

Peer Review

Review of: "Chaos Paradigm in International Law: Embracing Non-Linearity in an Anarchical World"

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I read this essay with great interest given its subject matter, that is, its proposition of reading international relations, with a focus on China, through the lens of chaos theory. Yet, despite its thesis that chaos theory is a useful paradigm through which to comprehend “uncertainty, nonlinearity, and unpredictability, which are aspects of the behavior in the international system” (p. 8), I saw no such analysis in the actual paper. First, I did not find any extended and systematic exposition of what “chaos theory” is and, more importantly, who its basic exponents in International Relations are and what their premises are. Second, I did not understand what the rise of China has to do with this analytical perspective.

Let me be more specific as to my reservations: It is clear that the rise of China in the world economic scene represents challenges for western hegemonic powers. It is also clear that China's assumptions about international relations, state sovereignty, law, and so forth, are very different from those of western liberal capitalist states. The essay spends a lot of time on these issues, but they are already readily comprehensible. But at no point does it explain why these understandable premises amount to a paradigm of chaos theory, why they introduce “uncertainty, nonlinearity, and unpredictability” in the world system, and what these terms mean. Even more specifically: to the extent that China is perceived as a threat to US unipolarity, it would be treated and viewed with hostility and suspicion simply because unipolarity is a US hegemonic goal; it does not even have to be culturally different from the US to constitute a threat. It suffices that its rise threatens, or is perceived as threatening, US unipolarity. Further, because of this simple reason, the US benefits from creating situations of chaos and disorder, precisely in order to block China's BRI expansion. I do not see a single instance in the essay where China is treated as creating “uncertainty, nonlinearity, and unpredictability” on its own. On the contrary, as the paper states, its basic principle is peaceful coexistence and “win-win” solutions. Hence, if the chaos paradigm has any validity here, it must have one in relation to the hegemon's response to China's rise, not with anything specific to China.

Because it does not at all address these issues, the essay gives the impression, on the one hand, that it seeks to address chaos as somehow due to China itself, and then, on the other hand, it dispels that idea. But then, of course, the reader wonders what chaos theory, disorder, etc. are doing in this essay, most of which actually explains--in a fashion that is intelligible--some of the complexities involved in China's transformation from a semi-colonial object of western exploitation into a sovereign state and an international player.

On the most basic level, then, the theoretical claims of this essay are never grounded in any specifics that point toward the validity or analytical utility of chaos theory and its correlates. Further, these theoretical claims erroneously bypass the possibility that the hegemon (the US) is the one deliberately deploying a strategy of chaos and disorder precisely to block the rise of China. Indeed, it is well known that the US and its allies have dismantled the former order of “international law” and replaced it with the “rules-based order,” which effectively means the order based on the rules the US itself makes ad hoc and according to its local geopolitical interests, without any regard for consistency. None of this is present in the essay's analysis, to the detriment of the convincingness and consistency of the argument.

Finally, the English used in the essay is in need of grammatical and syntactical revision quite frequently.

I do not recommend the publication of this essay until the above issues are addressed in an extensive revision.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.