world, Xiaoping saw to the creation of four Special Economic Zone (SEZ), a free trade zone which not only attracted FDIs into the manufacturing sector of the country but set the ball rolling for China's economic "take off". China external reserves as at 2011 stood at \$3.18 trillion with an economic growth rate of 9%. With such an impressive growth rate, China overtook Japan as the second largest economy with the U.S being the first. However, analysts are yet to agree whether or not China is in the true sense a developed country considering its per capita income. Though it has recorded over the years an increase in its middle class to about 400 million or so (Rosecrance, 2006), the distribution of China's wealth across her population still is not even. This huge income gap between the rich and poor citizens of the second largest economy in the world till this very day remains lucid for all to see.

### 2.2.3. Military Strength

"China's rising military power and its implications are significant concerns that have been widely discussed in the international community and among political elites across the globe" (Liang, 2012). By virtue of the size of her population and a booming economy, China has been able to recruit and manage the People's Liberation Army (PLA) with a personnel strength of over 2.3 million (Möckli, 2007, p.1), the largest in the world. With a 'Modernisation Policy' in place, China's military reform brought about an improvement in the PLA's capability and capacity. Presently, China has stockpiled sophisticated weaponry, provides technical training to her military personnel as well as increased its defense spending above \$100 billion annually, the second largest in the world after that of the U.S that fluctuates between \$500 to 600 billion annually. China today is numbered among the few nuclear powers in the world. It has a good number of fighter jets, stealth drones, ICBM and an aircraft carrier, "Liaoning", which is a refitted aircraft carrier of the defunct U.S.S.R that was purchased from Ukraine. In addition to this, China of recent launched its first home made aircraft carrier in April, 2017.

### 2.2.4. Strategic Purpose

"The strategy of peaceful rise is the policy of a weak state, of a great power not yet arrived, but of one whose power is growing, that needs a peaceful environment for its power to continue to grow, and that wishes to avoid encirclement as it grows more powerful" (Art, 2010). China has had one strategic purpose behind its peaceful rise (*heping jueqi*) since the late 70s. This strategic purpose is none other than her "peaceful development". As Julian Madsen (2006) rightly pointed out that, the most obvious motivation underpinning the PRC's new engagement strategy is the need to secure vital energy resources required to sustain China's dynamic economic growth amidst increasingly unstable international energy markets. Having ceased to be a net oil exporter in the early 1990s, China currently imports approximately 60 percent of its oil from the Middle East (cited in Zambelis and Gentry, 2008)

### 2.2.5. Will to Pursue National Strategy

China will to pursue her national strategy has been seen over its agenda to restore the ancient Silk Road which was a global trade network with the 'One Belt One Road' (OBOR) initiative. China's booming economy is a resource thirsty economy. China is the second largest consumer of the world's "black gold" (i.e. crude oil). In order to ensure her energy security, China has been conducting economic diplomacy with her neighbours by founding the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which among other things would see to the laying of pipe lines that would run across the oil rich Russian Federation into China. Knowing fully well that meeting her energy needs through this avenue would not sufficient, China, having the knowledge of the natural endowment in the pacific, has been more assertive in her claims over the South China Sea, the Scarborough Shoal and Spratly Islands as well as the East China Sea (known in China as Diaoyu and Senkaku in Japan). "China is using its economic instrument of national power to shore up its diplomacy in Southeast Asia and to balance the preponderant military power of the United States in the region. China also has intensified its defense and military diplomacy, as indicated in its 2002 Defense White Paper" (Banlaoi, 2003, p.103). China as at today has a presence in all the continents of the world. In 2009, China overtook the U.S as the largest investor on the African continent. By 2012, China's President Hu Jintao promised to inject \$20 billion into Africa, an amount which is almost triple investment amount of the U.S for improving African countries electricity generation under the Obama administration. At the close of 2015, China raised the figure to \$60 billion and by 2017 made a pledge of a \$100 billion. In South America, China's presence is seen in the oilfields of Ecuador and Venezuela. In Nicaragua, a Chinese billionaire in person of Mr. Wang Jing is funding the construction of a much bigger canal to the tune of \$50 billion compared to the American built Panama Canal which when completed would ease the traffic of goods from the Pacific to the Atlantic Ocean.

### 2.3. Paradigm

“A paradigm is a group of fundamental assumptions that form for the scholars a picture of the world - - a shared framework that provides instruction on how to view the object of inquiry. It is both broad and nebulous, certainly broader than a conceptual framework since concepts derive from paradigms. It also has much less specificity than a theory or a model, both of which are organized propositions that relate the concepts that are found in a paradigm” (Jablonsky, 1993). Put in another way, it is “a set of beliefs and ideals – conceptual, theoretical and methodological – of a scientific community helping the latter in the selection of problems, evaluation of data and formulation of theory” (Mukherjee and Ramaswamy, 2011, p.36). Succinctly, a paradigm is “the fundamental assumptions scholars make about the world they are studying” (Vasquez, 1983).

The words ‘Paradigm’ and ‘paradigm shift’ are concepts Thomas S. Kuhn for many years to come would be remembered to have coined and extensively written on. In his book entitled *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Kuhn was bent on knowing whether the knowledge on a phenomenon like a linear graph was actually a straightforward, continuous and incremental process or that there is the possibility for another to come up and eventually replace it. Thus Kuhn, while studying the history of science from ancient times, the medieval era of the 16<sup>th</sup> century through the Enlightenment Age of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, phased the history of science into three i) Pre-scientific Phase – Here, knowledge is incompatible as there is no consensus on a given phenomenon. In other words, there are inconsistencies in the knowledge on a phenomenon. In astronomy, there existed in ancient times the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic theory of the Earth being at the center of the cosmos, which was used in predicting the movement and changes in the celestial bodies – Sun, Moon and the Stars. In 16<sup>th</sup> century astronomy, Nicolaus Copernicus was of the view that the Sun was at the centre of the universe ii) Normal Science – This “means research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice” (Kuhn, 1970, p.10). Normal Science is the “puzzle solving” phase where intellectuals try to correct or provide the missing link in the previous paradigm. Here, knowledge is continuous as it builds on an existing assumption. Still on the Copernicus assumption, the Italian Mathematician by the name Galileo Galilei, with the aid of the telescope that was available during his time, accurately observed that it was the Earth that was at the centre of the cosmos and not the Sun as Copernicus made us believe. Another example is Isaac Newton during the Enlightenment Age who built on Aristotle’s theory of gravity as Albert Einstein likewise did on his in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and developed the theory of general and special relativity iii) Revolutionary phase - This phase brings an end to the cumulative or continuous buildup of knowledge on a phenomenon. With scholars thinking outside the box, an alternative paradigm is formulated which then replaces the existing paradigm. It is at this point one can say a ‘paradigm shift’ has occurred (Voelker, 1994). Realism is by far the oldest and most prominent theoretical paradigm in international relations. It remains the primary or alternative theory in virtually every major book and article addressing general theories of world politics, particularly in security affairs (Legro and Moravcsik, 1999). “In this analysis, *realism* is defined as a set of theories associated with a group of thinkers who emerged just before World War II and who distinguished themselves from idealists (i.e. Wilsonians) on the basis of their belief in the centrality of power for shaping politics, the prevalence of the practices of power politics, and the danger of basing foreign policy on morality or reason rather than interest and power. The *realist paradigm* refers to the shared fundamental assumptions various realist theorists make about the world. Derived primarily from the exemplar of realist scholarship, Morgenthau’s ([1948] 1978) *Politics among Nations*, these include: (1) Nation-states are the most important actors in international relations; (2) there is a sharp distinction between domestic and international politics; and (3) international relations is a struggle for power and peace” (Vasquez, 1997, p.899).

“Realism, many have observed, is not a single theory but a family of theories—a “paradigm.” Nearly all scholars who have voiced an opinion on the subject over the past quarter century agree that what makes it possible and useful to speak about realism as a unified paradigm is the existence of a series of shared core assumptions” (Legro and Moravcsik, 1999). “The realist paradigm will remain relevant for understanding, explaining, and shaping international politics in the twenty first century. An examination of the contemporary international system reveals a system in which anarchy endures, states with military capabilities are still the primary actors, and inter-state power competition is widespread. Looking forward, there are no indications that these features will disappear over the course of this century” (Pearson, 2015).

### 3. Theoretical Framework

In the discipline International Relations, there exists a modicum of mainstream theories that touches on power one way or the other – power theory; power-transition theory; balance of power theory; classical realism and neorealism. As all these theories fall under the realist paradigm, this paper on state transformation and the rise of China as a world power would be laying emphasis more on classical realism and neorealism.

“Realism” within international relations is not a “theory” per se. Rather, it is a “paradigm” that includes a group of different theories that share a set of assumptions about the international system (Mearsheimer, 2002, p.25). Realism or political realism has been one out of the two traditional theories of international relations. Though its scholars have more often than not criticised Idealism which the second traditional theory as merely ‘utopian’ and not a reflection of international reality, both theories use one common approach and that is the state-centric approach. Following the outbreak of the First World War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945), realism has gained more supports in the theorisation of international relations, owing to shortcomings of the prevalent post-WWI & II idealist thinking.

Classical realists theoretically see “world politics” as being driven by competing national interest of nation-states. They believe “power” and “national interest” to be the keys to unlocking the understanding of State behaviour. The primary national interest of States is their ‘survival’ in a hostile environment. Thus, no means is more important than the acquisition of power and no principle is more relevant than self-help (Kegley, 2008, p.29).

Scholars of realism can be grouped into two categories i) those that use the human nature in understanding the behaviour of States and; ii) those that focus on the anarchical structure of the international system. Classical Realists from the ancient times till date include Kautilya, Sun Tzu, Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes, Hans J. Morgenthau, Edward H. Carr, Reinhold Neibuhr, John H. Herz, Raymond Aaron, John Mearsheimer, George Kennan, Henry Kissinger and Georg Schwarzenberger.

Beginning with the English political philosopher and classical realist, Thomas Hobbes, he wrote in his classic book: *Leviathan* (1651) concerning the human nature as the driving force behind Man's endless pursuit for power. He said:

- "I put forth a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power that ceaseth only in death. And the cause of this is not always that a man does for a more intensive delight than he has already attained to; or that he cannot be content with a moderate power: but because he cannot assure the power and means to live well, which he has present without the acquisition of power" (Curley, 1994).

Similarly, Hans J. Morgenthau, the chief proponent of modern realism, opined that "International politics like politics is a struggle for power" (Morgenthau 1948, p.13). By this, "the game of international politics resolves around the pursuit of power: acquiring it, increasing it, projecting it, and using it to bend other to one's will" (Kegley & Wittkopf, 2004, p.37). Therefore, conflicting national interest is bound to set in thereby making war between States inevitable.

Furthermore, the realists see the international system as being anarchical in nature. The international system to them comprises of sovereign states which as autonomous entities, answer to no higher authority. Owing to the absence of a world government, States resort to self-help in order to advance their national interest and ensure their survival. As Mearsheimer rightly asserted, "power is a means to an end and the ultimate end is survival" (Mearsheimer, 2001, p.78). Hence, moral principles are of no value in international politics but "interest defined in terms of power" (Morgenthau, 1978).

"Realism seems to offer a compelling explanation for the 'China threat'. Realists focus on the shift of power relations in the international system between states (Liu, 2010). Robert Gilpin suggests that as the power of a State increases, 'a state will seek to change the international system through territorial, political and economic expansion until the marginal costs of further change are equal to or greater than the marginal benefits' (Gilpin 1981, p.106 cited in Liu, 2010).

### 3.1. Neorealism

Neorealism or structural realism as some scholars would preferably call it, is an offshoot of classical realism which sprang up during the Cold War with Kenneth N. Waltz as the chief proponent. In his book: *Theory of International Politics* (1979), Waltz made up for the loose ends in classical realist thinking.

"Waltz agreed with classical realists that states are the primary actors in the international system, and that they seek power. However, Waltz broke with earlier realists on why states seek power. Instead of human nature, Waltz identified the international structure as the origin for why states seek power. Anarchy and the distribution of power within the international system determine state behaviour. Anarchy forces states with military capabilities (i.e. all of them) to fear each other, and, as a result, build up their respective power capabilities to achieve an adequate level of security. System-wide, this logic leads to a balance of power dynamic, whereby states either build-up their own power capabilities (internal balancing) or forge alliances with other states (external balancing) to balance the power of a rival state" (Pearson, 2015, p.3).

According to Stephen Walt (2002), there are two kinds of structural realism - i) offensive realism ii) defensive realism. Each of these types of structural realism seek to answer the salient question, why do States seek power?

#### 3.1.1. Offensive Realism

Offensive Realism or Revisionism as one out of the two kinds of structural realism, was developed by John Mearsheimer. To the offensive realists, in order for States to assure their survival in the self-help system, their aim should be the accumulation of much power as possible (Heffron, 2015).

Mearsheimer (2014, pp.79-80) came up with five assumptions on why States would do all it take to maximise power at the detriment of other states in the international system. "The first assumption is that great powers are the principal actors in global politics and operate in a system of anarchy. The second assumption is that all states have offensive military capabilities, albeit some greater than others, and this can change over time. Assumption number three is that states can never be sure of the intentions of other states. A state may appear to be a status quo state, but in reality, may be a revisionist state. Furthermore, whilst it is difficult to detect a state's present intentions, it is near impossible to predict its intentions in the future. The fourth assumption is that survival is the ultimate goal of all states. The final assumption is that states are rational actors and make calculated decisions" (cited in Heffron, 2015, p.5).

Offensive realists are expansive States who seek to alter the status quo to their own advantage. They are opportunist who would offensively "look for opportunities to shift the balance of power in their favour". (Mearsheimer, 2014, p.80). "The rise of China presents a mix of opportunities and perils. One of the dangers is stress on the structures and arrangements that have kept the most of the region relatively peaceful since the climax of the Cold War" (Roy, 2013, p.2). In Asia, China, being the most populous country in the region and indeed the entire world, has been flexing her muscle as a rising global power in order to lay sovereign claims to the East and South China Sea on historical basis which Japan equally has an overlapping claim to the island in the East China Sea while for the South China Sea, Brunei, Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines. In November 2013, China declared an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) which extended to the disputed island which the Chinese call Diaoyu and the Japanese Senkaku in the East China Sea. By the ADIZ, civilian and military aircraft are to notify the Chinese authority for the identification of their flight schedule over the area. In May, 2014, China began the installation of the oil rig *Haiyang Shiyou 981* in the disputed waters of the Paracel Islands which did hurt Sino-Vietnam relations before its removal same year. Also, China has repeatedly banned the fishing activities

of neighbouring States in her 9-dash-line demarcation of the South China Sea. In 2016, China rejected the July 12 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague, Netherland, which ruled in favour of the Philippines that brought the case before it. China's claim to the disputed territories in the South China Sea on the grounds of historical ties was found by the Arbitration Court not to confer on her sovereignty over it. Although some scholars as Roy (2013, p.3) are of the view that China would not attempt to alter forcefully the status quo as she benefits immensely in terms of international trade from the existing international system, offensive realists going by China's recent actions in Southeast Asia think otherwise.

### 3.1.2. Defensive Realism

Defensive realism as the second strand of structural realism was developed by Kenneth Waltz and Stephen Walt. To Waltz, "the first concern of states is not to maximise power but to maintain their positions in the system" (Waltz, 1979, p.126). There is a good reason for him to have said this. In his words, "If a single state becomes too powerful, it will be perceived by neighbouring states as a direct threat to their survival. This will cause the weaker states to increase their own capabilities, and form coalitions to balance against the rival state" (Heffron, 2015).

"Defensive realists show optimism unlike offensive realists' pessimism. The former is optimistic about cooperation among 'Status Quo' states because such states have no designs to dominate each other. However, cooperation is not possible among 'Revisionist States' because they have avariciousness to dominate the strategic environment for themselves. In other words, revisionist states enter into competition for dominance" (Amir and Zafar, 2013, p.404).

In other words, defensive realist States tend to balance the power of emerging world powers rather than maximise theirs. They seek to maintain the status quo and the distribution of capabilities the world over. Of recent, the United States and her Western and Asian allies have directly and indirectly been putting in an effort to encumber expansionist China. Under the Obama administration, the U.S strategically shifted its foreign policy focus from the Middle East to Asia in order to call rising China to order. This American foreign policy was labeled the "Pivot to Asia" or the "rebalancing strategy".

### *3.2. Shortcomings of the Realist Paradigm*

The myriad theories of international relations have gone a long way in improving our understanding of inter-state relations. This notwithstanding, they have however not been spared of criticisms. For the realist paradigm, critics have come all out to point fingers at the realist as being one sided in the theorisation of international relations. Much as the realist postulations about nation-states being driven by national interest defined in terms of power and not moral principles in an adjudged anarchical international system holds water, they turned a blind eye to the cooperation among States via international organisations and indeed the role of international law in regulating the behaviour of states as seen on the world stage today.

## **4. State Transformation and the Rise of China as a World Power: A Discourse on the Realist Paradigm**

"China's rise as a leading economic and military power is among the most epic phenomena in the 21st century. Since the Chinese leadership made a strategic choice to reform its economic system and to open up to the world economy in the late 1970s, China has sustained an average annual economic growth of about 10 percent for thirty years, the fastest in the world and unprecedented in world history of economic development. In 2005, China surpassed Japan as the largest holder of foreign exchange reserve. In 2007, China overtook Germany to become the 3rd largest economy and 2<sup>nd</sup> largest trading nation in the world. In 2008 China's GDP reached to 4.5-6 \$ trillion moving closer to the 2nd largest economy in the world--Japan. As the largest creditor of the sole superpower—United States by holding more than \$720 billion of the US treasury bonds, China began to be called "Bank of America." It is widely projected that China will replace the United States as the largest economy by 2025-2040" (Wang, 2009b).

The rise of modern day China as an economic power first and foremost, dates as far back as the late 50s when Mao Zedong strove to make China an industrialised economy. The effort to channel resources toward industrialisation posed difficult choices for rural policy. In 1958, Mao Zedong's personal intervention shifted policy decisively toward collectivisation. Farmland, tools, livestock, and rural labour were hastily absorbed into large "People's Communes," amid an intense campaign to raise output of grain and steel. This "Great Leap Forward" shattered administrative routines, wasted vast resources, undermined work incentives, and triggered a man-made famine that cost 30 million lives (Rawski, 2011). Following the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, the reformist Deng Xiaoping assumed power and saw to the economic reform of China from the late 1970s

"Beginning in 1979, China launched several economic reforms. The central government initiated price and ownership incentives for farmers, which enabled them to sell a portion of their crops on the free market. In addition, the government established four special economic zones along the coast for the purpose of attracting foreign investment, boosting exports, and importing high technology products into China. Additional reforms, which followed in stages, sought to decentralize economic policymaking in several sectors, especially trade. Economic control of various enterprises was given to provincial and local governments, which were generally allowed to operate and compete on free market principles, rather than under the direction and guidance of state planning. In addition, citizens were encouraged to start their own businesses. Additional coastal regions and cities were designated as open cities and development zones, which allowed them to experiment with free market reforms and to offer tax and trade incentives to attract foreign investment. In addition, state price controls on a wide range of products were gradually eliminated. Trade liberalization was also a major key to China's economic success. Removing trade barriers encouraged greater competition and attracted foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows" (Morrison, 2013).

"China's ascendance as a major power and its implications for the world economy, global governance and international security continues to be a source of major debate" (Pollack, 2012). "In terms of defense policy, China has declared on many occasions that it

has committed itself to a path of peaceful development and is dedicated to upholding world peace and common development” (Liang, 2012). But on the other hand, its actions particularly in the South China Sea have caused the U.S and a number of countries to perceive the rise of China as a threat to the status quo.

“China has existing territorial disputes with a few countries in Southeast Asia, namely Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Although Indonesia is not actually a claimant state in the disputes, China’s territorial claims overlap with Indonesia’s Exclusive Economic Zones. The South China Sea disputes continue to serve as major irritants in China-Southeast Asia relations. In fact, China has earlier fought with Vietnam over the Paracel and Spratly islands and had military skirmishes with the Philippine navy in the waters of the Kalayaan Island Group and Scarborough Shoal. But with the signing of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea on 4 November 2002, there are high hopes that these irritants will be eventually resolved or at least be swept sufficiently under the rug to enable China and Southeast Asia to concentrate more on productive areas of cooperation” (Banlaoi, 2003).

The People’s Republic of China has to an extent proven to be a responsible rising power with her compliance to international regimes on certain areas. Of them all, China’s adherence over the years to the principle of ‘non-interference’ in the domestic affairs of other states as spelt out in the 2(7) of the United Nations Charter (1945) is highly commendable. Much as this, her immense contribution to the U.N budget and peacekeeping operations and not to forget to Third World countries infrastructural development are applaudable, the track record of China’s human rights violation before and after the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident as well as her violation of the provisions of UNCLOS (1982), have had Western countries raise eye brows and accordingly take necessary steps to checkmate China vis-à-vis her activities in the South China Sea. The United States stands to gain a lot by preserving freedom of navigation for commercial vessels through the South China Sea. The United States is a trading nation and has a vested interest in freedom of the seas. Since World War II, it has been the provider of that collective good to the world. For both commercial and strategic reasons, it cannot tolerate China eventually moving to prevent freedom of commercial navigation through the South China Sea, because it contains crucial sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) through which Middle East oil and other vital resources flow, not only to China, but to Japan, Korea, and other states in the region (Art, 2010).

## 5. Concluding Remarks

From all indications, be it the economic clout or military power she wields, China is fast rising as a world power and a force to reckon with in our anarchical but multi-polar international system. Although, China as a matter of policy pronouncement and rhetoric, claims its rise would be for its peaceful development which would not in any way threaten the relative peace and stability of the international system, a number of countries particularly the U.S, think otherwise as China is believed at the moment to be merely acting out Deng Xiaoping’s foreign policy principle of keeping a low profile until the capabilities of the State are fully developed (*tao guang yang hui*). China’s recent actions in the disputed territories in the South China Sea, the sand filling of the sea, the creation of an artificial island and the ongoing military installations on the island, only goes to show that China as a regional hegemon has already began exerting her military power in South East Asia. In a nutshell, China would continue spreading her tentacles the world over as a rising power in pursuit of her national interest which at the moment is basically developmental and economic in nature via the ‘One Belt One Road’ (OBOR) initiative. As China’s State power increases over the years, she would as expected play more roles regionally and internationally. Hopefully, these roles would be constructive in enforcing international regimes, maintaining international peace and security, promoting trade liberalisation and sundry. Much as this is a typical Idealist forecast of a rising China, the possibility that a risen China in the nearest future would attempt to shake up the status quo remains a plausible Realist assumption if the history of ascending world powers is anything to go by.

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