

A Systematic Review: Revisiting Neoliberal Institutionalism in the Modern Context with Political Philosophy Considerations

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Abstract: This paper contributes to the modern neoliberal institutionalist line of thinking and international relations studies by revisiting and discussing neoliberal arguments under today's socio-economic and political background. The goal is to defend neoliberal institutionalism through a brief and yet systematic review of classical neoliberal works. An interdisciplinary approach is taken through paralleling neoliberalism with theories in philosophy (utilitarianism and pragmatism) and politics. Criticisms from neorealists and worrying issues like state-contestation and counter-institutionalization are discussed and defended. Afghanistan's accession to becoming a WTO member has been used as an example to show the positive influence that international organizations and institutions can exert in the 21st century.

Keywords: neoliberalism, institutionalism, international relations theories, international organizations, pragmatism, utilitarianism, state-contestation, counter-institutionalization

1. Introduction

In this paper, the author seeks to conduct an interdisciplinary review focusing on neoliberal institutionalism alongside the lenses of political philosophy. This review is conducted as an attempt to argue that institutional neoliberalism provides a promising theoretical basis to assessing the status quo of the present international political and economic system. Why is neoliberal institutionalism still a popular ideology today, after about forty years of development? This paper is written based primarily on believing that in arguing in favor of neoliberal institutionalism as a dominant IR theory today, the soundness of such view should be based on how well the ideologies can be explained with linkage to the modern context. A secondarily reason for this writing is due to the author's belief that social sciences, especially political sciences, should not be studied solely but instead there is necessity for cross-examination and interdisciplinary studies alongside psychology, economics, law (i.e. international law and law of the sea) amongst other first level disciplines, majority of the academic breakthroughs in the 21st century happened in the overlapping sections of two or more traditional disciplinary fields.

The paper began with a brief summarization of neoliberal strands of thinking, scoping towards an in-depth introduction and review of institutional neoliberalism (focus primarily on Keohane). The author then looks at the WTO's influence on Afghanistan during and after its accession processes. The WTO was chosen for it is a vital example of the international organizations today and draws attention to Afghanistan which is the most recent country to acquire WTO membership and which at

the same time happen to be a least-developed country and have a war-torn economy. Another important reason for choosing Afghanistan was because of its iconic recent political instability due to the Afghan Taliban takeover, which leads to political instability for Afghanistan on its domestic realm and questions towards its potential future behavior within the international institutional system as an individual agent state. Afterward, there is a discussion surrounding why neoliberal institutionalism should be more favored in perceiving the global situation under two closely linked approaches: philosophy and politics. The paper does this by first assessing the theoretical background of institutional neoliberalism and then discuss it with pragmatism and utilitarianism. The paper then discusses modern concerning problems for neoliberal institutionalism, state contestation and counter-institutionalization, which weakens the authority and effectiveness of IOs in IR presently. Alongside is an innovative “drinking glass” imagery to better help readers understand how IOs work. Lastly, by summarizing the key ideas throughout the paper, in the conclusion the author delivers some possible insights and explanations for neoliberal institutionalism’s retained popularity, and why it will continue to shape our world today and in the future.

2. Literature Review

Before the term ‘neoliberalism’ became popular, political theories of international relations were dominated by realism and liberalism. In the 1950s-60s, countries and regions such as Japan and Western Europe have turned to the idea of mass-consumption welfare states [3]. This postwar development results in growing dependency on international trade, coordination of resources and transactions with other states. One example would be that the basic production capacity (which required low level of skills and technology) were transferred from the well-developed countries to developing-countries and under-developed countries such as China, at the time. This socio-economic structural change demanded for progress in the field of IR.

Following this idea, according to Robert Jackson and Georg Sørensen, liberalism has refined itself into several strands of thinking each focusing on a particular area. The first strand is republican liberalism, which argues that cooperation is easier to establish between democratic countries because they have heavy disincentive to cheat against each other and it is highly unlikely for two democratic countries to go to war because of their citizens favor peace and harmony over war time periods [3]. Secondly, a strand of thinking under the name of sociological liberalism emerged, it emphasized on the global impact of increase in these cross-border activities [3]. Scholars like Deutsch argued that the increase in interdependency between states and such interconnecting activities can help to push forward common values and goals among states and promote peace and harmony as a result of the growing benefits of cooperation and growing cost of cheating in inter-state programs [4]. It is increasingly unlikely for states under such cooperation relationships and within the global-interdependent frame to go to war with each other since having the benefits of cooperation. Following this line of thought, prominent scholars like Keohane and Nye developed the idea of interdependence liberalism [5]. They argued that complex political-economic relationships were established between countries like Western states and Japan, where there are increasing complex inter-state dependency and connections in areas such as political relationships between governments, military security and transnational cooperation between domestic businesses [5]. Keohane and Nye in ‘Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition’ further pointed out to the situation that there is an ‘absence of hierarchy among issues’, that dominating military power were no longer used instrumentally in foreign policies and in state-to-state relationships, instead, states sought after dealing with transnational issues with a more peaceful and harmonious liberalist approach. Under this development of increasing interdependency, further progress has been made, international regimes, institutions and organizations have been established by states as an approach towards solving common issues and pushing

forward common values of market freedom, economic development and government non-intervention policies, etc.

Keohane was among the main contributors of this strand of thinking of institutional liberalism [6]. It argues for international institutions and organizations to be the ideal medium to monitor international cooperation agreements, assess and distribute information to member countries and to prevent and punish the act of cheating. Institutional liberalism was developed as a vital part of the thinking that constitutes neoliberalism. The latter, which emerged in the 1980s, was developed in attempt to address issues which the former have had difficulties dealing with. Having its predecessor being accused of being too idealistic and utopian-thinking, neoliberals have repudiated the former's excesses in idealism but remained to share ideas like possibility of progress and change, as well as freedom and non-interventionist thinking [3]. With that said, the heated debate continues until now, where modern superpower states compete in security and cooperate in international trade, sign political and military alliance agreements... This is the real world after all, it is close to impossible to derive one single explanation for all possible actions of a state. When dealing with issues in the field of IR, almost all problems are far too complicated to be perfectly explained by solely the game theory. Motives behind the states' actions include socio-economic interests, geopolitical interests, military interests and more. The factors are often interrelated and not solely assessed by states during the decision-making process. This is very unlikely the case in quantitative research which requires control over variables and getting rid of externalities at their best. With these in mind, an interdisciplinary discussion and shall happen in later section of this paper, where the author attempts to approach, assess and explain neoliberalism in the modern context from the perspectives of politics and philosophy.

Having comprehended the four strands of thinking, the basic ideas of neoliberalism has been briefly introduced. The interconnection and interdependency between them provide a consistent argument of the neoliberalist tradition calling for peace and international cooperation. Institutional liberalism is the most important part out of all strands of the neoliberalist theory, given that it has imposed the greatest impact on our lives today. If the world is perceived under the modern context to be a painting portrayed together by different states, the paint itself should be perceived as the international organizations and institutions that were built to deal with common problems that a state would otherwise be incompetent to solve alone. Hence, it is crucial to take a closer look at neoliberalist institutionalism as people try to better understand how effective international institutions and organizations are at promoting humanitarian, political and economic developments today.

Ever since its emergence in the 1980s, neoliberal institutionalism has become one of the most dominant ideologies in international relations (IR). Being the mainstream neoliberal trend to go into a theoretical warfare with the school of neorealism, the neoliberal institutionalist school places critical weight on the influence of international institutions towards inter-state and international cooperation. Neoliberal institutionalists believe that international institutions, by providing trustworthy information to states, could weaken and improve the "out of order" or "state of nature" phenomenon and thereby leading to cooperation between states [20]. Neoliberal institutionalism is a systematic IR theory, through implementing the fundamental ideology of rationalism, the theory has built its theoretical system around the idea of "institutional choice" [1]. Moreover, the theory argues that states should pay concerns and focus of attention to the idea of absolute advantage instead of relative gains compared with other states when dealing with matters between themselves. When states find themselves facing problems in which they regard as so closely linked that should require it to be dealt with other states together, they create international regimes focusing on solving that specific type of problem through common negotiations and coordination [1]. Throughout this process, group coordination of manpower, financial power and legal power are contributed and used to solve common problems in a systematical way, which is where the idea of international institution comes to play. Neoliberal

intuitionism focuses its attention specifically on topics related to the central functional role of international institutions and organizations within the international political system by playing a vital role in promoting trade and maintaining world peaceful order [2].

Keohane and Nye denied the three fundamental theoretical assumptions of realism by asserting and reinforcing on the idea “complex interdependence” and stressing on inter-state relationships [21]. Keohane and Nye developed a systematic neoliberal institutionalism through studying of international political-economic institutions, international cooperation mechanisms and institutions in the ocean and currency fields were discussed in-depth and have become a crucial cornerstone of “complex interdependence” [21]. The work has brought neoliberalism back on track to claiming its prominent status alongside political realism. Keohane in his iconic ‘After Hegemony’ criticized Gilpin and other realist scholars’ view on their hegemonic theories by establishing a systematic and functional theoretical basis for international institutions believing in that whilst hegemony could help to create such institutions, the recession of such hegemony does not necessarily imply or lead to a failure of international order, the already existing institutional cooperation mechanism does not cease to exist in the after hegemony period and thus would still be able to sustain and maintain international cooperation [1].

Moreover, Keohane’s ‘Neorealism and its Critics’ launched a full-scale attack against the fundamental theoretical basis of realism, questioning the political-realist theoretical system created by Waltz, Morgenthau (six principles of realism) and formerly Thucydides [24]. Keohane asserted three fundamental theoretical strands of liberalist thinking: commercial liberalism which holds free trade can promote peace; democratic liberalism which holds democratic states can promote peace; institutional liberalism which holds international institutions can promote peace [22]. Furthermore, given that international institution was believed to be one of the reasons contributing to the behavior of a state, international institution researches have also become a crucial part of political idealism in IR, and which were carried in IR studies to date [22]. In his book ‘International Institutions and State Power’, the school’s name ‘Neoliberalism’ was clearly employed by Keohane for the first time, alongside were the definition of neoliberalist ideologies and its subject of focus, these iconic changes not only signified neoliberalism’s inheritance from classical liberalism and neorealism but also made clear that there are fundamental differences between it and its predecessors [23]. The ‘International Institutions and State Power’ collected ten pieces of academic writing including nine of which Keohane wrote in the 1980s and the introduction piece written especially for this book, which summarized and defended neoliberal institutionalism. Keohane discussed the conditionality of international cooperation, the formation of international institution and its function, and the relationship between states and such institution on the theoretical level [23]. Qin summarized Keohane’s study of theoretical systematic neoliberal institutionalism with the logic formulae:

$S_i \rightarrow U_b$

in his ‘Power, Institutions, and Culture’ where “ S_i ” represents international institution and “ U_b ” represents state behavior [20]. The core of neoliberalism lies on the idea and theoretical framework of “institutional choice”, of which assumes that under a unchanging or stable international framework, a state would still show different behaviors and tendencies of act, in such case the causal factor or independent variable is the institutionalize degree or extent of the international system [23]. These assertion makes “international progress” the main or solely important feature or characteristic that neoliberal institutionalists focus on their studies.

3. Today: Neoliberal Institutionalism

3.1. International Organizations in the Modern Context

3.1.1. From Principles to Institutions in Global Governance

It is important to understand how international institutions and organizations work before rethinking into the reasons behind neoliberal institutionalism's popularity until today, as these are the central mechanisms and practical means to achieve the good ends of neoliberal institutionalism. International organizations (IO) and institutions arise as essential tools or means of international authority within a global governance system which emerged in the 1990s to deal with modern struggles such as trans-border issues, widening and deepening of transnational commerce relationships and there is also hope to tackle problems like anarchism and power-inequalities between the most powerful countries and the weaker ones. These IOs may exercise influence and enforce constraints on their member states' policies and processes, through assessing relevant information and coming up with an interpretation or decision which may be legal binding to the member states [7].

In accordance to Zürn's model, the modern global governance system can be described through three layers: (1) a set of normative principles (which justifies exercise of authority in the global governance system); (2) a set of specific authorized institutions (which exercise that power and authority in targeted issue areas) that can be either international or transnational; (3) interactions between different spheres of authority within the system which exposes important legitimation problems [8]. In the justification of authorities within the global governance system, there involves a basic presupposition of promoting common good as well as justification for the basic rights of societal actors, apart from states, to address issues in global governance. One of the most important encompassing ideologies behind the creation IOs is to push forward common good in terms of more public value-oriented international policies. The possibility to have an independent international authority in the system is also generally believed and consented by government and citizens at the time. In referencing to the justifications of these basic principles of common good, IOs are believed to be a very competent medium to exercise this authority over states and societies in relevant issue areas. The IOs would gather information, assess and interpret them and then come up with some conclusion. It could then exercise authority and exercise influence on member states or societal actors, not necessarily through direct commands or requests, however, the IOs and its stakeholders tend to share the implicit expectation that these recommendations will be followed by the subject of assessment [8].

3.1.2. Neoliberal Institutionalism

Critical attention and value have been placed on development of the "institutional choice" in neoliberal institutionalism. The term "institution" is as important to neoliberalism as "power" is to neorealism and "culture" is to constructivism. Neoliberal institutionalists have taken "institution" as an independent variable and "sovereign entities" were seen as dependent variables in attempt to study and develop their IR theories objectively. Like the other two traditions, neoliberalism is a systematic theory. Neoliberal theorists view "institution" as the core influencer within an international system, which influences the behavior of independent entities (sovereignties). Several underlying issues grasps the neoliberalists' attention: the anarchic international environment (no superior nor central global enforcer to monitor states' behavior); trading problems (while it is mutually beneficial from interstate cooperation to take place, efforts must be taken to make it happen); peace problems (peace and harmony between states also need to be maintained with effort despite being mutually beneficial i.e. the stronger party might feel that invasion and war provides more relative-benefit and would need to be persuaded that it is not) the neoliberalists propose that international regimes, institutions and

organizations can act as the ideal instrument of peacemaking and they also argue that it has done its job relatively well.

Scholars such as Keohane focused on the need to facilitate cooperation between states, and argues that such cooperation, especially through the form of an institution, can help to solve cooperation and collaboration problems between states, which otherwise would not be able to be resolved with the absence of the institution. Cooperation happens when state actors perceive their policies to be in actual conflict or potentially in conflict [1]. Keohane points out that there are several optimal options for a state, and that the dilemma is not how to defect cheating of the other state(s) but instead how the states work together to reach an agreement on one of these options. Cooperation should not be understood as the absence of conflict in interstate relationships but instead, it should be seen as a reaction or solution towards interstate conflict or potential conflict of interests [1]. Cooperation is a highly political behavior where patterns of behavior of actor states must be altered in order to reach some sort of interstate agreement in some area. Studies of game-theoretic experiments, simulations and past international crises have shown promising empirical evidence that measures including promises and rewards and threats and punishments tend to be more effective in obtaining cooperative outcomes in interstate relationships than measures purely based on persuasion [1].

3.1.3. International Organizations and Institutions (IOS)

Today, the international political and commercial system has developed to become highly structured and institutionalized. International organizations and institutions like the IMF, the WTO and the UN each plays one or more critical roles in promoting and maintaining world financial security, economic and political stability as well as developments in humanitarianism and living quality in less and underdeveloped countries. Whether international institutions and organizations have done a good job in fulfilling their inner values, that is, the reason why they were created by states in the first place, is still in question. Scholars in all three prominent traditions of IR has attempted to participate in this centennial debate but so far there has not been a dominant conclusion which defeats both two others. While a result coming from such debate remains unclear, it has come to attention that Neoliberalism out of the three, seemed to always claim its position behind the establishment of today's most well-known international institutions and organizations. Of all these words and norms: human development, economic growth, environmental protection and interstate cooperation... there is public consensus that international institutions and organizations are created to worship these ideas.

Such ideas of international institutions and organizations originates from the concept of international regimes. One promising interpretation was defined by John Ruggie as 'a set of mutual expectations, rules and regulations, plans, organizational energies and financial commitments, which have been accepted by a group of states' [9]. This means that international behaviors are institutionalized [9]. The idea was further developed by Krasner and mentioned in Keohane's *After Hegemony*, advocating international regimes as 'sets of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in each area of international relations. Principles are beliefs of fact, causation, and rectitude. Norms are standards of behavior defined in terms of rights and obligations. Rules are specific prescriptions or proscriptions for action. Decision-making procedures are prevailing practices for making and implementing collective choice' [10].

This definition is concise and meaningful for later development of an analytical framework for international regimes in the form of international institutions. For a clearer understanding of the reader, regime does not have a physical form, it can be understood as more of a virtue or spirit of collective action and inter-state cooperation. International institutions and organizations are the actual forms that are physically present in the modern society. International institutions and organizations (IOs) generally mean the same thing, though "institution" is more frequently used in past IR literatures, on the other hand, IOs have been more often regarded in recent literatures.

In support of international institutions and organizations, neoliberalist scholars like Abbott and Snidal have provided prominent arguments that institutional form of IOs have the two central advantages: centralization and independency [11]. Whereas Martin and Simmons further support by holding that ‘institutions should be most influential in promoting cooperation when they are relatively independent, “expert sources of information and when such information is scarce and valuable to states’ [12]. Which is useful when dealing with international issues related to cross-border information (such as banking and financial regulations). They further argued that as long as people are considering dealing with issues which involves mix-motives from two or more actor states, in which the actors must cooperate so as to achieve their self-interest or objective, there would surely always be the incentive to construct an international institution in the relevant field.

3.1.4. The Criticisms

While the effectiveness of the IOs have been argued for in game-theoretic experiments and theoretic models, and while present empirical evidence can always be somehow used to explain in favor towards the positive impact of the IOs. Positive reasoning like those above are often attacked by the other traditions questioning the actual effectiveness of IOs.

Neoliberalists holds that the main defect to international cooperation and coordination is the incentive to cheat (i.e. relative gains in inter-state cooperation) and argues for international institutions and organizations as an effective platform and way for international monitoring of states’ actions throughout cooperation and coordination processes and to prevent cheating through enforcement measures. Most scholars in this tradition pays little or no attention and effort in the military part of the discussion of international cooperation and argues that neoliberalism only pays attention on developing the political-economic part. This is one of the main reasons for it being attacked by opposing neorealist scholars like Mearsheimer, who argues that it is realistically impossible for countries to ignore the presence of military gains in inter-state cooperation, since economic gains can be transferred to military gains by states [13]. Relative gains cannot be neglected, it is always present and even the most liberalist states would have to rely on part of this information when dealing with inter-state cooperation agreements. Therefore, it can be argued that the theory self-contradicts itself in some way.

Furthermore, the implementation of international authorities by the IOs may fall short due to existing problems of power bias [8]. In thought of power bias, IOs may be reluctant to impose pressure on major-donor countries, in other cases, decisions and recommendations of IOs on specific issue areas can depend on the willingness of powerful states to follow or obey by a great extent. This means there is insufficient independent capacity and ability to exert a influence which directly determine the final decision of the target issue. It would be clearer to perceive the influence of an IO as a glass of water, the container itself presents authority as in its capacity to hold how much water, while the actual amount of water within the container depends on the willingness of member states and societal actors to follow the decision/recommendation of the IO on a specific concerned issue. Zürn argued that while such limited power of the IOs to enforce its decisions or interpretations violated the regulative idea that like cases should be treated alike and fairly, it could also imply that the impartial exercise of authority is unlikely to happen. However, the incompetency and lack of capability of enforcement and the impartial exercise of authority should be separately considered. Lack of capability does not necessarily mean fair treatment. Moreover, an IO’s capability could be weakened when its strongest member opposes its decision but strengthened when the decision it made benefits major members and that it is favored. For instance, why would a member country resist to follow if the IO’s decision is what they wished for in the first place i.e., a decision that provides the maximum utility that a member can argue for.

The neorealist line of thought questions that despite under the rules and guidelines of IOs, the rights of equal voting power and the right to voice out opinions are given to weaker and smaller member states and regions, the neoliberal institutionalist ideas are far too vulnerable towards criticisms of idealism by simply assuming that the major superpower states would fully comply under the rules, regulations and laws administered by the IOs constituted by strong and weak member states, whether observed on the surface or beneath the table. Strict or firm measures to secure the behavior of these dominating states within and outside (retaliation or vengeance) the structure of the IOs have not yet been well established i.e. the monitoring and cheating-prevention mechanism. Nowadays, the most powerful IOs themselves are the ones constituted and formed by states which include the participation of these superpowers, it is valuable in and of itself to dig for an explanation on why these IOs are effective and influential and what gives them such power or contributed to such power in the first place. Thus, it cannot be guaranteed that mutual supervision is correctly reinforced in between member states of an IO even if there is a “mutual non-interest affiliated investigation and supervision office” set within the IO structure, for this directly leads to the question of “where does the enforcement power of this office come from?” By unconsciously giving into the underlining assumption that dominating states can behave properly with accordance to rules and regulations under the IOs they are member of without such careful consideration would lead us to the trap where the old liberalist tradition had fallen into. Therefore, the effectiveness of an “established rule-making procedure” or IO requires that the powerful member states respect those arrangements they themselves are part of during the rule-making process [11]. Neorealists might argue that it is more ideal to consider the situation in which powerful members consider it is more beneficial and favorable if they follow such regulations of a weak IO self-voluntarily and willingly without enforcement from the IO, which supports the realist claims that IOs are an ineffective means of promoting and monitoring a healthy IR relationship between nations in today’s political-economic world.

While neorealist voices seemed to overtake the neoliberalism thinking today, especially after 2018, when social media rumors claimed that the COVID-19 was likely originated from China, dragging China and all other states into a misery period of suspicion and war against the viruses. International political relationships come to tension, trade rules and flight policies were revisited and revised again and again. The relationship socio-political relationship between China and the United States, the two largest economies today, has especially come to an ice point after U.S. President Donald Trump acquired presidency and started a trade war. Topics of national threats in areas of economic development, employment and trade seemed to strengthen realism’s ideology in real life. Bigger and louder the political debate goes, to cooperate or to compete... Government intervention and restrictions in private merge and acquisition processes of companies in key industries to restrict the other country... It is during moments like these, that IOs such as the WTO seemed to be fragile and lacked the ability to protect private businesses and to preserve the international relationship. However, this does not mean that IOs are completely meaningless products of neoliberal institutionalism in international relations today.

3.2. WTO’s Institutional Influence on Afghanistan

While the neoliberal institutionalist tradition (and IR as an academic discipline) is young, it has been a key influencer of international order for the past few decades. One most recent example in support of the neoliberalist line of thinking is the Afghanistan’s accession into the WTO.

Afghanistan believes that by joining the WTO, it can obtain more opportunities for international cooperation and as well as free trade, thereby effectively promote the growth of its domestic economy and achieve developments in overall social welfare. Simultaneously, it also believes that as an underdeveloped country with very limited natural geographical and populational advantages, there is necessity for it to claim presence within an influential international organization to better safeguard its

national interests in IR, where there is anarchism and where states only care about relative gains rather than absolute gains [13]. The country also believes that by accessing into IOs, in specific the WTO, the IO could act as a meaningful source for obtaining useful trade information related to its interest. The WTO, like most IOs serve the function of information provision [14]. Realistically speaking, the WTO might be one of the most reliable and unbiased information sources to obtain trade information, there would be more genuine opportunities thanks to the transparency and accuracy of the WTO. Last but not least, Afghanistan aimed to establish an effective intergovernmental cooperation mechanism, and in particular, the trade system. By becoming a member of the WTO, Afghanistan would be able to enjoy a range of trade benefits that are only accessible to WTO members, such as potential lower transaction costs, lowering or cancellation of trade barriers of certain technological markets and lower negotiation costs of trade agreements with other members. Throughout these processes, the WTO could act as a reliable independent source of monitoring.

Afghanistan applied for WTO membership in December 2004. A Memorandum on Foreign Trade Regime (MFTR) was submitted in 2009 and the first Working Party meeting was held in January 2011. It became an official member of the WTO in July 2016. During the negotiation and accession phase, Afghanistan has adapted to a series of rules, regulations and procedures and experienced changes such as market reforms. In terms of policy changes in market access, 9 Bilateral agreements for goods and 7 bilateral agreements for services were signed by the government with other countries and regions. Barriers and tariffs have been lowered or cancelled: the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT); levy of Other Charges and Duties (OCD) have been cancelled; an intellectual property rights office was established, and the Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights laws (TRIPS) have been adopted and implemented. Other commitments have also been made in areas like telecommunication, banking and insurance. Finally, there was implementation of WTO transparency obligations. The negotiation and accession phase were challenging to the Afghanistan government, but the efforts have been proofed to be fruitful.

Moreover, in terms of economic development. Before joining the WTO in 2016, Afghanistan's total added export value to countries around the world in 2010 sums up to around 390000000 million USD. In its accession year 2016, the value increased to around 600000000 million USD, which was more than 50% growth than six years ago. Given the low inflation rate at the time period, this growth can be considered as an achievement. By 2018, the value has rocketed to its peak value throughout the 22 years period from 2000 to 2022, at around 885000000 million USD [15]. By 2019, the figure has dropped to 870000000 million USD, but has yet remained high as compared to before accession into the WTO. Afghanistan have observed a record high GDP growth between 2009 and 2010 with an estimation of 22.5%, mainly contributed by a strong rebound in its agricultural market which is likely due to increased trade activities during the membership negotiation process. On the other hand, the country's poverty was also reduced due to the low inflation (estimation of 2% in 2010) and robust growth. Last but not least, in terms of the changes in social welfare, before and after accession into the WTO, in 2004 the Human Development Index (HDI) of Afghanistan sits at 0.409. By 2019, the HDI value has improved to 0.511, life expectancy at birth has improved to 64.8, expected years of schooling raised to 10.2 and the GNI per capita sits at 2229 USD, although outperformed by Sudan (which ranks 2 places below at 171 in the low human development category of HDI ranking), it has achieved better overall performance compared to countries like Ethiopia and Gambia [16]. As for the Consumer Price Index (CPI), after joining the WTO Afghanistan's % change has improved from -0.662 in 2015 to 4.384 in 2016 and improved to 4.976 by 2017, the year after its accession [17].

While the present measurements of economic and human developments in Afghanistan are undisclosed by the Afghanistan government, it can be anticipated to be unpleasant compared to the years before. This assumption is based on the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted international trade relationships and the socio-economic environment across the world. One might argue that

other countries even the much stronger nations are doing poorly in health and economic areas in between 2018-2022. However, the recent Afghanistan Taliban political crisis would potentially exert a negative influence on Afghanistan's membership in international institutions like the WTO and more others, given a change in the government in control. The political instability has attracted attention on the international scale and led people to question the possible changes in international trading strategies of the Afghanistan government and other changes in its behavior as an individual agent state in the international institutional system, a potential direction of research for neoliberal institutionalist scholars who wish to conduct focused regional case studies about impact of regime changes on a state's international policies.

3.3. An Interdisciplinary Discussion with Political Philosophy Considerations

3.3.1. Philosophical Considerations: Utilitarian and Pragmatic Ideas

To some extent, the utilitarian line of thinking goes well with explaining the necessity of the presence of IOs in International Relations (IR). Utilitarianism merely focuses on how maximum utility can be gained and stresses the importance of "perfect judges" within any system. The author holds that on the institutionalization of international relations in peace, trade and order, this strand of philosophy may as well provide a logically valid and sound support for neoliberal institutionalism under the modern socio-economic and political context.

In the criticisms within section 3.1(d), it was mentioned that today's international relations context is much more tensioned compared to the time period before the 2018 Covid-19 outbreak. How does this relate to the IOs? Two possible approaches into matter are (1) perhaps having the presence of the IOs are better than having none; (2) the importance of having the IOs (or institutions, as in what they represent) has never been greater than it is today, under such context of global insecurity, trade war, nation-wide competition and health pandemic. The two views should be self-defending in and of themselves. Following the discussion, another prominent example of how IOs within the international framework can exert a positive influence on the behavior of individual state actors is the WHO during the Covid-19 epidemic. Whilst the advice and provision of information is accurate, the determining of the degree of success depends entirely on the willingness of different states to cope with the rules and suggestions under the WHO.

The ideology of "maximizing utility" and "perfect judges" derives from one of the key ideas in utilitarianism: "control". Uncontrollable externalities like the COVID-19 outbreak are sudden and unanticipated, and escalates quickly around the world, the policymaking procedure is always one step behind the happening crisis (virus). While a system cannot always accurately anticipate upcoming crisis, it should do its job well by having full control on all other variables that it can have control on. An independent and transparent IO is thus probably one of the best bets. By being delegated the authority in the relevant IR field such as trade (WTO) and monetary services (IMF), some of the largest IOs play a very influential role in modifying today's international environment through performing functions like information provision, monitoring and the prevention of cheating.

Hardin suggests that there are several utilitarian reasons that justifies the need for control, which 'give officials incentives to act in relevant ways (the incentives are therefore strategic—they focus on actions and not on kinds of outcomes)' [18]. Fully autonomous officials are not wanted, and judgments of right and wrongs should be made through the system after considering what serves the best utility for the system as a whole. This view can be further supported by Rawls' idea of an imaginary "institution" which would act in accordance to whatever actions that would produce better outcomes for the entire society. Therefore, a dream to achieve utilitarianism's best ends would probably be creating functional institution(s) which could act as perfect judges and make independent decisions

that are always rational and achieves the best utility for the international society. Putting such condition in the IR framework, such institution(s) would be in shape of how the neoliberal institutionalists perceive the role of international institutions and IOs, rather than the ideologies from constructivists or neorealists.

Another potentially strong support for neoliberalist institutionalism is Pragmatism. No matter to what extent the three prominent philosophers disagree with their versions of pragmatism, for Dewey, Peirce and James, Pragmatism represents a scientific attitude and way to act. Pragmatists seeks to find the most effective and justified ways to solve a dilemma or puzzle, and when it comes to the framework of the IR, the former parallels well with neoliberal institutionalists in some senses. For neoliberal institutionalists, an IO is the most scientific form and effective way to solve international issues collectively. Pragmatists on the other hand would very much perceive the question and answer in a similar way. Overall, Amartya Sen argues for a world of “reasoned social progress” where society citizens collectively deal with collective problems through having rational discussions and debates, justice and order is thus maintained within the society through free market policies and freedom to voice out opinions for individuals [19]. Richard Sandbrook has further developed this idea into his “pragmatic neoliberalism”. If the entire world is perceived as a single international society or the “earth federation”, such views should go well with neoliberal institutional arguments, because the sole purposes of IOs in IR is to promote international peace and order across states through establishing a systematic international framework. Moreover, the idea of “community of common destiny” or “human community with a shared future” further employs and develops neoliberal institutionalism in the modern context of the 21st century, where finance, trade and cooperation has never been closer in comparison to when the neoliberal institutionalist school as developed in the previous century.

Indeed, critics of neoliberal institutionalism points out that IOs are likely to be ineffective in what they are built for. However, whilst the actual effectiveness of IOs is indefinite and is unable to be measured collectively, it can be argued that there are cases where IOs come handy in both the historical and modern context. Pragmatists would very likely argue that it would be helpful for us to continue develop neoliberal institutionalism given that it has worked in past occasions and thus making the presence of IOs in IR meaningful. Attention should focus on improving the mechanisms of international institutions in promoting positive collective values rather than debating about their worthiness. Moreover, the author also believes that by being a systematic theory, neoliberal institutionalism has fulfilled an ideal condition to carry out scientific research in the IR field as so had the other two dominating schools. By leaving out other variables, neoliberal institutionalism focuses on the relationship between “institution” and the “international anarchic system” and the influence of “international institution” on “state behavior” in which sovereignties are considered as individual actors within the international cooperation framework. This degree of control over externalities and variables have allowed neoliberal institutionalists to study the influence of international institution on individuals through a dimension that is eternally stable across space and time, and thus allow us to get closer to finding “knowledge” or the absolute truth. Neoliberal institutionalism shall therefore not be attacked in the above theoretical formation aspect because this is indeed a utilitarian, pragmatic and scientific approach towards reaching an ideal theory that can describe international relations status quo, its changes and progression across the historical context and as well as the modern context.

3.3.2. Political Considerations

While key issues like state contestation and transparency remains in heated debate, these limitations also point out directions for institutionalism’s future development. The contestation between majority superpowers (China, United States and Russia) today poses threat to the effectiveness of IOs. When the most important members of the IOs are no longer willing to cooperate with one another in areas

of strategic interests, an IO's central function of collective problem solving, and international authority is at stake. For Zürn, state contestation happens "when states demand change or dismantling of international authority to international institutions" [8]. He holds that this process of contestation is carried out by states in a "reflexive manner" [8]. Interestingly, Zürn points out that these countries are unlikely to deviate and exit the former institution which does not benefit its interest. Rather, they create and delegate authority to a new institution closer to their interests, and this in turn leads to a conflict with the original IO they are in, which weakens the former IO in all aspects as a result. This behavior is called counter-institutionalization. However, it is also likely that under state contestation, IOs should play the key role in restoring opportunities for these countries to negotiate in a peaceful and meaningful way, in the relevant field that IOs have been delegated international authority and responsibility. The influence and authority of the former IO (disfavored by some of its members) is unlikely damaged, since the rest of the members within remains supportive.

An "Drinking Glass" imagery is developed to help the readers to perceive and understand the political complexity involved here at ease: (1) Perceive the entirety imagery of a drinking glass to be the influence of an IO, the volume of container represents the IO's potentially delegated authority by member states as in its capacity to hold how much water or liquid. On the other hand, the actual current amount of water or liquid that is currently present within the container depends on/represents the willingness of member states and other societal actors (internationally and domestically) to obey or follow the decision/recommendation of the IO on a specific concerned issue, e.g. WHO on Covid-19 pandemic. (2) Counter-institutionalization problem. When users (states) feel that the glass is not in good condition to hold their water (fulfil their interests), they can always move to another new drinking glass that may be of a different volume and appearance. (3) The amount of water or liquid present in the glass do not have a direct causal relationship with the size of the glass, however the ceiling/maximum amount of water or liquid possible in the glass is entirely dependent on the volume built for the glass, which is the scope plus the amount of authority delegated to the IO by the member states. On the other hand, when the user of the glass wishes to drink through larger glass, they could either go use another glass or rebuild the present drinking glass by reheating (conferences) and adding more material(s) which the glass originally composites, or if they want the glass to be smaller to contain less liquid they could also do otherwise. However, the glass would supposedly remain permanently still and unchanged in its virtue. It either fall and break or it stays what it is. Despite having the power, member states do not usually exit IOs but instead attempt to create new ones if the present one does not fulfil its expectation. The older glass is used less often, and preference shifts to the new glass which aims to either surpass or replace its predecessor upon its creation. (4) Transparency problem. The public may observe and notice the actual amount of liquid within the container (given that the glass is transparent), influence and degree of power exerted by an IO can be noticed by the public in such cases by carrying out research or receiving online information about what the IO is doing and what it has accomplished. (5) Only the creator(s) and user(s) of the drinking glass can decide what they want to drink through collective decision-making processes, as well as the appearance (functions and competency) of the container and how much liquid is poured into it. (6) The existence of the drinking glass becomes more meaningful when it is needed for use than when it is not needed. (7) Keohane asserts that while hegemony may be necessary for establishing international institution (a cabinet that contains various drinking glasses) the cease of existence or losing its hegemonic political influence/power of the hegemony does not necessarily imply or lead to the same situation for that international institution. This may be understood by perceiving the existence of a cabinet, after its creation, the leaving and joining of different drinking glasses will not be of any influence its existence, unless in one specific extreme case in which at a certain point all drinking glasses falls and shatters alongside the cabinet, which implies the failure of the international institutional framework. If that is not the case, then the cabinet shall always be welcoming new drinking glasses and saying goodbye

to older drinking glasses which has failed their mission and have ceased to exist. (8) Lastly, an IO upon creation, will not and shall not be a personal asset but instead it becomes and remains a public asset for all member states. A similar ideology can be perceived using the example of a microwave oven, one family member could use their income to purchase (create, promote and develop) the oven and after it is brought back to home, every family member could share the oven, there's no such case where people think "dad bought the oven, so it only belongs to him as a personal asset rather than belonging to the entire family. There is a very similar relationship between the hegemony, the IO, the international institutional framework and other member states.

4. Conclusion

Built based on a fundamental approach of rationalism, neoliberal institutionalism is a systematic IR theory which has the potential to improve across time and space, just as neorealism and constructivism are. By controlling variables and limiting externalities, the neoliberal institutionalist school examines the influence of "international institution" on "individual state actors", studying the patterns of behavior of state actors, attempting to find reasons and explanations in a scientific way. Being assessed and discussed with the political philosophy considerations, the neoliberal institutionalist ideologies correlate positively with the utilitarian and pragmatist line of thoughts. The theory is thus able to consistently improve upon itself and remains not only one of the three prominent IR school but also able to explain the political-economic world today.

The key difference between neoliberal and neorealism is the essential difference in how people perceive the world, the former has taken an optimistic perspective. Optimism and pessimism are subjective to attitudes. Moreover, the academic realm of International Relations (IR) was created in the virtue of finding ways to end war(s) and promote peaceful nation-nation relationships which are embrace towards pluralistic cultural backgrounds around the globe. Understanding the importance of international institutions and an international cooperation framework is necessary. On the other hand, putting effort into improving the international institutional framework is even more important.

To conclude, main ideas of neoliberal institutionalism was introduced in the paper, alongside some of its key theoretical characteristics. As part of the practical implications of the school's methodology, international organizations (IOs) and the international institutional cooperation framework have been introduced and explained to promote the in-depth understanding of how and why neoliberal institutionalism is functional in the modern context and remains a popular IR school. The author has discussed some of the serious criticisms against neoliberal institutionalism and IOs from the neorealist school and attempted to defend the former stand. Furthermore, an interdisciplinary approach in philosophy (pragmatism and utilitarianism) and politics (state contestation problem and counter-institutionalization problem) was taken in this paper, hoping to propose that neoliberal institutionalism is a practical and systematic way for perceiving and explaining the world today. In the paper, the WTO was chosen as a persuasive example of an IO in international trade and Afghanistan as an example of a WTO member country to demonstrate that the socio-economic improvements in Afghanistan throughout the negotiation phase and post-accession phase are in favor towards the values that Neoliberalism Institutionalism theories hoped to promote. Finally, a "drinking glass" imagery has been developed to deliver an explanation providing insights for the readers' theoretical understanding of how IOs and the international institutional cooperation framework can work, such implications add weight to explain neoliberalism institutionalism's influential status in the 21st century. This paper serves as an attempt to demonstrate the interdisciplinary understandings of the author at the present stage and is thus vulnerable to limitations in terms of depth of knowledge, which unfortunately will only be able to progress on a slow and steady pace.

Interdisciplinary research and studies are growing trends in the fields of social sciences, it is very beneficiary if such methodology and ideology is brought into international relations studies. Examples potential directions for interdisciplinary research include paralleling political sciences with psychology on the sociological level of analysis (on topics of group identity formation and group consensus, etc.) which the author is currently working on, and notably the assessing of neoliberal institutionalism through pragmatist and utilitarian perspectives, which the author hoped the contribute to.

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