

Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
Chinese Social Sciences Today
Interview questions for Professor Linklater
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1. Your monograph, *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations*, Robert Cox's "Social Forces, States and World Orders", and Richard Ashley's "Political Realism and Human Interests" were published in early 1980s, which were regarded as uncovering the prelude of "critical turn" within the IR discipline for its historical in-depth influence. Would you please comment your most outstanding contribution to this "critical turn", as well as the main difference with the other two's ideas.

AL: *Men and Citizens* was concerned with the question of the relationship between the obligations that citizens have to one another by virtue of belonging to the same state and the obligations they have to other people by virtue of shared humanity – a question that had been posed by the main natural law/social contract theories of the state in European thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That question arose because of the influence of Stoic-Christian universalism on modern ideas about the state and international relations. As Kant emphasized, the dominant answer elevated obligations to the state above obligations to humanity. Universal potentials had still to be released in the theory and practice of politics. I worked on this problem for much of the 1970s. Underlying *Men and Citizens* is a broadly Hegelian-Marxian interest in tensions and contradictions within societies and on immanent potentials for alternative arrangements. That interest provided the motivation for writing *Beyond Realism and Marxism*.

2. The main peculiarity of your critical theory has been its normative perspective and your study interest has been concerned with the moral and cultural dimensions of world politics all the time since 1982. In early 1980s, political theory of IR (also call international political theory or normative international theory) was not been paid much attention yet, and what made you locate your research within the ambit then?

AL: As a student of Politics and International Relations in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I was baffled by the gulf between the main preoccupations of political theorists and the central concerns of students of international relations. When I started work on the *Men and Citizens* book back in 1973, there was no such thing as international political theory or normative international theory. But there were works back then that pointed the way forward. Two books that influenced me were Stanley Hoffmann's, *The State of War* with its fascinating discussion of Kant and Rousseau's ideas about international relations, and Arnold Wolfers', *Discord and Collaboration* which contained an invaluable study of the relevance of Weber's distinction between the 'ethic of conviction' and 'the ethics of responsibility' for thinking about statecraft and world affairs

3. Both you and Professor Cox are representatives of critical theories, and in our previous email you emphasized Cox is concerned with the political economy of international relations, not with normative issues, while you are dealing with normative and cultural dimensions of world politics.

Some scholars commented that your critical theory study and Cox's are complementary, how you comments on this?

AL: I think it is fair to say that Robert Cox was primarily concerned with investigating the relationship between power and production while my own work has focused more on the moral and cultural dimensions of social and political life. Of course, Cox has not ignored the latter domain. His essays on civilizations represent a widening of focus. My more recent work in harm might also be said to broaden the earlier scope of investigation by considering the material context in which moral codes develop. Suffice it to say that complex questions arise about the relationship between 'material' and 'ideational' forces. Over the last few years, I have come to the view that Elias's analysis of civilizing processes provides the best way of approaching that question, but perhaps that it something to come back to later.

4. You are praised one of the most influential Frankfurt School critical theorists in IR because of the influence of Frankfurt School critical theory. According to my studies on your theories, however, it seems your ideas' resources are much richer than Frankfurt School – your ideas' source begins with Kant and Marx, then the discovery of Frankfurt School critical theory, the engagement with the English School and finally the conversion to process or Eliasian sociology. Would you please detail why you chose these theories as the main source of inspiration?

AL: Cosmopolitan themes have run through my work since the 1970s. Initially, the main influence was Kant, and then Marx. Both believed that humans would have to develop cosmopolitan beliefs and political structures if they were develop effective responses to rising levels of global interconnectedness. It seemed logical to turn to Habermas's support for a cosmopolitan ethic as part of the attempted 'reconstruction of historical materialism' – and to try to understand how it was related to first generation Frankfurt School thinking. The turn to the English School arose as part of a belated realization of how it had wrestled with questions of power, order and justice in societies of states – in forms of world political organization that had not been discussed directly by post-Marxist critical theorists. There have been two reasons for focusing on Elias's process sociology in recent years. First of all, the approach can be read as an attempt to preserve some of the strengths of historical materialism in a more synoptic conception of social science. Second, Elias devoted more attention to relations between states than most sociologists of his generation did (he lived between 1897 and 1990). His study of civilizing processes that affect humanity as a whole can be read as an attempt to build on the legacy of Kant and Marx. I should stress that Elias was opposed to partisan sociology. However, his hopes for the species are part of the same 'Enlightenment tradition' – specifically, the belief that social inquiry can cast light on how people can exercise higher levels of control over the forces that have thrown them together.

5. Your original studies focused on the problem of the relationship between "men and citizens", later moved on to the establishment of what questions of inclusion and exclusion are central to IR study, and the triple approaches to the research, and then to the problem of the transformation of political community, and recently to the problem of harm in world politics. Although the moral issue of the institutional dichotomy between citizens and non-citizens has been all the focuses, your research themes at different period of time have been different. Would you comment why

your themes have been changed continuously over these years?

AL: In the introduction to *Critical Theory and World Politics* (Routledge 2007), I make the point that my research has moved from the problem of citizenship, to the problem of community and the problem of harm. Perhaps that can be seen as a progressive widening of horizons. The problem of citizenship revolved around specific tensions between obligations to the state and obligations to all other people. The problem of community was an attempt to think about the ethical principles that might one day underpin new forms of political association that break down invidious distinctions between insiders and outsiders (whether ‘outsiders’ are subordinate groups within the state or the members of other communities). The problem of harm focuses on the possibilities for global agreements about forms of violent and non-violent harm that all people should be free from. The question here is how far cosmopolitan harm conventions – conventions that are designed to protect all people irrespective of citizenship, nationality, gender, race, sexual identity and so forth from violent harm, humiliation, exploitation and so on – can solve the citizenship/humanity problem mentioned earlier.

6. Western scholars commented that your theories and Cox’s are influenced greatly by Marxism, which is the theoretical source. You also stated your praiseworthy “incorporating, absorbing and surpassing the thoughts and approaches of Marxism” in your book, *Beyond Realism and Marxism: Critical Theory and International Relations*, and that your three approaches and studies on the transformation of political community and so on are inspired by Marxism. Chinese scholars are exploring Marxism IR theories with Chinese-style and studying the dialectic materialism and historical materialism further. Would you please give some comments and suggestions?

AL: There is important work within the historical materialist perspective in both the UK and Canada that is undoubtedly known to Chinese IR scholars. I have in mind the neo-Gramscian perspective associated with Robert Cox, Stephen Gill and others. Then there is the work that Justin Rosenberg, Benno Teschke and Kees van der Pijl are doing at Sussex University. Much of it has shed light on the relationship between power and production, and it has focused on long-term processes of change rather than concentrating on current events. Rather less attention has been paid to the moral-cultural sphere – and little attention has been paid to the role of emotions in social and political life. One of the attractions of Elias’s writings is that they move freely from the study of state-building and war to the analysis of changing notions of shame and disgust in society, as well as noting the significance of changes in the ‘economic’ sphere. That sense of the multi-layered nature of the social world is more sophisticated – so it seems to me – than historical materialist investigation. Another way of putting this is to say that Marx’s attempt to understand the social totality and the relationship between different dimensions of human interaction takes us beyond historical materialism to modes of analysis that consider not only war and state-building but conceptions of race, gender and so forth, and also the emotions that bind people together in social systems. This may be controversial to say the least but in support I will just mention Marx’s alleged comment that he was not a Marxist!

7. Your book, *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-westphalian Era*, has been regarded as one of the most influential postpositivist books. Some

scholars, however, criticized that an important foundation of the research of the transformation of political community, Habermas discourse theory, is based on pure formal reason and not practical in the real International Politics. According to the logic, you chose to use it and hence it is difficult to cast off those criticisms. How you comment these viewpoints?

AL: I stand by the Habermasian argument that the commitment to dialogue between equals is central to cosmopolitanism and to the idea of justice between all peoples. That is not just theoretically interesting but has significance for practical matters that arise in relations within and between societies, and indeed in our everyday lives. But I understand the criticism that the ethic seems remote from many practical concerns. Jean Bethke Elshtain criticized *The Transformation of Political Community* because it said little about violence; Norman Geras argued that all humans have certain basic needs and interests, and that there is an easier way to cosmopolitanism than through support for discourse ethics. Their criticisms have influenced my recent work on harm in world politics, but I would say that this is about trying to find a more comprehensive perspective and not about breaking with the commitment to a discourse ethic.

8. You mentioned in our exchanged email that some of your recent work on harm has been published but most is still in draft chapter form as part of a three volume study on “the problem of harm in world politics”. Would you tell us why you started on this topic and introduce the main content of your three volume study on harm in advance?

AL: The immediate interest for focusing on harm was Marx’s belief that a major transformation was under way in Europe and would eventually affect the whole world. As a result of capitalism, violent harm between national populations was probably in decline, only to be overshadowed by non-violent harm in the shape of the world-wide exploitation of vulnerable people.

That comment raised the question of whether the most industrialised societies are caught up in a longer-term pacifying trend – as many liberals from the nineteenth century to the present day have argued. If so, the modern states-system may avoid the conflicts that finally destroyed earlier states-systems. Marx’s standpoint also raised questions about how many forms of harm exist in world politics and about how to understand them. Significantly, there is no tradition of thought, no body of literature, that analyses the place of harm – the development of more ingenious ways of harming other people as well as efforts to rein in that power – in the history of humanity.

The first of three books which is entitled *Theorising Harm* (the book went to the publisher, Cambridge University Press, last week) considers what is involved in understanding the problem of harm in world politics. The second volume (which exists as a first draft) analyses the relationship between violence and civilizing processes in the Western states-systems from the Hellenic-Hellenic systems to the present day. That book is designed to contribute to what Martin Wight called the ‘sociology of states-systems’, and not least by attempting to integrate themes from English School theory and Eliasian sociology. The third volume (which exists only in outline at this stage) will analyse the development of the capacity to harm – the capacity to cause ever more destructive forms of harm over ever greater distances – and the human struggle to control that unique ability which has over the last few decades created the possibility that humanity may

eventually be exterminated.

9. Some scholars commented your critical theory not only criticizes the mainstream theories, but also attempts to create critical theory on a grand scale, looking for the forms of immanent possibility that can be built on to create a more inclusive and cosmopolitan global order. Would you please comment on your critical theory's contributions on the re-structure of global order, as well as the relevancy between your critical theory and globalization?

AL: I mentioned the belief that cosmopolitan potentials exist in many societies. Recent research has tried to develop the theme by arguing that all humans can build relations of solidarity around general vulnerabilities to mental and physical suffering. That theme was important for first generation Frankfurt School theorists such as Horkheimer who was heavily influenced by Schopenhauer. I have tried to link that idea with the long-term trend towards higher levels of human interconnectedness, and argue that it is one of the foundations on which a more cosmopolitan political order may yet be built.

10. You mentioned in the book, *The English School of International Relations: a Contemporary Reassessment*, that the English School particularly the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics, such as thinking of Martin Wight and Hedley Bull and the like, has significant impacts on your research. You said that you always thought of John Vincent's late writings as an attempt to "radicalize rationalism" in Wight's sense of rationalism, and that the second part of the book on the English School is an attempt to push things in broadly that direction. Would you please talk about the relationship between your theory and the English School. Also, some scholars commented that your critical theory is very close to revolutionism, and how you comment this viewpoint?

AL: Let me start with revolutionism – an unfortunate term that brackets together thinkers as different as Gandhi and Hitler although, to be fair to, Wight he did distinguish between types of revolutionism. The term nevertheless has connotations of standing against and outside the existing order whereas John Vincent argued, as well as Hedley Bull towards the end of his life, that certain cosmopolitan themes have become part of the contemporary world order. Vincent argued that the right to be free from starvation and malnutrition should be at the centre of international society, and he believed that development could build new forms of respect and solidarity between 'North' and 'South'. So there we had a focus on how cosmopolitan principles can address real political problems in the modern world. All I want to add is that cosmopolitan principles have in some way to be embedded in the society of states which is a critical domain for deciding how far peoples can agree on the principles that can enable them to live together more amicably than they have done in the past. English School theory stresses that the society of states is no longer European but is a universal society that is in the process of discovering how far it can develop principles that command the consent of all peoples, and not just Europeans, or Westerners, or the most powerful interests in international society. The question for me is how far modern societies can make progress in agreeing on fundamental cosmopolitan harm conventions, and on how to promote support for them.

11. Some scholars comment you emphasize more on normative domain of your critical-theoretical enterprise, and that your research in sociological realm is comparatively substantial, but your praxeological domain is slightly weak. I would like to have your opinions on this comment.

AL: Some constructivists have argued that the sociological side is also underdeveloped, but my recent work on harm may go some way towards dealing with that problem. The praxeological dimension is rudimentary still. The aim has been to show how modern notions of citizenship with their egalitarian and universalistic themes create the possibility of something larger, that is, notions of cosmopolitan citizenship and ‘good international citizenship’ that can enable peoples to deal with the current and future challenges of increasing human interconnectedness. That is to focus though only on certain moral and cultural resources that modern peoples can draw on in an attempt to reduce violent and non-violent harm in world politics.

12. In response to “post-positivism is annoyingly detached from vital questions of public policy and governance”, you stressed “one recent critique of post-positivism fails to mention, even in passing, Cox’s important and influential distinction between problem solving and critical approaches to IR. In fact, critical theories of all descriptions are especially alert to these considerations, which are at the forefront of a range of inquiries into policy matters, political structures, and alternative forms of human governance, rather than with incrementalist policy recommendations associated with revisionist solutions to the problems of modern capitalist society”. Although you neatly summarised the distinction, here, I would like to want you introduce which aspects of your theory can best address your concerns for the issues of current practice?

AL: I think the focus on citizenship addresses issues of current practice indirectly by suggesting how through notions of cosmopolitan citizenship peoples can prepare themselves for the challenges that lie ahead – challenges that will not be dealt with by assuming that our main duties are to fellow-citizens but which require the widening of ethical horizons – something that may take decades and probably centuries to occur.

I regard my current work on harm in the same way - that is an attempt to think about the moral and political sensitivities that people may have to develop if they are to live together more amicably in the period that lies ahead. I should add that the focus on current practice is important but not central. The real challenge, I believe, is to think about large-scale changes of moral and political orientation - that will only take place over many generations – that can enable societies to deal with the challenges mentioned earlier. It is important not to let issues of current practice that always attract large numbers of IR scholars obscure the need for thinking about how humans can adapt in the long-term to the challenges that result from the ways they have been thrown together over the last few centuries.

13. In some scholars’ view, the dialogue between non-mainstream (including your critical theory) and mainstream is not deep enough, in particular, in empiricist affairs. How you comment on this? If so, how to promote an in-depth dialogue between your critical theory as well as some other postpositivist theories, and the mainstream? Would you please introduce current postpositivist research in UK and the rest of Europe and its prospects against the increasingly deepening

globalization?

AL: It is interesting that there is little interest in critical theory in the mainstream areas of the discipline, most obviously in the US where a certain conception of social science that is not well-disposed towards critical theory of any kind dominates. It is also worth noting that some forms of critical theory (post-structuralism, for example) pay little attention to Marxism and Frankfurt School theory – despite Foucault and Derrida's comments on the significance of those perspectives. The fact is that there is a trend towards specialization, and professional pressures to specialize, that work against the kind of intellectual dialogue that you mention. I do not think that International Relations is a promising discipline as far as moving towards higher levels of synthesis are concerned. I have developed closer links with process sociologists precisely because of their openness to synthesis and because of their opposition to extreme specialization (and 'pseudo-specialisation') in the social sciences. Through engagement with process sociology it is possible, I believe, to develop a deeper understanding of how the history of international relations is connected with the long-term transformation of human society. But the details of that argument have still to be worked out.

14. The Frankfurt School critical theory in IR seems on longer represents the main challenge to orthodoxy within the field as it did in early 1980s, but it is still among the most influential schools of postpositivist theories hitherto. Would you please comment on its significance and prospects?

AL: I don't know that it ever was the main challenge to orthodoxy, or that orthodoxy was ever endangered by it. Post-structural critical theory has more adherents but remains marginal, and is now so specialized that many in the mainstream regard it as a sect with its own private language. When I refer to orthodoxy, I have in mind the US profession which is intellectually quite narrow. British and mainstream European IR are more open and diverse, and the different branches of critical theory are taken far more seriously there.

Of course in the long-run, the United States may lose its position of intellectual dominance in the field. It is too early to tell but one must wonder how the discipline will develop if new centres of power devote major resources to the study of international relations. How will the subject look a century from now if China, India, Brazil and other societies continue their journey to economic prosperity and greater political influence? Will the approaches that currently dominate still have the upper hand? Will Frankfurt School critical theory find new supporters in those societies? Or will it remain a marginal voice? Who can say?

All we can predict is that future developments will not only be influenced by the quest for truth but by the political environment that then prevails. Realists will argue that the future will probably be like the past, and that those perspectives that focus on competition and conflict will remain central. Perhaps they will be right. But the problems that future generations will face – including climate change – will not be solved if people remain attached to nation-states and think of citizens first. My hope is that Frankfurt School critical theory, in combination with other approaches, will contribute to different, more cosmopolitan sensibilities. It is hard to be optimistic but premature, and irresponsible, to give up hope.