



EDITORIAL: Trade Wars in International Relations

The rise of international trade relations has sparked intense competition among countries striving for dominance in the global market, leading to significant trade conflicts. When these economic disputes escalate into systemic crises, they are unequivocally defined as “trade wars.” The nations involved employ a wide array of strategies, including diplomacy and economic pressure, to fiercely protect their domestic industries from foreign competitors and to solidify their standing in the international market internasional (Baikushikova & Utkelbay, 2021). While trade wars are fundamentally rooted in economic motives, their consequences extend far beyond the initial conflict.

A trade war is fundamentally a conflict between countries that utilizes various trade barriers—such as tariffs, import quotas, subsidies, currency manipulation, and embargoes—as policy tools to counteract practices viewed as harmful or unfair (Baiq & Tariq, 2023). From the perspective of international political economy, Conybeare (1987) and Bastos (2017) characterize it as a confrontation that involves significant economic retaliation and trade restrictions aimed at advancing national interests. Scholars like Melese, Shughart, & Henderson (1989), and Saeed (1989), highlight trade wars as cycles of tit-for-tat protectionist policies that create deep structural tensions in the international trading system. Bekkers et al. (2019) assert that trade wars represent the collapse of cooperative trade relations and can escalate political tensions with alarming rapidity.

While proponents of trade wars often claim their aim is to protect domestic industries and workers or to correct unfair trade practices, it is critical to recognize that these conflicts are frequently driven by political or geopolitical motivations. Nations employ economic instruments to compel changes in their opponents' policies or to shift the balance of power in international relations.

Trade wars are undeniably damaging to the global order. They obstruct international cooperation, disrupt global supply chains and values (GSC and GVC),

inflate the prices of goods, and heighten the risk of economic stagnation. Over the long term, trade wars can exacerbate geopolitical tensions, undermine political stability, and even provoke armed conflicts (Saeed, 2023).

However, in certain contexts, trade wars can yield a "blessing in disguise." Domestically, these conflicts can galvanize social cohesion and enhance political legitimacy, especially when governments successfully frame the situation as a defense of national interests (Mueller, 1973); (Snyder, 2000); (Grey, 2009); (Frieden, 1991). Furthermore, trade wars present valuable opportunities for domestic reform and the formation of new political alliances driven by economic interests (Skocpol, 1979); (Gourevitch, 1986); (Rogowski, 1989). On the international stage, countries can bolster their diplomatic bargaining power, forge new coalitions (Walt, 1987), and reorganize economic relations to confront geopolitical pressures (Keohane & Nye, 1973). (Gilpin, 1981); (Goldstein, Rivers, & Tomz, 2007). Nations not directly involved can also reap benefits by maintaining stable economic relations, acting as neutral mediators, and contributing to the development of new norms and institutions in the global trading system (Lipset, 1959); (Nye, 2004); (Finnemore, 1998); (Krasner, 1982).

Ultimately, trade wars transcend the simplistic notions of tariffs and quotas; they vividly illustrate the dynamics of power within the international system. These conflicts serve as a battleground where economic, political, and strategic interests converge, making the economy both a tool and an arena for vying for influence within the ever-evolving global order.

Trade wars are a critical and enduring aspect of international relations, deeply embedded in the history of civilizations. They have evolved significantly in response to shifts in civilization and the global economic landscape. While the fundamental concept remains unchanged, the nature, causes, motives, and methods of implementation have transformed radically from ancient times to the present, clearly illustrating the interconnection of economic, political, and military interests.

In Ancient Greece and Rome (8th century BC to 5th century AD), trade wars were inseparable from military conflicts (Finley, 1999). Competition over trade routes and vital resources, such as grain and metals, often ignited warfare. The prevailing idea was firmly rooted in a "zero-sum" game, where the gain of one party equated to the total loss of another. Control over trade routes and raw materials was essential for the survival of a

city-state or empire. Key motives included securing food resources, controlling strategic territories, and projecting military power. Methods employed included maritime blockades, the plundering of merchant ships, and the establishment of colonies. The Peloponnesian War exemplifies how trade restrictions against Athens instigated conflict, while the Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage epitomized the struggle for dominance over Mediterranean trade routes (Eckstein, 2006).

The Mercantilism Era (16th to 18th centuries) marked the ascendancy of nation-states and a fervent colonial expansion. Trade became the foremost instrument for accumulating national wealth, underpinned by the belief that the global economy functioned as a zero-sum game (Heckscher, 1994). European nations vigorously implemented protectionist policies, including high tariffs, import bans, trade monopolies, and navigation laws to stifle foreign competition. The intent was clear: to bolster national power, control colonial markets, and undermine rivals. The English Navigation Acts of 1651, which barred non-English ships from trading with England and its colonies, ignited the Anglo-Dutch War, highlighting the indelible link between trade policy and military conflict (Irwin, 2020).

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, the landscape shifted dramatically due to the Industrial Revolution. Countries recognized the urgent need to protect their burgeoning domestic industries. Tariff protectionism became an essential strategy, particularly in nations undergoing industrialization. The drivers were simple: safeguarding young industries from foreign competition and preserving domestic jobs. These policies frequently led to reactive measures, escalating into tit-for-tat responses that heightened global economic tensions (Kindleberger, 1986). A striking example is the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act of 1930 in the United States, which elicited retaliatory tariffs from other nations and exacerbated the global economic turmoil of the Great Depression (Irwin, 2017).

In the post-World War II era, countries established GATT (which evolved into the WTO) to promote trade liberalization and thwart a return to protectionist measures (Jackson, 1997). Nevertheless, trade wars did not simply disappear; they evolved. Modern trade wars now often deploy non-tariff barriers (NTBs) veiled in domestic regulations like health and safety standards. The objective is unmistakable: protect domestic industries at all costs. Incidents such as the "Chicken War" between the US and Europe

and the banana import dispute between the US and the European Union are clear demonstrations of how technical barriers and preferential policies serve as economic weapons (Baldwin, 1986).

In the globalization era of the late 20th century, trade wars have grown increasingly intricate. Competition extends well beyond goods to encompass technology, data, cybersecurity, and geopolitical dynamics. Nations are fiercely contending for supremacy in strategic domains such as artificial intelligence, 5G, and semiconductors. Today's methods include selective tariffs, export controls on critical technology, economic sanctions, and foreign investment restrictions, frequently employing domestic regulations as indirect barriers. The US-China trade war, initiated in 2018, stands as a stark representation of these complexities. The US has imposed substantial tariffs on Chinese goods and restricted access to its technologies for companies such as Huawei (Bown, 2021). In response, China has executed similar tariffs and promoted domestic technological self-sufficiency (Liua & Woo, 2018).

The history of trade wars underscores the reality that economic conflicts reflect broader global power dynamics. From overt military actions in ancient times to precise technological policies in the current digital age, the underlying motive remains unchanged: the relentless pursuit to maintain or expand national influence. Understanding this evolution is imperative for analyzing present-day economic contestation.

Recent scrutiny of the ongoing US-China trade war has garnered significant attention from scholars across various disciplines. International Relations (IR) studies offer a suite of perspectives, including realism, neorealism, Marxism, constructivism, and critical theories such as feminism and postcolonialism. By leveraging these frameworks, IR scholars provide incisive and critical analyses of the intricate dynamics at play in the US-China trade war.

Classical realism firmly establishes that states are rational actors pursuing power within an anarchic international system, positioning global politics as a relentless struggle for security and influence (Morgenthau & Thompson, 1997). Through this lens, trade wars emerge as strategic maneuvers driven by narrow national interests. The United States and China adopt economic policies that embody beggar-thy-neighbor practices—efforts to enhance domestic conditions at the expense of others—as articulated by Smith in "The Wealth of Nations" in 1776 (Smith & Cannan, 2012). Both nations prioritize their

national interests over global welfare, as their political elites remain focused on domestic concerns and short-term economic growth. The US's imposition of economic restrictions on China is a calculated move to maintain its structural advantage by stifling its competitor's growth, to which China retaliates with its own policies (Khan & Mehmood, 2021). Classical realism argues unequivocally that economic policies serve the political and strategic objectives of the state. The US-China trade war epitomizes this paradigm; as a hegemon, the US perceives China's economic and technological progress as a direct threat to its global supremacy and national security. Initiatives such as technology bans and tariffs on companies like Huawei are rooted in the legitimate fear that China's technological advancements could yield military and intelligence advantages. Conversely, from a realist perspective, China's response is a clear indication of a rising state determined to enhance its security, influence, and standing within the international system. Its strategic industrial policies and retaliatory tariffs affirm its growing national power and assert its rejection of a subordinate role in a global order still dominated by the US.

Neorealism, or structural realism as articulated by Waltz, asserts decisively that the anarchic structure of the international system and the distribution of power within it substantially shape state behavior (Waltz, 1979). Unlike classical realism, which focuses on the internal motivations of states, neorealism posits that states operate as functional units compelled by the structure of the international system. Under this framework, the trade war between the United States and China is not merely a consequence of state greed or ambition but an inevitable outcome of the shifting distribution of global power.

Post-Cold War, the US has asserted its dominance as the sole hegemon in a unipolar world. However, China's ascent as a formidable economic and technological power presents serious challenges to this established order. Neorealists maintain that this dynamic epitomizes a classic phenomenon in power politics: as a new power rises, the dominant state will invariably seek to balance or contain it in order to maintain its preeminence (Mearsheimer, 2001). The trade war, therefore, serves as a vital instrument of US foreign policy aimed at curtailing China's capacity to enhance its relative position in the international arena. Tariff policies, technology restrictions, and surveillance of Chinese firms like Huawei and TikTok reveal strategic concerns that China's technological progress will not only bolster its economic might but also amplify its

military and diplomatic power. For neorealists, economic power is the bedrock of hard power, which ultimately shapes the global power structure. Consequently, US actions must be understood as a deliberate containment strategy against systemic rivals. In contrast, China's responses—including retaliatory tariffs, the promotion of technological independence (self-reliance), and the strengthening of alternative economic alliances like the Belt and Road Initiative—demonstrate its unwavering commitment to enhancing its strategic autonomy and accelerating the transition toward a multipolar order.

Neorealism asserts that in a system devoid of a central authority, countries inevitably harbor suspicions regarding each other's intentions, leading to the security dilemma, which also affects the economic sphere. As a result, trade wars exemplify a systemic inclination for nations to prioritize self-defense and maintain a balance of power. The increasing relative power of China intensifies the strategic anxiety of the United States—not simply because of perceived threats from China, but also due to the intrinsic uncertainty that characterizes the anarchic international system.

In stark contrast, liberalism and neoliberalism categorically view trade wars as detrimental and irrational deviations from ideal international behavior. These conflicts are driven by counterproductive political motivations or a failure to recognize the mutual advantages inherent in an interdependent and cooperative order fostered through free trade. Liberalism unequivocally highlights the benefits of economic interdependence and labels disruptive actions that undermine mutually beneficial trade as irrational. Meanwhile, neoliberalism brings attention to the failures of international institutions to avert such conflicts and advocates robust measures to strengthen these entities to enhance cooperation and avert trade wars.

Three predominant theories within the liberal framework—economic interdependence, liberal institutionalism, and democratic peace theory—clearly elucidate the dynamics of the trade war between the United States and China. The theory of economic interdependence posits that enduring peace is achieved through the establishment of mutually beneficial economic relationships. Disruption of these ties leads to significant losses for all parties involved. Conflicts are most effectively resolved through negotiation and consideration of mutual interests, fostering a positive-sum game rather than a zero-sum approach (Grubb, 2023). The extensive trade relations between the US and China have undeniably fostered substantial economic interdependence

(Copeland, 1996). The US reaps benefits from importing affordable goods from China and accessing its marketplace, while China relies on the US for exports and vital technology transfers from American companies. However, the outbreak of the trade war, marked by tariffs and retaliatory actions, has critically undermined this interdependence. Consequently, production and consumption costs have surged in both nations, contradicting liberal expectations that economic ties would bolster stability.

Moreover, multinational corporations, as key non-state actors within this liberal paradigm, have a compelling interest in maintaining open trade. The uncertainty arising from the trade war has severely disrupted their global supply chains, prompting a strong push from various stakeholders against tariffs. The persistent nature of this conflict underscores a troubling decline in the influence of these corporate entities, a trend that liberal theorists should find alarming. Supporting this view, Liu & Woo (2018) argue that escalating trade tensions signal a diminishing capacity of economic interdependence to facilitate cooperation.

Liberal institutionalism firmly posits that international law and organizations can promote peace by regulating state behavior and administering incentives or sanctions against violations (Keohane & Martin, 1995). However, when states perceive unequal benefits within the system, they are inclined to bypass the rules—undermining the legitimacy of international institutions (Liu, Yu, Wu, & Yao, 2021). In the context of the US-China trade war, these tensions starkly illustrate a crisis within the liberal international order, driven by China's ascendance as a formidable economic power and the shifting dynamics of economic relations between the two countries. Initial efforts to integrate China into the liberal order through organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) were designed to compel compliance with established international norms. However, China's rapid economic growth and expanding global influence have alarmingly led the US to feel its relative advantage is slipping away. This perception has catalyzed a shift toward protectionist and containment policies aimed at safeguarding US strategic interests.

Liberal institutionalists firmly argue that while US hegemonic leadership may be weakening, the fundamental principles of the liberal order remain vital. The tensions that have emerged do not herald the collapse of this system; rather, they challenge US dominance within it. The solution is clear: rather than confrontation, there must be a

concerted effort to revitalize international institutions, enhance transparency, and implement an inclusive strategy toward China to secure its peaceful integration into the rules-based global system.

Democratic peace theory (DPT) asserts that democratic states rarely engage in wars against one another due to their shared norms of peaceful conflict resolution and mutual trust (Owen, 1994). However, the US–China trade war starkly contradicts this assumption, highlighting that China is not a democratic state, yet both nations have been embroiled in a prolonged economic conflict without resorting to military action. This reality clearly indicates that factors such as economic interdependence and domestic pressures play a far more significant role in preventing conflict escalation than the mere presence of democratic governance. While regime differences matter, it is the bilateral economic ties and shared strategic interests that serve as crucial buffers against armed conflict. This insight broadens our understanding of international peace, showing that structural and economic factors can be equally or even more dominant than political system similarities.

Constructivism in International Relations decisively challenges the outdated notion that international relations are driven solely by material interests or the rigid structures of the international system. Constructivists firmly argue that the international landscape is fundamentally shaped by ideas, norms, identities, and intersubjective interactions. In this light, the US-China trade war transcends mere economic rivalry; it is fundamentally about the social construction of national identity, threat perception, and the historical dynamics between the two powers. As Wendt (1992) put it, "anarchy is what states make of it," emphasizing that the international system is not a static reality but is molded by perceptions and country-to-country interactions. Thus, the trade war represents a conflict deeply rooted in the tensions between national identities and political narratives, rather than simple economic calculations.

The United States has long positioned itself as a global hegemon, anchored in liberal values, democracy, and capitalism, which it sees as essential to its international legitimacy. Conversely, China has been assertively defining itself as a rising power, rebounding from a "century of humiliation" and cultivating a narrative rich in economic nationalism and technological pride. The trade war embodies a profound clash between the US's hegemonic identity—one that perceives itself as threatened by China's

ascendancy—and China's determined quest for recognition and respect. The US views China's economic successes and advancements in critical domains like 5G and artificial intelligence not merely as competition but as direct challenges to its value system and global standing (Callahan, 2015).

Political rhetoric amplifies this conflict, with the US government, particularly under Donald Trump, consistently framing China as a violator of international trade rules, a thief of intellectual property, and a peril to American jobs. In stark contrast, Chinese media and political elites present the trade war as a fresh form of “humiliation” and as a test of China's resolve to stand independently. Constructivists assert that such narratives actively shape social realities and heighten antagonism. As the “us vs. them” mindset spreads, the avenues for compromise and cooperation inevitably narrow.

Furthermore, constructivism highlights the significant impact of international norms and expectations on state attitudes. The ongoing tension between the US and China exemplifies a fierce struggle for normative legitimacy: will the world continue embracing the liberal values championed by the US, or will it pivot towards an alternative model proposed by China, such as “development without political liberalization”? This confrontation goes beyond mere tariffs; it is fundamentally about who will dictate the norms—ranging from digital data protection to economic sovereignty—that govern international relations.

Analyzing the US-China trade war through the lenses of Marxism and Neo-Marxism provides a vital framework for understanding the underlying power dynamics, economic contradictions, and global ramifications at play. As Marx (1867) decisively articulated, the state is not a neutral actor; it operates as an instrument of the capitalist class, aggressively protecting and advancing its interests. Capitalism is inherently expansionist and susceptible to internal crises, such as overproduction and underconsumption. When profit margins decline, capitalist nations are compelled to adopt protectionist measures and fiercely engage in global market struggles to sustain capital accumulation.

In this context, US tariff policy is a clear manifestation of domestic capital's interests, desperately trying to maintain its dominance amid external threats from foreign competitors. The US-China trade war transcends mere tariff disputes; it is a profound struggle for markets and resources between two colossal capitalist blocs. As an

established capitalist hegemon, the US rightly perceives China's rise as a serious challenge to its global economic influence. The imposition of tariffs and sanctions by the US is a defensive maneuver aimed at countering the threat posed to domestic industrial profitability by China's rapid industrial expansion.

Neo-Marxism enriches this analysis by broadening our understanding to include world systems, dependency, and hegemony. Wallerstein's World-Systems Theory (1974) categorizes the global political-economic system into three strata: core, semi-periphery, and periphery. Within this framework, the trade war is unequivocally a struggle for hegemony between the US (the established core country) and China (the rising semi-periphery country striving for core status).

China has firmly positioned itself as the "world's factory" within the global capitalist system, and it is now aggressively redefining its role through technological innovation and foreign investment. In reaction, the US is determined to keep China in a subordinate position within the global value chain. Allegations of intellectual property theft and unfair trade practices are expressions of dissatisfaction regarding the distribution of global profits that are increasingly seen as favoring China.

Dependency theory, developed by Frank (1969), remains crucial for understanding the intricacies of the US-China trade war. Despite being a major global power, China exhibits ongoing dependence on technology, markets, and capital from core countries like the US. Simultaneously, China is forging new dependency relationships with developing nations through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aimed at establishing its own semi-peripheral zone of influence. Consequently, the trade war starkly highlights the US's strategic efforts to uphold a global dependency structure that serves its own interests.

Moreover, Neo-Marxists influenced by Gramsci (1999) underscore the importance of ideological and cultural dimensions in establishing global dominance. Gramsci's concept of hegemony extends beyond mere material interests; it is achieved through the societal endorsement of dominant values. The US-China trade war powerfully illustrates the erosion of US ideological hegemony in the global economy. China is not merely competing in production; it is actively promoting an alternative development model that intertwines political authoritarianism with state capitalism as a challenge to the Western liberal paradigm. Ultimately, the trade war represents a robust conflict of narratives: the

US accuses China of engaging in unfair practices that undermine the global market, while China rebukes the US for its protectionism and obstruction of developing nations' progress.

From a Marxist and Neo-Marxist perspective, the US–China trade war is not just a passing concern to be resolved through technical compromises. It is a clear manifestation of the structural contradictions embedded in global capitalism and a fierce struggle for hegemonic power. The trade war decisively illustrates the global capitalist system's tendency towards fragmentation and decoupling, as international supply chains are deliberately reconfigured along political and geopolitical lines.

Moreover, this conflict does not merely disrupt the global order; it imposes significant hardships on the working class in both countries and around the world. The ramifications are severe, including job losses, rising consumer prices, and mounting economic instability. Consequently, the trade war must be understood as an integral part of the relentless competition that characterizes global capitalism, which seeks new spaces for accumulation while striving to maintain the dominance of the capitalist class.

Critical theory in International Relations (IR) offers a sharp and necessary lens through which to analyze the dynamics of the US–China trade war. It goes beyond the conventional explanatory frameworks of realism and liberalism. This approach is committed to dismantling the entrenched power structures, dominant norms, hegemonic discourses, and identity constructions that shape international relations. It centers on pressing issues of inequality, injustice, and the urgent agenda for emancipation. Key contributions from feminist international relations, postcolonial thinking, and perspectives from the Global South are vital in uncovering the underlying layers of this conflict.

From a feminist perspective in International Relations, the US–China trade war starkly reveals gendered consequences that mainstream analysis often ignores. IR feminism asserts that the global economy, international trade, and state policies are inherently gendered; they are saturated with power relations that place women in precarious positions (Tickner, 1992); (True, 2012).

In the context of trade wars, women emerge as the most disproportionately affected group. Their vulnerabilities stem from their associations with precarious employment sectors, limited access to economic resources, and entrenched gender roles in social

reproduction. Labor-intensive industries such as textiles, light electronics, and household manufacturing—sectors that predominantly employ women in developing countries—are the most severely impacted by tariff hikes and trade uncertainties (Barrientos, 2001); (Elson, 1999). When companies shift production or streamline their workforces in response to disruptions in global supply chains (GVCs), women workers, often trapped in weak or informal contracts, are the first to lose their jobs.

This dire situation is further aggravated by the absence of social protections and access to economic safety nets, especially in Global South countries. Additionally, in their roles as consumers, women face significant challenges. The term “pink tariff” or gendered tariff effects identifies the rising costs of goods predominantly consumed by women—such as hygiene products, household items, and children’s necessities—exacerbated by import tariffs (UNCTAD, 2020). This economic burden intensifies inequalities within low-income households, deepening gender disparities in consumption and amplifying the demands of women’s reproductive labor.

An essential aspect to examine is the escalating burden of social reproduction. In the tumultuous economic landscape shaped by the trade war, women are unavoidably thrust into the position of compensating for lost resources through unpaid care and household management work (Fraser, 2016); (Rai, Hoskyns, & Thomas, 2014). When the state fails to fulfill basic needs, women's traditional roles within the family become untenable. This dynamic not only reinforces the concept of the double burden but also significantly impedes their economic mobility.

Furthermore, from a discourse standpoint, International Relations (IR) feminism critically challenges the dominant narrative of the trade war, which is steeped in masculine, hegemonic language that emphasizes competition, power, and state dominance. Such language effectively silences the experiences and needs of non-state actors, particularly women, in policy analysis and research (Peterson, 2003). IR feminism unequivocally demands a reframing of our approach to global trade and economic dynamics, asserting that women's experiences must be a central focus of analysis rather than an afterthought in macroeconomic policy.

This IR feminist perspective boldly broadens our understanding of the US-China trade war; it is not merely a geopolitical struggle between two major powers. This conflict intensifies structural gender inequality across labor, consumption, and social roles.

Feminism provides a critical lens through which we can dismantle the illusion of neutrality in trade policies and advocate for a more inclusive and socially just global economic framework.

Moreover, postcolonial approaches and Global South perspectives are crucial for understanding the complexities of the US-China trade war. Postcolonial theory powerfully illustrates how the legacies of colonialism and imperialism continue to shape global power dynamics—not only in terms of political and economic structures but also through the production of knowledge, dominant narratives, and identity formation. As articulated by Edward Said in "Orientalism" (1978), Western domination over the East transcends physical or territorial control; it manifests through cultural and intellectual representation that casts the "other" (non-Western nations) as inferior, necessitating guidance from Western logic.

In navigating the US-China trade war, we must adopt a postcolonial framework that recognizes this conflict as an economic contest intertwined with the reconstruction of global domination rooted in colonial structures. Despite both the US and China being categorized as great powers, their relationship operates under an asymmetrical logic. The US consistently positions China as a "developing" country expected to conform to the international trading system established by Western institutions like the WTO, IMF, and World Bank. This expectation reflects a misguided belief that China's integration into the global economy will transpire within a neoliberal framework dictated by Western norms (Chang, 2002); (Wade, 2003). The assumption is that China will function solely as a provider of cheap labor and a low-cost industrial hub—without ever challenging the existing global power structure. However, as China boldly challenges the status quo through policies like Made in China 2025, the Belt and Road Initiative, and advancements in technology and geopolitical influence, the US responds with protectionist measures and campaigns to delegitimize China. Postcolonial analyses compellingly argue that this response reveals a profound fear of disrupting the global hierarchy that has historically benefited the West (Acharya, 2014).

From the perspective of the Global South, the US-China trade war is undeniably a new form of unequal exchange, firmly rooted in the classic concept of dependency theory (Amin, 1976). This theory illustrates that despite changes in the key players of global economic relations; exploitative patterns remain entrenched. Developing countries are

ensnared in a structural dilemma; they must navigate an increasingly polarized world between two dominant powers while fiercely protecting their autonomy and economic stability.

The trade war has a direct and profound impact on global value chains, foreign direct investment (FDI) flows, and geopolitical configurations. Countries in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa face the immediate threat of economic slowdown due to rising protectionism. However, they also encounter significant opportunities stemming from investments and industrial relocations from China (ADB, 2019). It is crucial to recognize that the distribution of these benefits is highly uneven and heavily influenced by institutional capacity, the quality of economic policies, and each country's bargaining power within the global system (Gallagher & Kozul-Wright, 2021); (Rodrik, 2011).

For nations in the Global South, this conflict serves as a pivotal moment of ambiguity, where opportunities for strategic maneuvers and alternatives emerge. Yet, they must also contend with the pressure to take sides and the risk of developing new dependencies. Countries that possess high adaptive capacity, effective regional integration, and robust political institutions are strongly positioned to excel in the evolving multipolar landscape (Hurrell, 2006); (Acharya, 2014).

Thus, the application of postcolonial theory and the Global South perspective provides a critical lens through which to analyze the US-China trade war. This conflict transcends mere concerns about trade deficits or imports tariffs; it is fundamentally a struggle for power that will shape the future of global relations. Critical theory effectively exposes the hidden dynamics of international power relations—ranging from dominant discourses and hegemonic norms to the systemic exclusion of non-Western actors. This perspective champions a call for a more inclusive and multipolar global economic order.

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With warm regards,

Arry Bainus and Junita Budi Rachman

Editor-in-Chief and Deputy Editor-in-Chief

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