

International Organizations and Change in World Orders in Coxian Critical Theory: A View from China in the United Nations

Organizações Internacionais e mudanças nas Ordens Mundiais na Teoria Crítica de Cox: uma visão da China nas Nações Unidas

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Abstract This article addresses the role of International Organizations and multilateralism in Robert W. Cox's critical theory. Cox's theoretical framework on historical structures considers that institutions – including international organizations – play an important role in the maintenance of hegemonic world orders, as they manage conflicts in a legitimate way and absorb counter-hegemonic ideas. However, in different writings, Cox considered that multilateral action in international organizations could also promote change in world orders, as they could be the locus for the development of different ideologies and the alternative visions of world orders. Considering this theoretical discussion, the article presents a historical and conjunctural case study on China's engagement in and with the United Nations, in order to point out the role of such international organization when it comes to the possibilities of changes in the current world order.

Keywords Critical Theory; Robert W. Cox; international organizations; United Nations; China.

Resumo Este artigo discute o papel das organizações internacionais e do multilateralismo a partir da teoria de Robert W. Cox. Seu quadro teórico, baseado nas estruturas históricas, considera que as instituições – incluindo as organizações internacionais – ocupam um papel fundamental para a manutenção das ordens hegemônicas globais, já que elas gerenciam os conflitos de maneira legítima e absorvem ideias contra-hegemônicas. Entretanto, em diferentes trabalhos, Cox considerou que a ação multilateral por meio das organizações internacionais poderia também promover mudanças nas ordens mundiais, já que elas poderiam ser o lócus de desenvolvimento de diferentes ideologias e visões alternativas de ordens mundiais. Considerando essa discussão teórica, o artigo apresenta um estudo de caso histórico e conjuntural sobre o engajamento da China na e com a ONU, com o propósito de apontar o papel dessa organização internacional no que se refere às possibilidades de mudança na ordem mundial contemporânea.

Palavras-chave teoria crítica; Robert W. Cox; organizações internacionais; ONU; China.

INTRODUCTION¹

Robert W. Cox's work is acknowledged for his valuable contribution in the field of Critical International Relations Theory and International Political Economy, as an alternative to those realist theories devoid of historical nexus. His paper "Social forces, states and world orders: beyond international relations theory" (1981) is considered a seminal text in this regard, as the author intended to present an analytical method that could go beyond power politics among states and offer a historical perspective on global power relations and world orders.

However, his professional and intellectual trajectory in International Organizations (IOs) is no less important. Besides his academic work, Cox worked as an international civil servant at the International Labour Organization (ILO) headquarters in Geneva from 1947 to 1972. As he witnessed the intricacies of international negotiations to define international labor standards in the ILO, his practical view about how IOs operate influenced his academic work in terms of the importance given to the institutional dimension of world orders. But at the same time, considering his academic background in History, Cox rejected the comprehension that IOs were given formulas to solve all conflicts, because each tension that arises in a world order has a unique nature. So, for him, a negotiated solution to a conflict would go beyond International Law and would only emerge from understanding the specific circumstances of a given antagonism and the motivations of the involved parties (COX, 2013, p. 163).

As Cox (2013, p. 164) himself argued in his memories, these experiences revealed his intellectual and personal ambivalence about the role of IOs in world orders: on one hand, his professional experience at the ILO gave him a more normative and rule-based perspective; on the other, he was interested in pursuing an academic work to explore the relationships between cultures and civilizations. In this sense, the purpose of this article is to situate the importance of IOs in Coxian critical theory. It is well explored by the literature on Cox's work how IOs constitute a relevant dimension of historical structures, especially for the maintenance of a hegemonic world order. However, considering that the Coxian theoretical framework is focused on explaining social change, it is also crucial to understand the relationships between IOs and change in world orders.

With this in mind, the main question addressed in this article is: In Cox's work, which role do IOs and multilateralism play when it comes to explaining changes in world orders? Drawing from Cox's considerations about institutions on "Social forces..." and combining them with his other writings on IOs, our hypothesis is that IOs can be the *locus* for changes in world orders because they are based on legitimacy and consensus. Due to this, they can promote the accommodation of new ideologies, support alternative visions of world orders, and promote counter-hegemonic forces.

In order to confirm this hypothesis, this article will follow four stages that contemplate Coxian original analysis and applications derived from his methodological assumptions. Firstly, it will be necessary to demonstrate the nexus between IOs and world orders. So, in the first section of this article, we explain how Cox developed a framework of analysis based on specific historical circumstances and conflicts in different world orders, including economic and political spheres.

¹ The authors would like to thank Professor Rodrigo Duarte Fernandes dos Passos for his constructive comments on this article.

In such a context, IOs, their decision-making processes and nexus with hegemonic and counter-hegemonic perspectives cannot be taken apart from a holistic perspective that integrates all these levels, combining states, social forces, ideas, and material capabilities.

Secondly, in the following section, we will address the relationship between multilateralism and world orders. We consider how the rules and norms of IOs can operate for the maintenance of the *status quo* as well as the pursuit of changes in world orders. To historically demonstrate how IOs can operate as a *locus* for change, we turn our attention to the United Nations (UN), created in 1945 under the framework of the United States (US) hegemony. In different writings, Cox argued that the UN was an institutional space that nurtured different ideologies and new visions for the world order, as it was the case of the Third World and its proposal for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in the 1970s.

After presenting the core of Cox's theoretical considerations on IOs and change in world orders, we mobilize his framework to present a case study on the increasing participation of People's Republic of China (hereafter China) in the UN, to analyze if this engagement has the potential to be considered a counter-hegemonic force in Coxian terms. For that, in the third section, we address the historical process from World War II until the 1970s, when China changed its view towards the UN. We consider both the transformations in the US hegemony and China's perception regarding multilateralism. Whereas in the fourth section we present some highlights on China's involvement in and with the UN in the 2000s, in order to understand if and how this state has been challenging the *pax americana*. Based on this case study, we argue that the growing Chinese involvement with the UN can be understood as a very embryonic counter-hegemonic force that may result in future transformations in the world order under the US hegemony. We conclude with considerations regarding the present conjuncture, the long-term historical process with its proper historical times, and the own temporality of change inside the UN.

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN HEGEMONIC WORLD ORDERS

The book "International Organisation: World Politics" (1969) edited by Cox was his first important publication on IOs. In the introduction of this volume, he argued that the legal-reformist and functionalist theories that dominated the field of IO studies failed to provide an analysis to improve the potentiality of IOs to solve international problems. For the legal-reformist view, IOs were understood as means to operate legal reforms that would potentially change international political relations through International Law. Whereas functionalist theories understood IOs as *loci* for enhancing cooperation among states, firstly in technical areas and then progressively creating a network of interdependence among them². Cox labeled scholars under these approaches as utopians because their commitment to IOs was merely based

² In his autobiographical memories, Cox continued to defend his incredulity in the established functionalist belief of a world government through IOs in the immediate post-World War, which to some extent replaced the lost hopes concerning the League of Nations (COX, 2013, pp. 255-256).

on moral or faith grounds, and to overcome utopianism, he suggested that IOs should be studied considering the “(...) actual channels of influence between international organizations and national political systems – including the impact of these organizations upon national political and administrative structures” (COX, 1969, p. 39).

The mutual relationship between IOs and national governments was also part of Cox’s analysis in “Social forces, states and world orders: beyond international relations theory” (1981). His purpose in this paper was to present an empiric-historical perspective of global power relations, based on the critical theory studies of the Frankfurt School³, Marx’s historical materialism, and Gramsci’s ideas. With this eclectic⁴ analytical viewpoint, the author proposed a critical theory centered on the concept of historical structure. For Cox (1981, p. 153), a historical structure is a particular configuration of three forces – ideas, material capabilities, and institutions – that mutually interact creating a global framework for action, with specific limits and pressures. Ideas involve both the shared subjective meanings, habits, and behavior expectations about the nature of social relations; and the collective images of a prevailing order held by distinct social groups, which can be different from and compete with each other. Material capabilities refer to “productive and destructive potentials” (COX, 1981, p. 136), which can assume the concrete form of industrial and natural resources, economic wealth, technological capabilities, and military power. As for institutions, Cox argued that they are means of consolidating a historical structure.

That was not the first time the author addressed the role of institutionalization in global power relations. In “Decision-making” (1977), written together with K. Jacobson, Cox highlighted that institutions had two characteristics. Firstly, their emergence and sustainability are a consequence of material capabilities and collective images derived from dominant power relations. Secondly, when conflicts emerge from social relations, institutions are the *locus* to solve these conflicts within the limits of the dominant power relations, through the development of new ideas and material capabilities. In this sense, institutions serve to sustain and perpetuate a determined social order (COX; JACOBSON, [1977]1996, p. 350).

With this view in mind, in “Social forces...” (1981), Cox presented a new perspective to understand the role of IOs. Instead of addressing these institutions as a separate dimension of analysis⁵, without questioning the social and power relations that lead to their creation, the author argued that IOs were means of sustaining a specific historical structure. In particular, IOs are a crucial element to the establishment of world orders⁶ because they are tools to manage and regulate international conflicts that could emerge in the relationship among states and social

3 Cox (*apud* SCHECHTER, 2002, p. 4) denied his affiliation with the Frankfurt School, although his differentiation between critical theory and problem-solving theory is very similar to Max Horkheimer’s (1991) differentiation between critical theory and traditional theory. This similarity is recognized by several commentators (DEVETAK, 2005, pp. 138-139; HALLIDAY, 1999, p. 67; PUGH, 2004, p. 40; JAHN, 1998, pp. 616-617; MORTON, 2003, pp. 153-154).

4 Even though defining himself as a tributary of Marxism (*apud* SCHOUTEN, 2009), Cox defended his theoretical perspective as eclectic (COX, 2002, pp. 28-29). For further information about eclecticism in Cox’s epistemological status, see Passos, 2013. For further discussion about his conceptual eclecticism, see Saad-Filho; Ayers, 2008.

5 Cox called the analytical method of separating the spheres of action into isolated dimensions as problem-solving theories. The author highlighted that these theories take power relations as given and explain reality using general laws. It means that they are a-historical as they intend to explain the continuity of the present. In order to do this, these theories fragment reality into different spheres and assume as a premise that each sphere is relatively distinct from the others (COX, 1981, p. 129).

6 For Cox (1981, p. 138) world orders are one of the three levels of analysis of a historical structure, together with forms of states, which encompasses state-society relations; and social forces, which include the modes of social relations of production. In this article, we focus on the world order level.

forces (COX, 1981, p. 137). In this sense, Cox avoided the utopian analysis about the pacifying role of IOs by inferring that their types, functions, decision-making processes, purposes, principles, and policies are related to the powerful states' need of maintaining their dominant positions by handling conflicts that emerge in a world order without the use of force.

Cox's considerations about the role of IOs in world orders are connected to the concept of hegemony. In "Gramsci, hegemony and international relations: an essay in method" (1993), the author defined hegemony as a kind of domination that is primarily based on consensus, rather than the use of coercion. A hegemonic world order is run by a dominant social class settled on a dominant state which exercises its power through consensual leadership. It is materialized in a political, productive, and social structure that regulates the behavior of states, social classes, and the dominant mode of production. This means that all states and social classes within the hegemonic sphere believe that this order is compatible with their interests (COX, 1993, p. 52)⁷. Moreover, a hegemonic world order implies a ruling structure that is largely sustained by the acceptance of an ideology and institutions aligned with this same structure (COX, 1981, p. 153).

Considering the universal and consensual feature of a hegemonic world order, Cox (1993, p. 62) highlighted that IOs fulfill five functions:

Indeed, international organisation functions as the process through which the institutions of hegemony and its ideology are developed. Among the features of international organisation which express its hegemonic role are the following: (1) they embody the rules which facilitate the expansion of hegemonic world orders; (2) they are themselves the product of the hegemonic world order; (3) they ideologically legitimate the norms of the world order; (4) they co-opt the elites from peripheral countries and (5) they absorb counter-hegemonic ideas.

The hegemonic state is the one responsible for leading the creation of international rules of behavior through IOs. These institutions – as collective forums for decision-making on international norms and rules – help the hegemonic state to institutionalize and disseminate such norms and rules in a universal base since IOs allow mutual dialogue among state and non-state actors. Besides, supervision mechanisms run by IOs ensure that states will legitimize the hegemonic structure by following the rules and respecting the hierarchy of power and influence of a world order (COX, 1969, p. 31).

7 The dual character of the Coxian appropriation of the Gramscian category of hegemony, with antinomic pairs – such as hegemony and passive revolution, hegemony and counter-hegemony, hegemony and absence of hegemony – is not found in the work of the Sardinian communist. For further information, see Passos, 2017, pp. 132-137. In Gramsci's work, the category of hegemony acquires a much more complex perspective, with multiple dimensions from local, national, and international levels. Its scope transcends conjunctures and considers broader historical processes, evaluated in terms of what Gramsci called the analysis of relations of force (GRAMSCI, 1975, pp. 1578-1589). Contrary to the perspective assumed by Cox (1987, p. 218; 1993, pp. 54-55; 2007, p. 519), the concept of passive revolution has a restricted hegemonic sense in Gramsci's work (1975, p. 41), as a conservative modernization that co-opts some of the demands from subordinate classes and groups without giving them political prominence. Each political clash presupposes a conflict of perspectives that directly or indirectly seeks to achieve, maintain, or expand hegemony. This point clarifies the absence of "counter-hegemony" in the Gramscian work, probably a concept popularized by Williams' (1977) approach. Moreover, the absence of hegemony mentioned in Cox's work (1981, p. 153; 1992, pp. 179-180) should not be mistaken with Gramsci's notion of hegemony crisis: a crisis of state's authority as a whole, a particular element – in ideological terms – of a wider crisis, it means, an organic crisis in which the ruling class failed to impose by force the consensus on the great masses (GRAMSCI, 1975, p. 1603).

This is the reason why IOs are the visible product of a hegemonic world order. Cox and Jacobson ([1977]1996, p. 364) highlight that “when a particular formal intergovernmental institution is established, it crystallizes the hegemonic consensus of a particular time in relation to a particular global task or set of global tasks”. Much as they disseminate certain guidelines and practices that are in accordance with the preferences and interests of the hegemonic state, IOs are able to absorb ideas and threats posed against the hegemony by transforming and adapting them to be coherent with the world order (COX, 1993, p. 63).

This is evident in the way IOs build consensus on a specific agenda item with the purpose of directing actions and shaping opinions of international actors involved in power relations, which is related to IOs’ role of co-opting elites from peripheral countries. IOs provide elites with collective goods and other benefits – such as the agenda for the promotion of economic development – which is crucial to absorbing possible counter-hegemonic forces (AUGELLI; MURPHY, 1993, p. 133).

Although hegemony cannot be reduced solely to its institutional dimension, as it is also supported by ideas and material capabilities, it is evident in Cox’s thinking that IOs are the most concrete expression of a hegemonic world order. IOs’ objectives, functions, and policies must be understood as part of the historic structure in which they operate. Considering their global dimension, IOs allow both the expansion of ruling economic and social forces and the consensual absorption of counter-hegemonic forces. They are spaces for solving conflicts without disrupting the order.

MULTILATERALISM AND CHANGE IN WORLD ORDERS

In his definition of critical theory, Cox defended that “[c]ritical theory, unlike problem-solving theory, does not take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing” (COX, 1981, p. 129). From the perspective of institutions, this means analyzing them not only in terms of their role in the perpetuation of a certain hegemonic world order, but also highlighting how institutions can change a given order and/or the policies of world actors, and reversely, how world actors can promote changes through institutions.

In “Multilateralism and world order” (1992) and “The crisis in world order and the challenge to International Organizations” (1994), Cox discussed the relationship between IOs and changes in world orders through the concept of multilateralism⁸. Cox defined multilateralism

8 Cox (1992) differentiated the concept of multilateralism according to distinct theoretical approaches in International Relations. For realists, multilateralism is a means used by states, as the main actors of the international system, to fulfill their selfish objectives, therefore, multilateral institutions are not autonomous from states. Institutionalist liberals, in their turn, consider that multilateralism contributes to the evolution of the international system into a new authoritative configuration, such as regional integration or complex interdependence. Whereas for the world-system theory, multilateralism tends to perpetuate unequal relationships between the center and the periphery of the world-system, especially when it comes to economic relations.

as a process of interaction among global actors that involves the collective management of conflicts through cooperation. There are different *loci* for multilateral interactions: interstate relations, international trade and payment systems, and civil society international conferences. Nevertheless, the author defended that, under the US hegemony since the second half of the twentieth century, IOs not only have become the main stage for multilateral discussion and action but also have performed a relevant role in shaping changes in the world order (COX, 1994, p. 101). As historical experience has shown that IOs are dependents of the existence of a coercive international power which guarantees their effectiveness (MURPHY, 2014, p. 47), Cox (1981, p. 140)⁹ pointed out that during the *pax americana*, hegemony was exercised through consent rather than force, because the legitimacy of institutions was a mechanism to create and conduct rules in accordance with the US interests.

In this sense, multilateralism through IOs plays a two-dimensional role in its relationship with world orders. On the one hand, multilateralism reinforces the use of institutions and the implementation of the rules and norms that sustain a world order; on the other hand, it has the potential to change these very institutions and their rules and norms¹⁰. Consequently, multilateralism can be a means of transforming a world order:

Multilateralism can be examined from two main standpoints: one, as the institutionalization and regulation of established order; the other, as the locus of interactions for the transformation of the existing order. Multilateralism, in practice, is both, but these two aspects find their bases in different parts of the overall structure of multilateralism and pursue different tactics. A comprehensive enquiry into multilateralism at the present time cannot afford to focus on the one to the detriment of the other. Indeed, the question of transformation is the more compelling of the two (COX, 1992, p. 163).

Firstly, IOs can transform world orders as a result of the necessary accommodations to maintain legitimacy in a hegemonic world order. Inside IOs, multilateralism allows the coexistence of different ideologies and collective images in a competitive way. In the same manner, multilateralism helps to guarantee the consensual character of a world order by accommodating the concerns and interests of those with less power in the hierarchy, be they states or social groups.

Since 1945, the IO that has most clearly fulfilled the role of promoting changes within the order through accommodation is the United Nations (UN)¹¹ (COX, 1969, p. 32). The UN was

9 This perspective set out by Cox echoes Gramsci's organic unity between force and consent, coercion and legitimacy, derived from Machiavelli's centaur.

10 Cox criticized the separation between political multilateralism and economic multilateralism. Some analysts define political multilateralism as the relations among two or more states on one or more specific issues. From a political and diplomatic standpoint, political multilateralism arises from the state system and occurs through diplomacy or interstate organizations. As for economic multilateralism, it can be defined as all international economic relations among economic actors from civil society. These economic relations occur within the regulatory framework defined by states and IOs. For Cox, this division between political and economic multilateralism is a simplification that undermines the understanding of the complexity of a world order (COX, 1992, p. 162).

11 Besides the UN, the institutional framework of the US hegemony included the creation of the Bretton Woods Institutions, namely, the International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which later became the World Bank.

created after World War II as part of the institutional structure of the world order ruled by the US hegemony, considering its interests over the capitalist sphere of influence. Nevertheless, the UN had to accommodate some of the interests and ideologies of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in order to manage and avoid conflicts of large proportions among world powers. In his 1969 paper about IOs, Cox questioned if the UN identified itself with a liberal-democratic ideology. He answered that it was not possible to understand this organization only through one ideology but rather it was necessary to consider “(...) the competitive co-existence of several ideologies of international organisation (principally liberal democratic, Marxist and populist) each expressing the self-image of a power-grouping within the international system” (COX, 1969, p. 32). The creation of the UN Security Council¹² as a collective security system composed of five permanent members (China, France, USSR, the United Kingdom, and the US) to manage and avoid international conflicts among world powers is an example of such accommodation.

The UN mandate also included the promotion of global development because there was an understanding among world powers that economic and social welfare was essential to keep international peace and security. So, besides being a *locus* for the accommodation of world powers' different interests and ideologies, the UN was also responsible for integrating the least developed and newly independent countries into the US hegemonic world order.

This process took place at the UN General Assembly (UNGA), as the main UN body in which all members of the organization have the same formal power of voice and decision due to the one country-one vote rule. The existence of such a universal forum made the emergence of a new political force possible: the creation of the so-called Third World¹³ in the 1960s. Gathering the dependent, peripheric, or developing countries from Africa, Asia and Latin America, the Third World was a form of political articulation that sought to promote the political and economic modernization of these countries through changes in the world order. Important institutional modifications in the UN structure occurred as a response to the demands of the Third World, which resulted in the creation of an effective UN development system (UNDS), composed of a series of specialized agencies, funds, programs, and offices responsible for offering technical assistance and knowledge exchange programs to developing countries¹⁴ (MURPHY, 2014, p. 181).

The UNDS served to co-opt the Third World into the *pax americana* by promoting a notion of development emulated from capitalist countries. However, Cox suggested, in different articles (1969, 1977 [1996], 1981, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1997), that the performance of the Third World in the UN could result in more profound changes in the world order. In the concluding chapter of the book “The New Realism: Perspectives on Multilateralism and World Order”, Cox (1997, p.

12 The distinction between the five permanent members with veto power (China, France, the USSR, the United Kingdom, and the US) and the 10 non-permanent members (elected for a two-year mandate, with no veto power) was a result of the US hegemony in the creation of the UN Security Council. For the US, this configuration was crucial to ensure great powers' compliance to UN decisions in the arena of international peace and security (VELASCO E CRUZ, 2005, pp. 11-12).

13 The economist Alfred Sauvy used the expression “Third World” for the first time in an article published in *L'Observateur* magazine, in 1952. After that, developing countries used the expression as a political platform at the Bandung Conference, in 1955. Bandung was the first international summit that gathered medium and small countries without the presence of European countries, the US and the USSR.

14 Among the main entities of the UNDS created in this period, it is important to highlight the establishment of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1965. Historically, the UNDP has consolidated itself not only as a program that coordinates the main UN development projects but also as a legitimate forum to developing countries' demands (MURPHY, 2006, pp. 3-4). Before the creation of UNDP, the establishment of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964 for discussing matters of economic development related to international trade was crucial for the articulation of the Third World's agenda over a more positive integration in the global economy (WEISS; THAKUR, 2010, loc. 792-798).

225) pointed out that there is a dual nature in the political functions of the UN system. If, on the one hand, the organization reinforces the power hierarchy of the current state system through its Security Council, on the other hand, there are different entities in the UN system – such as the General Assembly – that act as interlocutors of forces that may change the state system itself¹⁵.

In order to analyze how institutions can contribute to the transformation of a world order, it is necessary to understand the possibilities of change in the hegemonic structure itself. Cox used the term counter-hegemonic forces to define a specific configuration that challenges the legitimacy and consensus necessary to sustain a hegemonic order. In his 1977 article with Jacobson, Cox ([1977] 1996, p. 364) pointed out that counter-hegemonic forces could assume two forms: “(a) an increase in the material resources available to a subordinate group and (b) a coherent and persistent articulation of the subordinate group’s demands that challenges the legitimacy of the prevailing consensus”¹⁶ (COX; JACOBSON, [1977] 1996, p. 364). In his 1981 article, Cox (1981, p. 150) reaffirmed the argument presented in 1977 by explaining that a counter-hegemonic force not only is supported by material resources but also by a coalition of states and social forces capable of providing, in an articulated way, an alternative vision for the transformation of the world order.

In many of his works, Cox identified the Third World proposal for the construction of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), on the occasion of the Sixth Special Session of the UN General Assembly in 1974, as a possible counter-hegemonic force in the period (COX; JACOBSON, [1997] 1996, p. 365; COX, 1981, p. 150; COX, 1993, p. 61). During the UNGA Sixth Special Session, UN member states discussed multilateral strategies to confront the oil crisis. The final decisions adopted – the Declaration for the Establishment of a New International Economic Order and the Programme of Action on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order – recognized the right of Third World countries to nationalize their natural resources without paying compensation to damaged companies. In the documents, the UNGA also urged the reform of global governance towards a greater representation of developing countries’ interests. Throughout the 1970s, the Third World transformed the multilateral space of the UN into an institutional field of resistance and opposition, by mobilizing the NIEO proposal as an agenda for the promotion of equal economic rights and duties and the correction of the asymmetries of the prevailing order (MURPHY, 1983, p. 66).

Whereas Cox recognized the Third World as a possible counter-hegemonic force, he underscored the challenges of such an effort. In his 1977 article with Jacobson, Cox ([1977] 1996, p. 365) stressed out that the Third World was not able to offer a coherent alternative vision of a world order due to asymmetries among developing countries. The different state structures, the asymmetries in capitalist development and the deep social inequalities made it difficult to build a strong consensus within Third World countries. Additionally, in his 1981 article, Cox (1981, p. 151) pointed out that not only the lack of consensus but especially state structures from Third World countries posed greater challenges to the establishment of a counter-hegemony. Most of these countries were ruled by a conservative state class that was more interested

¹⁵ This perspective seems to echo what Gramsci called transformism, as an action of co-optation aimed at maintaining hegemony.

¹⁶ These two possibilities show that, for Cox (2013, p. 352), without legitimacy, it is not possible to achieve a peaceful consensus in global governance.

in guaranteeing a more favorable accommodation in the current order than building a *de facto* counter-hegemonic force.

In the 1980s, the hegemonic response to the Third World attempts to change the world order through the NIEO proposal was harsh: under the ruling of the US, economic and financial liberalization policies were imposed at the global level. As a result, the world order was characterized by a crisis of both multilateralism and the UN. In his 1992 article, Cox assessed that:

(...) the crisis of multilateralism emerged in the 1980s in a tendency on the part of the United States and some other powerful countries to reject the United Nations as a vehicle for international action and a movement on the part of these countries towards either unilateralism or collective dominance in world economic and political matters. The context in which this shift occurred was the economic crisis of the mid-1970s which led among other things to a reduced willingness on the part of the rich countries to finance aid to the Third World, and an increased tendency on their part to insist upon free-market, deregulating, and privatizing economic policies both at home and abroad. This was accompanied by their suspicion that the United Nations system was an unfriendly political forum and a potential obstacle to economic liberalization (COX, 1992, p. 164).

The suspicion and even the rejection of the US against the UN since the 1980s illustrates the two-dimensional nature of IOs in a world order. The UN has been both a space for absorbing forces contrary to the US world order and a forum where multilateral relations can promote possible forces of change. In other words, without the UN, the Third World would probably have no other possibility of expressing its alternative vision of a world order (COX, 1992, p. 165).

Within the context of a crisis of multilateralism, Cox (1992, p. 165) claimed that how long the UN could survive without the political and economic support of the US was the wrong question to make. For him, the crucial question was whether the UN would continue to be recognized as a legitimate institution after many developing countries criticized the organization for being an instrument of the most powerful countries. That is why Cox started to consider two other possibilities for the configuration of a counter-hegemonic force in the 1990s. In his 1992 article, he suggested that a new world order could arise without the dominance of a hegemon, as a result of a diffuse concert of state and non-state forces based on certain universal principles (COX, 1992, p. 180). Whereas in his 1993 analysis on Gramsci and international relations, he considered that rampant unemployment and cuts in social programs could foment the rise of a counter-hegemony from the organization of popular social forces within national contexts, minimizing the role of IOs as the *locus* of such changes¹⁷ (COX, 1993, pp. 64-65).

17 Cox suggested that a counter-hegemonic force in core countries could arise from “a broad alliance of the disadvantaged against the sectors of capital and labour which find common ground in international production and the monopoly-liberal world order” (COX, 1993, p. 65). While in peripheral countries, Cox highlighted the possibility of revolutionary action from popular classes, giving the examples of Central America and Iran. However, he warned that population in peripheral countries could not have the political strength to keep their revolutionary impetus in the long term.

In the 2000s, the perspectives of a counter-hegemony emerging from a diffuse configuration of power or popular uprisings were progressively replaced by the possibility of a counter-hegemonic force led by a single state, with increasing material and ideological power. In this context, the emergence of China and its growing engagement in and with the UN can be analyzed from Cox's perspective regarding the role of IOs and multilateralism in promoting changes in world orders. When addressing the context of China's rise, Cox (2013, p. 278) reiterated that the critical theory framework was, more than ever, suitable for analyzing the uncertainties arising from the end of the Cold War.

THE UN AS A *LOCUS* FOR CHANGE: A VIEW FROM CHINA

After presenting the Coxian framework, now we will introduce a case study about the relationship between China and the UN in order to historically understand how IOs and multilateralism can work as a *locus* and means to promote changes in world orders. The reason to choose this case was twofold. Firstly, because since the 1970s, China has considered the UN as a legitimate and neutral place, a view that has contributed to reinforcing the legitimacy of this IO. Secondly, because since the 2000s, China has been mobilizing the UN institutional space to propose a reform in the world order. In this section, we will address the period of 1945-1980, when changes in China's national politics, combined with changes in the state system, led this country to modify its perceptions about the UN.

During World War II, the Republic of China was not a communist country and fought together with the Allies. Especially because it was a relevant ally to the US in its fight against Japan and in its efforts to contain the Soviet expansion, the Republic of China was welcomed to join negotiations for the creation of the UN, assuming the responsibility to build the order together with the winners of the war. Even though the material capabilities of the Republic of China were restricted in the negotiations with the US, the USSR, the United Kingdom and France, a permanent seat in the UN Security Council was attributed to the country (XUE, 2014, p. 3). The inclusion of the Republic of China in this process illustrates how the *pax americana* was based on legitimacy: the US was the main responsible for defining the norms and rules of this order, but it was sustained by international cooperation and multilateralism through IOs (MURPHY, 2014, pp. 256-259).

The participation of the Republic of China in the US hegemonic world order ended in 1949, when the Communist Revolution took place. The Chinese Communist Party founded the People's Republic of China and started to rule the country under a socialist government. Internationally, China isolated itself from the world order as a result of the US' blockade imposed on the country and the military threats that came from Taiwan (LOKE, 2013, pp. 210-213). That led to the Chinese withdrawal from the UN as Mao Zedong believed that being part of this organization would automatically mean being under the US' dominance. Without participating in the UN and isolating itself from relations with other countries, the only option for China in the 1950s

was to strengthen – unwillingly – its relations with the USSR in order to get support to advance political and economic modernization¹⁸ (COX, 2013, p. 285).

However, as the relationship between Chinese and Soviet leaders became strained, in the late 1950s China started to change its view about the UN. Mao closely observed the Third World movement inside the UN and realized that this organization worked as an important forum to reaffirm the sovereignty of newly founded countries, as it was a space in which they could express their different voices. He admitted the UN as being more neutral than the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Treaty because it allowed the competitive coexistence of various ideologies and types of states. So, in the 1960s, China signaled an international overture towards the Third World, expanding indirectly its relationship with the UN (LIU, 2014, p. 26).

The Chinese approximation with the Third World highlights not only the legitimacy of the US hegemonic world order but also the country's perception that the UN could be a space for change. Working with some prospective scenarios in the 1960s and the 1970s, Cox (2013, p. 261) noticed that, together with Third World countries, China could be responsible for promoting changes in the world order as a result of its economic recovery and domestic reorganization, presenting itself as an alternative development model to other countries:

The ambivalence in the Third World perspective was like this. On the one hand, there was the prospect of revolution on the Chinese pattern that meant rejection of Western models and Western aid, and pursuit of inward-looking development. On the other hand, the impending threat of revolution became a bargaining counter designed to encourage further concessions from the West, which would likely perpetuate existing structures with some incremental changes in poor countries (COX, 2013, p. 261).

One important consequence of China's approximation with the Third World was that the coalition annually put to a vote in the UNGA a resolution for transferring the UN membership from Taipei to Beijing. That finally happened on 25 October 1971, with the adoption of Resolution 2758(XXVI). With a majority of 76 votes in favor (mainly from Third World countries), 35 votes against and 17 abstentions, the UNGA restored the lawful rights of the People's Republic of China in the UN, which included the permanent seat in the Security Council (LIU, 2014, pp. 51-52). Not coincidentally, the resolution was adopted on the last day of Kissinger's trip to China, which consolidated the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party *vis-a-vis* the US and the other permanent members of the Council. Besides, becoming officially a UN member meant that China's sovereignty was guaranteed by the principles and rules of international

18 The divide between the USSR and China has its origins in the different positions assumed by the two communist parties. The Soviet party advocated, since Stalin, a violent urbanization of the peasantry, considering the existence of an incipient urban working class in the Russian Revolution. Such a situation was nonexistent in China. Resistant to the imposition of the Soviet model, the Chinese party sought to preserve the peasantry in rural communes, with agricultural collectivization (ROSENBERG; BOYLE, 2019, p. e40). With these differences, Soviet support for China during the Cold War was marked by many frictions. For instance, China never accepted an eventual adherence to the Warsaw Pact. In 1956, the principle of peaceful coexistence between socialism and capitalism announced by the Soviet leader Khrushchev worsened the differences, among other points. Another crucial moment for deepening divergences between the two countries was the 1969 military border conflict on an island in the Ussuri River region.

law under the UN Charter, ending the threat of foreign intervention. These principles and rules coincide with the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence¹⁹ proposed in the 1950s and that has guided Chinese foreign policy since then (HARRIS, 2014, p. 31).

Even though the initial Chinese engagement with the UN was more of a “symbolic activism and substantive passivism” (KIM, 1977, p. 741), it inaugurated a new period of China’s international relations. This was crucial to consolidate Deng Xiaoping’s domestic economic reforms towards “opening China to the world economy” (COX, 2013, p. 243). In the 1980s, Chinese leaders were aware that it was necessary to overcome the negative consequences of the Cultural Revolution, and that domestic stability depended on overcoming underdevelopment. That is why the symbolic engagement with the UN was considered very important to China in this period. In the area of economic development, China started to accept financial aid from the organization after years of refusal (NIU, 2018, p. 68). Besides, China’s economic rise was based on the massive attraction of foreign investments along with highly accelerated industrialization, large manufacturing exports worldwide, and cheap labor, *vis-a-vis* the relocation of production from the US and Europe to Asia (ROSENBERG; BOYLE, 2019, pp. e40-e42).

Offering a diagnosis about the historical context in the 1980s, Cox (2013, p. 273) suggested that China’s rise and the Third World’s demand for a New International Economic Order could result in a new balance among the main centers of power – the US, Europe, Japan, the USSR and China. The author wondered if this new configuration would lead to a transition from the hegemony of the *pax americana* to a future world order without hegemony.

CHINA AND THE UN: TOWARDS A NEW WORLD ORDER?

Cox (2013, p. 334) asserted that the main role of global governance is to provide legitimacy to a given world order. Considering the current challenges to global governance, the neoliberal world order run by the US has been questioned in terms of consent since the 2008 global economic and financial crisis. There has been a crescent legitimacy vacuum left by the US, which has become more evident with the unilateral foreign policies conducted by Republican governments since 2001²⁰. Amid this vacuum, China’s rise has not been unnoticed by the world: in response to the 2008 crisis, the Chinese Communist Party took several measures to stimulate the internal market and increase productivity to ensure its global competitiveness, which was accompanied by an expansion of its political and military power worldwide. In fact, the

19 The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are: “[...] mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence” (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, 2014).

20 After the 2001 terrorist attacks on the twin towers, the US Republican government of George Walker Bush (2001-2009) pursued a unilateral policy whose greatest achievement was the invasion of Iraq in 2003 without the UN endorsement, under the false allegation of production of weapons of mass destruction. Donald Trump’s Republican government (2017-2021) also conducted a unilateral policy against IOs, in particular, the UN and the World Health Organization.

Chinese rise in several dimensions of global power has been complemented and reinforced by a foreign policy aimed at reforming global governance.

In the literature, there are three types of perceptions about the role of China in the current world order. These visions have in common the fact that China is pursuing a global change, although they emphasize different degrees of the Chinese willingness to pursue a transformation of the world order. The first perception is that China is a revolutionary state willing to lead a major change in the world order to correct its unfairness; it is worth mentioning that this view was defended by Mao Zedong, based on Chinese Communist Party vision about China's history, and was abandoned after 1978. The second one is that China is inclined to assume leadership to pursue the necessary reforms so the current world order could be acceptable. The third one also emphasizes that the current world order needs to go under reform, but instead of a Chinese leadership, changes would be pursued by China together with other countries (TANG, 2018, pp. 33-34).

That is why, under Coxian terms, it is not misplaced to ask if China could be considered an emerging counter-hegemonic force. In this section, we will address this question from an institutional perspective: the unprecedented Chinese engagement with the UN in the 2000s, both in terms of its material and ideational contributions to this IO. But before addressing this issue, it is crucial to make a disclaimer: For an accurate evaluation of a counter-hegemony in a Coxian perspective, it is necessary to consider all temporalities, which involve both conjunctures and long duration, a process which has certainly not finished yet. This not only suits the scope of critical theory better but also demands one caveat as theoretical aftermath. Based on Fernand Braudel's (1978) perspective, mentioned as an important reference by Cox (2013, p. 38), historical changes operate in distinct temporalities. In other words, different spheres of historical structures change at different speeds and do not shape a homogeneous linearity in the whole world, providing a complex evaluation in terms of an amalgamation of conjuncture, long duration, and its parts in a historical process. In such a manner, the temporality of change in IOs does not operate in the same way as in the other spheres of a world order. Hence, our intention in this section is to point out how China's institutional role in the UN has been contributing to a very embryonic counter-hegemonic Chinese perspective, which is very uncertain at this moment.

With this disclaimer in mind, the increase in China's material capabilities is palpable when we observe its current financial, in-kind, and personnel contributions to different parts of the UN system. These contributions are associated with specific ideas and visions, aimed at legitimating the Chinese role in promoting a global governance based on multilateralism and the respect for national sovereignty.

The first example on this realm is China's performance in the UNSC and in UN peacekeeping operations, which has been crucial to establishing the country's global legitimacy in terms of its peaceful ascension and its position as a responsible power *vis-à-vis* the other permanent members (DANNER, 2018, p. 182). China has historically preferred to maintain its low profile in the Council, as proved by the fact that it has exercised its veto power the least. China vetoed only 16 resolutions from 1972 to August 2020, but it is worth mentioning that 13 of those vetoes occurred precisely from the 2000s on (UNITED NATIONS, 2021a). The vetoed resolutions addressed situations in developing countries (Myanmar, Syria, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe), with measures that involved, in the Chinese perspective, a violation of the principle of sovereignty. As for the contribution of military and police personnel for UN peacekeeping missions,

China increased its contributions from just 5 contingents in 1990 to 192 in 2001 and 2,465 in January 2021 (UNITED NATIONS, 2021b). Currently, Chinese military and police personnel contributions are greater than all the other four permanent members combined, and they have been employed exclusively in missions in which there is clear consent from recipient countries.

The second example of how the Chinese engagement with the UN has increased its global legitimacy and reputation are its initiatives in the area of development. Since the UNDS is not hierarchically organized but rather a decentralized and loosely coordinated set of more than 30 funds, programs, offices, and specialized agencies, there are three fronts of growing Chinese participation: the search for leadership positions in UN specialized agencies; the increase in its financial contributions to the UNDS; and the promotion of development cooperation projects in association with different UN entities.

Currently, among the 15 UN specialized agencies, four of them are led by Chinese nationals: The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO); the International Telecommunication Union (ITU); the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO); and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)²¹. Besides, the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, appointed the Chinese national Liu Zhenmin as Deputy Secretary-General of the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) in 2017²². As a result, China currently is the country with the highest number of leadership positions in the UN, a fact that has been seen with mistrust by many US officials (SCHAEFER, 2019, p. 12).

In terms of funding, China occupies the 13th position in the rank of contributions to the UNDS budget. China not only is the single developing country placed among the 15 largest contributors but is the largest contributor among all developing countries. China's financial contributions have grown 280% between 2008-2017, totaling US\$ 325.8 billion in 2017²³. Most of the resources were allocated to the World Food Programme (46.2% of contributions), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (10.7%), and the UNDESA (7.4%). Whereas voluntary funds were mainly destined to the specialized agencies led by Chinese nationals, that is UNIDO, ITU and ICAO (MAO, 2020, p. 1).

China has also established direct partnerships with different UNDS entities, providing resources for the establishment of new offices and programs. The first initiative was the creation of the International Poverty Reduction Center in Beijing, in 2004. Launched by the Chinese government with the support of the UNDP, the center is responsible for conducting research, training, and exchange of solutions for poverty reduction based on South-South cooperation. After the success of this initiative, China and the UNDP signed their first formal agreement in 2010, to strengthen South-South cooperation initiatives between the two parties (UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME, 2021). Another partnership was the Chinese

21 A Chinese national was elected for the first time to a leadership position in a UN specialized agency in 2006 when Margaret Chan was the Director-General of the WHO in 2007-2017. Afterward, Li Yong was elected in 2013 and will occupy the position of Director-General of the UNIDO until 2021; Houlin Zhao was elected in 2015 and will assume the role of Secretary-General of the ITU until 2023; Fang Liu was also elected in 2015 and will lead the ICAO until 2021; and in 2019, Qu Dongyu assumed the role of Director-General of the FAO, with a term of office until 2023 (SCHAEFER, 2019, p. 12).

22 Although the UNDESA is not a specialized agency, but rather one of the bureaucracies of the UN Secretariat, the appointment of a Chinese national to one of the top secretariat positions at the UN in the area of development was significant.

23 Chinese contributions to the UNDS budget in 2017 were distributed as follows: US\$ 120.1 billion in regular resources; US\$ 38.7 billion in voluntary core resources; and US\$ 166.9 billion in voluntary non-core resources (MAO, 2020, p. 1).

funding for the creation of three UNIDO centers in Beijing: The Investment and Technology Promotion Office; the Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production Center; and the South-South Industrial Cooperation Center (UNITED NATIONS INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION, 2015, p. 8).

The support of the UNDS is also important to institutionalize and legitimize the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)²⁴. The Chinese government has signed memorandums of understanding with the UNDP, FAO, World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to channel the financial contributions under the BRI to these UN entities. In 2019, in his statement for the occasion of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Xi Jinping emphasized that: “(...) We will also deepen cooperation in agriculture, health, disaster mitigation and water resources; and we will enhance development cooperation with the United Nations to narrow the gap in development” (XI, 2019b).

The human rights pillar has been the most sensitive area to China’s engagement with the UN thus far. Even so, since 2000 the country has increased its participation in the UN Commission on Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Council. As put by Kinzelbach (2012, p. 331), Chinese statements in the UN have shown its acceptance of the main norms and principles under the international human rights regime, but the country has rejected the practical implications derived from it. Nonetheless, Beijing has not proposed an alternative vision to the human rights agenda yet.

Hitherto, Chinese diplomacy does not advocate for a revisionist ideological posture towards a new global governance. President Xi’s (2019a) speeches concerning a “Chinese dream” and a harmonic global arrangement – inspired by the reinterpretation of Confucian and ancient ideals of harmony between political unities in the form of a *Tianxia* (all under heaven) and based on the work of intellectuals such as Zhao Tingyang (2009)²⁵ – do not express the willingness to dictate a Chinese model to the world. In Xi’s statements, it is clear the intention to use the UN as a space to reform global governance under the principles of multilateralism, peaceful settlement of disputes, and respect for sovereign equality. In his speech at the General Debate of the 75th Session of the UNGA, in September 2020, the Chinese Head of State summarized his purpose for building a cooperative global governance:

We should stay true to multilateralism and safeguard the international system with the UN at its core. Global governance should be based on the principle of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits so as to ensure that all countries enjoy equal rights and opportunities and follow the same rules. The global governance system should

24 In 2013, considering the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, the Chinese government proposed to create the BRI as a means to strengthen cooperation among Asian, African and European countries, connecting them through infrastructure improvement. Besides promoting cooperation, the BRI aims to facilitate trade, finance, and cultural exchanges across the globe (THE STATE COUNCIL, 2015).

25 Some aspects of such a view are not exactly new. According to Cox (2013, p. 327), the traditional Chinese view of world order deals with the yin – which encompasses the wish for continuing consensus – and the yang – associated with the struggle among rival aims and changing strategies. In other words, Chinese rhetoric presents a dialectic between the myth of inclusiveness of “all under heaven” and “nothing left out”. This results in a foreign policy based on treating all states with impartiality, as well as a realist perception about differences in power and identity among countries.

adapt itself to evolving global political and economic dynamics, meet global challenges and embrace the underlying trend of peace, development and win-win cooperation. It is natural for countries to have differences. What's important is to address them through dialogue and consultation. Countries may engage in competition, but such competition should be positive and healthy in nature. When in competition, countries should not breach the moral standard and should comply with international norms. In particular, major countries should act like major countries. They should provide more global public goods, take up their due responsibilities and live up to people's expectations (XI, 2020).

As for the limitations to China's global legitimacy, Beijing still has a long way to go in terms of improving its image worldwide. In the last three years, data drawn from the Gallup Poll (*apud* POWER, 2021) – an US institute that conducts public opinion surveys – showed that among 130 countries, China's approval rating of 32% has been practically stable for ten years. Besides, negative perceptions because of fake news and doubts on China's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic have increased, reaching a 75% disapproval rate in the United Kingdom this year. Similar trends have been observed in Australia, Canada, South Korea, and Germany. China's difficulty to consolidate its global image also reflects in its diplomatic alliances: Chinese diplomatic presence in East Asia still faces resistance, considering the relevant political and economic nexus of the US with Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, and South Korea, for example.

China's position in the global political economy also presents fragilities that must be taken into consideration when discussing a possible counter-hegemony. Its system of production is based on the assembling of export products in capitalist global production, and cheap labor and super-exploitation of workers is still an important aspect of its productivity. Besides, there is a dependency nexus with the US market: Chinese economic growth has benefited from free trade and economic and financial liberalization under the US neoliberal order. According to Bieler and Morton (2018, pp. 185-188), Chinese and global political economy are under a demand and over-accumulation crises. Considering the demand crisis, China relies on export-led growth to the US and European markets, and its domestic market may not be able to support its growth alone for many years. As for the over-accumulation crisis, new Chinese investments channeled through projects such as the BRI may be only a temporary solution to future global economic and financial crises.

Considering these limitations, the Chinese diplomatic way to persuade for alliances and cooperation encounters in the UN a very suitable means for its purposes. As images and ideology matter for evaluating the stability of historical structures and hegemony, the "UN stamp" plays an important role in terms of Beijing's legitimacy towards an embryonic counter-hegemony and, therefore, the construction of a possible alternative vision of world order. After all, as put by Cox (2013, p. 352), "legitimacy is the crux of the problem of achieving peaceful consensus in global governance".

CONCLUSION

The nexus among world orders, historical processes, conjunctures, different temporalities, ideas, and material capabilities in order to understand global change is one of the most important legacies of Robert W. Cox's work in the field of International Relations. In this article, we sought to situate the role of IOs in the Coxian framework and the importance of the institutional dimension of a world order when it comes to understanding hegemonic and counter-hegemonic perspectives. After all, Cox's professional experience with the decision-making process in the ILO informed many of his considerations regarding the stiffness of IOs, on one hand; and the possibility of using IOs and multilateralism as a *locus* and means for representativeness and transformation of a world order, on the other.

Under the Coxian lens, we demonstrated that all these dimensions connect with China's rising presence in the international system and the UN, along with Beijing's search for a greater legitimacy for change. In a certain way, China has been seeking some change through its role in the UN system that embryonically may challenge the *pax americana*. This would depend, however, on the broader ongoing processes which are permeated by uncertainties and different speeds of change, points that will be cleared up only within the historical long term.

In this context of uncertainty and impossibility of predicting the future, Cox (2013, pp. 365-366) listed two scenarios in his last book. The first one deals with a relative decline of the US power and its acceptance to integrate a plural world, in which several powers would engage in constant negotiation to continuously define and adjust the *modus vivendi*. This could lead to a plural coexistence of civilizations, defined by Cox (2013, p. 323) as different intersubjectivities and different material conditions of existence. The author envisaged a dialogue of civilizations for the search of common interests, such as the survival of life on the planet (COX, 2013, pp. 333-334). In this civilization dialogue, the Chinese mentality would contribute, among other things, with a perspective about the possibilities of change, instead of the classical Greek vision of an eternal present (COX, 2013, p. 304). The second scenario would point to a confrontation of catastrophic consequences involving the US, on one side; and China and Russia on the other side.

For Cox, the second scenario was more likely because he believed that the US would not abandon its singular military position in favor of a plural world. But for him, a better and changing world would have to take into account the possibility of a new multilateralism, with the UN or some surrogate constellation of world powers reflecting norms and practices compatible with each of the different traditions of civilization. For that, the UN needed to go beyond its Westphalian perspective and include new actors, according to new historical circumstances, to achieve a common goal.

In both scenarios, the role of institutions is a very important topic for the transformation of world orders under the Coxian framework. In this sense, no matter how and when a new counter-hegemonic force will emerge, Cox asserted that the ideational and material role of IOs and multilateralism are intrinsically connected to this process, as the Chinese engagement with the UN and its embryonic counter-hegemony have shown so far.

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