



## Current Liberal Global Order and Beijing Reaction

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**Abstract:** *This paper mainly focuses on rejecting the much-upheld view regarding the rise of China as a global power. It is widely believed that China being a socialist polity will try to overthrow the liberal world order. The paper tries to establish the view that China because of its political priorities will uphold the current system and will emerge as what the Singaporean political analyst, Mahbubani has called the "Asian Inheritors of Western Legacy". The paper explores China's economic engagement with the rest of the world according to the rules of the liberal multilateral world order. It also discusses China's role as a "responsible player" in world affairs. The conclusion arrived at rejecting the position of China as a revisionist power.*

**Key Words:** China, Revisionist, Economic, Integration, Peaceful

### Introduction

According to Kishore Mahbubani, the 21st century will be the Asian Century. In 2000, Asia was no.3 in the combined GDP of regions while North America and Europe were 1st and 2nd respectively. A mere 20 years later, in 2020, Asia had become no.1 and North America and Europe had become no.2 and no.3 respectively (Mahbubani, 2022).

For the first time in the history of the United States, the country is facing a true rival power (the Soviet Union could challenge it only militarily). China has become a source of trouble for US hegemony in the world (Dalio, 2021). In 2022(full year) trade surplus of China increased by 31% to US\$876.91 billion, the highest since 1950. According to WTO, China reported an overall 40% increase in exports and a 16% decrease in imports for the year 2021.

Not just the economy but the growth of Chinese technology is undeniable. Companies like Tencent, the company behind WeChat and its rival Alibaba will soon leave the West in a catch-up position (Dukach, 2022). If these

trends continue China might one day become more powerful than the United States in every aspect from economic to military.

With the fact explained that China is on its rise, let's turn to Thucydides' Trap as explained by Graham Allison. According to the writer, there are always chances of war when there is a rising power challenging a ruling power of the time. In 12 out of 16 cases, the result of such kind of confrontation has been war (Allison, 2015). Out of the few remaining cases, the most important is the power transition from the U.K. to the U.S. post-WWII. The two were war-time allies and in March 1947, British Foreign Minister Ernst Bevin asked the United States to "support free people" in Greece and Turkey (Norman, 2015).

These warm relationships can't just be attributed to the geographical distance between the two or the presence of another immediate enemy in the vicinity of Great Britain but also to the fact that both of these countries were liberal democracies. Not just domestic politics but both were committed to

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marinating the same world order. Great Britain supported the kind of world order that Roosevelt built. Aaron Friedberg in his book explains the same point. He described seven factors in the US-China relationship that could lead it either toward hostility or cooperation. Five out of the seven factors could be a source of cooperation. One of them is the responsible stakeholder position of China. According to the author, Conflict can be avoided if China is made to defend the current world order or the multilateral institutions (Friedberg, 2011). Keeping this view in mind, successive American administrations since Nixon have tried to engage with China and bring it to multilateral institutions. US efforts in Chinese accession to WTO is the best example.

Now turning to our main question: Will China in its will and Capacity defend the current world order? The official standing of the PRC is to abide by international rules. President Xi presented his view at the 19th party congress. President Xi said, "China will keep on doing its job, it'll act as a responsible player and would be working toward world governance". Meanwhile, western leaders have constantly been accusing China of being a revisionist power. The G7 members in response to the Samarkand Summit accused China of a threat to the global order. Even the Biden administration accused China of having revisionist tendencies in its national security strategy document.

### The China Threat Thesis

A vast majority of the world public including both Westerners and Non-westerners believe that the rise of China is somehow a threat to the global world order. This fear is being propagated mainly by the Americans and the Japanese. This fear has reasons. According to Kenneth Waltz, the economic competition, in the age of nuclear weapons, will be more intense than any other competition. The Chinese economic surge is a source of fear among many. Also, neocons like Robert Kagan saw the rise of China as violent as the rise of modern western countries. The main argument however is that of the Democratic Peace Theory. China is a threat because it's an economic giant and its ideology is a socialist one. In line with the typical cold war mentality,

many in the West believe that China is a revolutionary power and is bent on changing the global order in its own fashion. Also, the weak Asian neighbours of China feel pressured by the presence of the giant Chinese Dragon in the vicinity.

### China's Peaceful Rise:

In the 1978 Plenary session of the Eleventh Central Committee of CCP, the "development path to peaceful rise" was introduced into Chinese official policies. The priorities of Deng Xiaoping were economic growth and the prosperous life of the Chinese people. The economy was opened up to international trade and since then it has maintained an average of 9.4 GDP growth rate (Bijian, 2005). With such a huge population the Chinese priorities still lay in the economic well-being of the people. Chinese leaders still think that the country is in the stage of development and it will only be somewhere in the 2050s that China will be termed as a modern developed country.

There is another thing worth mentioning here. Those are the historical memories of Chinese people. China, throughout its history, has never been an expansionist power. Though it served as a master to its surrounding small neighbours, the interference in domestic affairs was not much. The Chinese envoys would regularly land in the Southeastern countries to receive tribute but the kingdom never interfered in their internal affairs. It's not because the Chinese didn't have any naval power. In fact, Ming China had 3800 ships in 1420, 1350 of which were combat ships. It was long before the Spanish and the Portuguese set sail on the high seas. The Zheng expedition of 1405 displaced 1500 tons compared to the 300 tons displaced by Vasco de Gama's first expedition to India (McNeill, 1982). In spite of having such formidable naval power, the Chinese didn't capture Australia which was done by the much distant Europeans. Zheng conducted trade with distant African countries but never brought them under Chinese tutelage which the Europeans did after a few decades.

This inward-looking past will influence policies as many Chinese leaders look with nostalgia into their middle kingdom past. The perceptions of Chinese leaders have been shaped by Confucian values which advocate

living with the community and acting according to the larger environment. Henry Kissinger explaining "why China is peaceful echoed the essence of the advice given by Chinese military strategist, Sun Tzu that the Chinese believe in a "winning without fighting" strategy (Kissinger, 2011).

Graham Allison warned the Americans to be careful with what they wanted the Chinese to be. Most Americans have called upon the Chinese to be like them (Allison, 2017). American history is filled with expansion in North America, controlling the Western Hemisphere (Monroe Doctrine) and interfering in countries throughout the globe. It kicked Spain out of South East Asia, colonized the Philippines and declared the Western Hemisphere as the sphere of its influence. Westerners especially Americans should be contented with the Chinese are not like them.

According to Mearsheimer, the United States has increased its military interference in foreign countries in the post-1989 period instead of decreasing as was predicted or as should have been the case (Mearsheimer, 2018). The Congressional Research Service published a report "Instances of use of United States Armed Forces Abroad 1798-2018". According to this report, the US deployed its forces 216 times in 190 years before 1989 while it did the same 152 times in 25 years (Congressional Research Service, 2018). Mahbubani is of the opinion that while the American public revere men in uniform, the Chinese pay respect to scholars and men of learning (Mahbubani, 2022). Out of the five members of the UN Security Council only China has not used military deployments in the past forty years (Mahbubani, 2022). Even what the analysts call wolf warrior diplomacy is conducted through words, not bullets.

### **Economic Integration**

Simply speaking, the prime directive of Chinese foreign policy is Deng's "Hide our capabilities and bid our times" and Hu Jintao's "peaceful rise". Since its creation, even with Mao Zedong, China tried to integrate with the global world by requesting entry into the United Nations. The membership was granted only when the Nixon administration adopted the "Détente" policy with China. Since then

China is increasingly becoming part of the global village, and its economy is intertwined with that of the global economy.

China far from rejecting the global order tried to make a good position for itself within this order. It became a member of various regional and International Organizations, signed treaties and agreements with foreign countries, and established goodwill relations with its neighbours (except India) and the size of its international trade is increasing day by day. Since Deng Xiaoping came to power, China is increasingly becoming part of International Organizations, especially after the Tiananmen Square massacre when the PRC needed to revive its reputation. It signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1992, the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1996 and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1996.

After the Taiwan Crises of 1995-1996, China started its "New Security Concept" by which it signed partnership agreements with various foreign countries. It included the 1996 and 2001 agreements with Russia, the 1998 agreement with Japan, the 1998 agreement with South Korea and a few others. China entered the ASEAN Regional Forum in the 1990s and is part of ASEAN Plus Three which was established in 1997. China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization was created in 2001. At first, it played a meagre role in International Organizations but since the early 2000s, it has adopted what can be called "a more responsible role" in world affairs. The Chinese contribution to UN Peacekeeping missions has increased from 9.4% in 2008 to 15.21% in 2020. Also, it has the largest contingent in these peacekeeping missions (Warsaw Institute, 2020). Chinese officials have led four out of fifteen UN specialized agencies. In 2006, Margaret Chan was appointed Director General of the World Health Organization. Qu Dongyu was elected as Director General of the Food and Agriculture Organization in August 2019. The Chinese contribution to WHO has increased by 52% since 2014.

China has become a responsible player in world affairs and to think that it would now embark on some adventurous path is a mistake. Because its economy is integrated into the global economy, the stakes are high for it. China simply cannot overthrow the current world

order because it's the largest beneficiary of the liberal system put in place by the United States in the 1940s. The liberal multilateral system put forth by Roosevelt greatly helped the European and East Asian countries bolster their economic strength. Why would the "economic titan" overthrow the system that virtually created it?

Since the opening-up reforms of Deng, China's trade with the world and the FDI investment it attracts is increasing. In the 1970s it accounted for only 1% of global exports. With the opening up, China entered the General Agreement on Tariff and Trade to secure access to foreign markets. It accessed to WTO in 2001 and became the largest exporter of goods by 2012. In 2020 it accounted for 14.7% of global exports (Alessandro, C, 2021). The point of all these statistics is to show that the Chinese economy, the prosperity of its people and the power of the CCP that actually lay in the confidence of people about its successful economic policies, all are dependent on global markets which must exist for the CCP to rule.

China is also taking part in world politics as per the rules of the game. On May 18 2022, while addressing the conference held at the 70th anniversary of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade", Xi called for "reforms of the global governance system guided by the principles of fairness and justice". The "responsible player" status of China was clarified during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The PRC projected its soft power by sending medical aid to pandemic-hit countries, especially Africa. Previously it had supported developing countries in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. It provided a loan of \$100 million to Central Asian Republics for recovering their economies.

### **China is Threatening US Hegemony Not Global Order**

Currently the Chinese are working and trying to work in cooperation with the United States within the established rules. In the future, China might threaten, not the multilateral order, but US hegemony and Western Primacy in this order.

When the Western media cry about China being a threat to the free world, they only speak anachronistically according to the cold War

mentality when the major powers were involved in the ideological struggle against each other. That struggle is no more. Countries are now involved in economic pursuits. There is no substantial evidence of China trying to overthrow regimes and install new ones. Even if does something of the sort, it's just a normal major power behaviour and not something that the Chinese are bent on doing because they are Socialists. Neither will this change the multilateral order in support of which the Chinese officials have spoken again and again.

The order is like public goods which are for the benefit of all but can be controlled and managed but some specific people or groups. China is a beneficiary and will uphold the order in its essence. What the Chinese are threatening is American control of this order. The hegemon in a global order is determined by how much soft power can it project through diplomacy and assistance. China will take on the US by increasing this soft power. One major example of this soft power is BRI or One Belt One Road Initiative.

OBOR was launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013 to connect less developed regions of China to world markets. It has two major routes. One is called Silk Road Economic Belt which will pass through Central Asia into Europe. The other is the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road which will connect Southern China to the Indian Ocean and will pass through Indochina, and Malacca Strait into the Indian Ocean. China Pakistan Economic Corridor is a flagship of the BRI project. It'll connect Xinxiang to Gawader in Pakistan and from there to the Indian Ocean. This will obviate the need for Chinese shipments to go through Malacca and Gawader will serve as a commercial port. OBOR according to Chinese officials could counter Obama's pivot to Asia. Justin Yifu Lin, a Chinese political advisor said in 2015 that BRI was launched to counter Trans-Pacific Partnership (Cai, 2017).

The BRI project will cement China's central position in this interconnected world. Through BRI Chinese companies and banks are financing infrastructure, providing telecommunication networks, artificial intelligence capabilities, e-commerce, and surveillance technology. Hundreds of other high-tech projects work under the BRI umbrella. Since 2013, banks have financed the

construction of power plants, railways, highways, ports, telecommunications infrastructure and smart cities around the world.

In the world of BRI, cheap Chinese products will replace expensive US products. Earlier when the Europeans came to Asia, their industrially manufactured goods replaced local products because they were cheaper and mass-produced. The same thing will happen to American products. BRI will leave countries indebted to Chinese loans through which it can exercise political power.

China also might form or acquire military bases in the BRI countries. Gawader port is deep enough to accommodate nuclear submarines. This could pose serious threats to American hegemony, especially in its own continental sphere. Chinese BRI will encircle US global presence through a pincer movement. BRI covers the whole of the Eurasian landmass. 17 European Union countries signed to BRI and entered into EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment in December 2020. The Eurasian Landmass Bridge is a project of BRI that'll pass through Central Asia, Russia, Belarus into Poland and then Germany.

The China-Central Asia- West Asia Corridor will link China to Central Asia, Transcaucasia, and then into the Balkans and Turkey. This whole project will undermine Obama's Pivot to Asia. The BRI will not challenge American presence on land but on the high seas as well. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road will link China to Hanoi (Vietnam), Jakarta (Indonesia), Kuala Lumpur, Strait of Malacca, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Djibouti then to Suez Canal and from there into the Mediterranean Sea. These can become Chinese military bases as well. This whole project is dubbed by the Indians as a move to encircle them called the String of Pearls. China also increased its trade with traditional American allies, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines. This will push the American empire back into the Atlantic Ocean out of Western Pacific and Indian Ocean.

The geopolitical contest between US and China might well be won by China. Political power is mainly determined by soft power abilities. The US has seen a general decline in its political power in recent years. This is because

of china's soft power projection as the US is well ahead in hard power and it has not declined. Today in this world of material contests, ideology does not play many roles and if Africans were to be given a choice between US and China, they might choose China. These countries have seen the economic growth of other countries which was achieved not through aid but through trade and China is the largest trading partner today. Also for the industrial revolution to occur, infrastructure is needed and China is an infrastructure superpower. The Rwandan President said, "The Chinese bring what Africans need". Many in Africa have favourable views about Chinese money. In 2014, 65% of Kenyans, 67% of Ghanaians and 85% of Nigerians held good views about China. Not only in Africa but when the Italian economy was stumbling China offered its investment. The Italian minister of Economy and Finance has termed it "a train that Italy can't afford to miss". China provided Italy with 31 tons of medical equipment during Covid-19 Pandemic (Mahbubani, 2022). China's handling of the Pandemic not only within but throughout the globe has received much appreciation. This quick and able response has been contrasted and compared with that of the United States. China's handling of the Covid-19 Pandemic proved as a catalyst in boosting its soft power abilities.

## **Conclusion**

Chinese imperial history has been more peaceful than most other empires in the world. Even if people don't consider history as a reliable variable in determining a nation's path, Chinese priorities today indicate that its leaders don't have any bad intentions. China, its economy and its business class have become part of the global village. The China that we know today, as an economic giant, is the consequence of the Chinese elite class accepting the liberal economic order and their integration with this international trade. China grew as it left its Mao's era isolation and began working with the world. The strength is not only economic but the high GDP growth rate allows PRC to spend more on the defence budget as increasing in the defence budget has been kept in proportion with the GDP growth rate. Today China is placed in the South China

Sea with supersonic missiles to counter US military presence in the Pacific. A strong economy will also provide China with the ability to project its soft power throughout the globe. All this was made possible by Chinese engagement with international trade. Chinese leaders today equate economic growth with the materialist ideas of Karl Marx. Thus for modern Chinese, real socialism is to grow economically. As long as this idea prevails, China won't undermine the system that helped bolster its economy. Even if this socialist thinking subsides, the ancient Confucian values don't favour interfering in others' affairs or imposing one's ideas on others. In fact, it advocates living according to larger sociopolitical dynamics existing at specific

times. In a nutshell, China in the near future won't undermine the current global institutions in their essence because of its beneficiary. Even if it rejects some of its values like the one regarding human rights, it's not because China is a revisionist power but because it's a major power. It will reject certain values of the United Nations just like the US did while invading Iraq and it will interfere in other's affairs just as the US did through its regime change policy. China is just a typical major power working according to geopolitical compulsions and bolstering its position as a regional and global power and this is a threat to US hegemony thus all the fears and propaganda.

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