

## Why Should China Keep the Liberal Order?

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**Abstract:** China's rise is one of the most heated topics in today's international world. China's stubborn economic and military rise over the past three decades and also its regional and global behavior arises inquiries related to what sort of emerging power China is? Does China play the role of supporter of the existing order, or, put it simply, it just wants to overthrow it? On the other hand, to what extent China is a free rider of today's global politics? Indeed, China backs the free markets rules, while it disagrees Western institutions or other legal norms. China's free rider approach is closely tied to its ineffective involvement in today's liberal (economic) order considering the economic gifts it has offered to China, so far. Given the United States of America's offshore retrenchment and China's unwillingness to take on the global responsibilities, how strong the current international is? and how it will look like without an orderer? Without any doubt, China is looking for regaining the prestige it had during its past dynasties, but it seems has no interest to take on the global responsibilities. Prestige is the most valuable asset when come to deal in international affairs. Considering those mentioned so far, we are going to assess, using the hegemonic stability theory, wheater China is committed to conserving the US-led international order, or it is ready to topple it. The article, also, will be divided into four parts, as follow- the first part concerns the introduction in the subject, the second part regards the exposure of the hegemonic stability theory. On the other hand, the third part is concerned with how China views the liberal order, while the fourth part is dedicated to the study case- 'Why should China keep the liberal order'?

**Keywords:** China; hegemonic clash; power diffusion; liberal order; the United States of America

### 1. Introduction

Since ancient times, great powers have (re) shaped the international systems, these being built according to each (great) power needs. This idea is partially correct since the arrangements made after important events, such as the Yalta Conference or the 1815 Vienna Congress, reflect to an (less) extent the hegemon's interests and

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to a great measure the results of the haggling process, where all parts were involved. An actor gets great power status when it is the wealthiest and best military equipped and trained against the rivals. The geography and the size of the population are relevant indicators of a great power, too. However, over time, due to one of the several well-known internal or external issues, such as an aging population, domestic problems, aggressive neighbors, lack of international trust, then the hegemon's global influence will decrease, and a new challenger would arise.

On the other hand, China's economic, diplomatic, cultural, products, technology footprint is everywhere around the world. These facts are also specific attributes of a great power. Other prerequisites of being a great power are related, as well, to the actor's capacity of being a good manager of global affairs.

As an excellent way to understand China's behavior with respect to the world order that has been established prior to WW2, we have to define what does a "world order" means? At first glance, it can be defined 'as a set of institutional rules or relations among international players' (Sorensen, G., p. 344).

Moreover, a new order brings with it a new set of norms, such as- particular institutions, laws, or standards. The real outcomes of world order can just be defined by admitting the amalgamation of the above elements—the institutional and economic order, the policies of state behavior the order determined, and also the blended inclinations of the inhabitants or of the group of states that constitute its 'elitist club'. Because the order once created mostly serves hegemon interests, then a rising power, dissatisfied by how the existing order works, may try to topple it (Pan, Lo, 2015, pp. 1-25).

Since adopting a more assertive posture, different scholars scrutinize wheater "China is ready to accommodate and fully integrate within the existing liberal order, or it is ready for a confrontation so that to overthrow it" (G. John Ikenberry, Darren, 2017). However, why China would be driven to topple the existing order, considering the benefits it has been getting since the beginning of the '80s?. As with the citizens who believe, right or wrong, their government system is more suited and superior comparing with others', a rising power, also, may propose, at least theoretically, a better-suited order than the already established one that might serve better to its interests and position on global stage.

Since Deng's opening policy, China has never been in confrontation with the USA. Moreover, China has chosen to confront the USA only using (non) institutional channels, such as: using its Veto power for blocking the USA resolutions in the UN's Security Council, investing more money and gaining more influence around the world, especially in the third world, creating new regional institutions, or having the upper hand in different regional or global organizations. So, because China is not interested in changing the core base of the liberal hegemony, so, the USA has never been interested in containing it (Thomas J. Christensen, p. 85). In the same train of thoughts, '... the United States often competes more effectively for [...] influence by cooperating with China than it would be seeking to contain China's economic growth and diplomatic influence' (Ryan Hass, Mira Rapp-Hooper, 2019) Moreover, "the U.S. and China must work together to ensure global peace and prosperity" (Banning Garrett & Thomas Fingar, 2013).

Moderately aggressive/ assertive U.S. defense policy in Asia Pacific region has facilitated a win-win regional effect by determining China to embrace some reassuring policies via its next-door-neighbors as a hurdle on a possible U.S. encirclement over it. As a result of the integration within the liberal order, China has enhanced its relationships with Southeast Asian nations, too. Mending the fences with its neighbors is due to the fact of its endeavors for growing its regional role, especially during the 1997 Asian financial crisis. In 1997, Beijing performed a significant role in the making of ASEAN plus Three, a forum that addresses both financial and regional defense affairs.

## **2. The Hegemonic Stability Theory's (HST) Core Basis**

The United States of America and China are struggling for gaining or at least not losing, prestige on the international stage. China wants more prestige than ever, but it avoids, on every occasion, to take more responsibilities on global affairs, while the incumbent hegemon is engaged in a retrenchment process that scares its old and new allies, respectively.

The primary and most important claim of the hegemonic stability argument is that the diffusion of strength/power amongst states is the primary driver of nature of the international (economic) system (Michael C. & Stephen D. Krasner, 1989, p. 183). Moreover, we assert that the distribution of identity plays an equally important role at the system level, too.

However, the hegemonic stability theory supposes the existence of an orderer. If there is an orderer, then there is no power vacuum, and the power is settled the most. The idea of the concentration of power in one place makes that orderer able to create a sort of global government. Because the order once created got the support of the actors which agreed its core base, then the given order becomes a global common good. The global public good can be defined as ‘one the consumption of which by an individual, household, or firm does not reduce the amount available for other potential consumers.’ (Kindleberger, p. 243).

The collective global good philosophy is divided into two layers, such as the economic and the security layer. The first one supposes that ‘all actors can profit from the global collective goods solely in the presence of a hegemon. In the absence of it, they will not be able to get this common interest due to the fact of the institutional barriers to the provision of collective goods’; and the security layer expects that “states have no common reason in supporting the economic liberalization and stability’, because there always will be an actor who will get a more relative gain in respect to others” (Michael C. Webb, Stephen D. Krasner, p. 184).

At a time when hegemon declining is happening, the ruler is expecting to share the burdens of maintaining the existing order with those actors who adhered to and benefited from it. In other words, the ruler needs “a group of secondary actors which are essential for supporting the order; they single would neither be capable of establishing it or running it, but the ruler is finally also reliant on their collaboration” (Stefano Guzzini & Iver B. Neumann, 2012, p. 12).

Moreover, this sort of order “includes a vision of order which is to some extent consensual, or, at least, rational insofar as countries do not see anything better as far they are concerned and therefore they share an interest in its preservation” (Stefano Guzzini & Iver B. Neumann, 2012, p. 12). As far as the free-riders are concerned, they, often, bypass the newfound responsibilities, what makes the ruler incredibly frustrated. However, since the international (economic ) order is seen as a collective good, where all actors are gaining from it, regardless of their share of help, then why the orderer is getting frustrated?. Moreover, the hegemon is aware that it is the only actor in the system who can provide, not only security assurances but also economic security to others’. The free-riding behavior is not a welcoming attitude at the system level, but that is all the small and medium-sized actors can

do. They will always do their best to achieve their national interest. (Charles Kindleberger, pp. 247-250).

However, power diffusion approach asserts that accumulated power will diminish across an interval of time. So, the diffusion of power approach admits that the power is more diffused at the system level than it happens in the case of power transition theory, for instance. So, that's is the main explanation for why the diffusion of power amongst nations is the principal driver of the nature of the global financial order (Michael C. Webb, Stephen D. Krasner, p. 183).

Consequently, the deconcentration of power is viewed, by the power transition scholars, as a driver of war and balancing behavior, while the former theory predicts more stability and peace (Kim, W., p.172). Alternatively said, the theory of power diffusion does not consider the rising powers as deeply unsatisfied as regards the existing order or hegemon's actions. The diffusion of power theory pays more attention over free-riders, or on rising powers that are not deeply involved in managing the order.

Moreover, the diffusion of power theory is suited as far our research is concerned because the rising power, China in our case, has no incentive to govern the system, or at most, to take responsibility for some parts of it.

China's attitude toward the existing order is a mix of isolationism, full involvement, and free-riding behavior. The free-riding behavior is referring to China's reluctance to take on some of the USA global burdens, while full-involvement refers to almost China's total integration in the Western free-market rules. Being disappointed by the free-riding conduct of its (almost) equal opponents and trying to stop own visible decline, the leader (the United States of America) will eventually reconsider or even quit some from its global duties, that is, we will be witness to an order where none actor is willing to manage the system. In other words, there will be an order without an orderer. The trade war, initiated by the USA, can be considered a punitive answer to China's free-riding behavior.

Although there are not hawks and spoilers, the rising powers are still determined to topple the existing order. Why? Because the most valuable dealing-coin in world affairs is gaining prestige. Besides this, status matters when economic or territorial conflicts or other anxieties over international norms occur (R. P. Dore, 1975, p.195). In other terms, "China [may] seeks the top seat in the hierarchy of prestige, and the US will do everything in its power to maintain its pole position because the

state with the greatest reputation for power gets to govern the region” (Yuen Foong Khong, 2019, pp. 119).

On the other hand, growth peace plays an essential role in our case. The bigger the growth rate amongst the actors is, the higher the possibility of rapid diffusion of power is. Due to the fact of the diffusion of power is balanced at the system level, there won't be a balancing behavior inside it. So, the core idea of power diffusion is related to the even distribution of power within the system, as we emphasized above.

Whether power diffusion theory is accurate, then China will try to elude its future global duties and commitments. In the short term, this sort of behavior will get more benefits to China, but in the long run, it will be destructive, at least, for China's economic development. Imagine a world where all significant powers would adopt a retrenchment policy. As we can see, this policy is the first step in raising custom taxes or adopting mercantilism strategies. If this finding is correct, then China will have to deal with two options- economic or social implosion. If China may face an economic implosion, then there won't be any “invisible hand.” So, the legitimacy of the Communist Party would be under question.

### **3. China's Vision of Liberal Order.**

Following the end of Mao's tenure, the US-China relations consisted of in China's recognition of the USA political, economic, and military supremacy in the Asia Pacific. At the time, China did not pay too much attention to the US supremacy in the Pacific, because Beijing was very committed to keeping a low profile while maintaining at high standards the domestic economic development rate (Son Daekwon, 2017).

Since the USA- Soviet Union rivalry got to an end, China has to accommodate itself to an unstable international order and discover its status within it. Following Xi taking office, China has adopted a new and more audacious foreign policy strategy, the so-called striving for achievement (Xuetong Yan, 2014, pp. 153–184). Moreover, China is looking for equal treatment at the international stage, pledging for a new type of great power relations (Jinghan Zeng, Shaun Breslin, 2016, pp. 773-794). In Cheng Li's words “Embedded in the “New Type of Great Power Relations” is a nation's hope for an international environment more conducive to its development” (Cheng Li, Lucy Xu, 2014).

Considering the two strategies I mentioned above, it is expecting as China to take some of the hegemon's global burdens. China would act in this way only if the costs of the supposed burden do not exceed the gains or benefits.

However, what is China's view of liberalism? The first one is *politically*-related, and it describes, very often, how Western states run their societies, and the second one is *economically*-related, and it outlines ideas on the market economy.

Liberalism became the most potent and reliable global ideology at the beginning of the '90s, due to the USA final victory against the socialist camp. At the time, liberalism was seen as the highest way of governance. Even Fukuyama forecasted that "liberal democracy is the end point of humankind governing process" (Francis & Fukuyama, 1989, p. 6). Moreover, today's shine of liberalism is fading in the West because the Western governments have not provided alternative economic solutions in the wake of the 2008 economic crises. The lack of non-western democracies' support of liberal values is closely related to the cause of the Western countries' decreasing economies.

In the same train of thoughts, liberalism is still facing many blows, such as Trump's isolationist and racist policies, the European democratic countries' populism, BREXIT, China's Uyghur people genocide, and so on. So, Can China become the most significant threat of liberal (order) democracy? China may be considered a threat just because it is already launched an alternative vision to the liberal ideology, a strategy consisting of in helping others in developing their economy while conserving their independence" (Liangyu, 2017).

At the domestic level, the ideological guidance in China is in a total state of contradiction. The Marxist ideology (I) is the "Holy Bible", of every Chinese citizen. Thus, Marxism shapes domestic politics, but it has limited influence over foreign policy decisions. Marxism-Leninism is very prayed at the Chinese societal level, being described as "the latest achievement" (Xi Jinping, 2017) in the life of CCP and of Chinese people, respectively. On the contrary, China cannot use the Marxist ideology in its foreign policy because it is in stark contradiction with China's strategy of peaceful development and, also, with its non-aggressive international posture. In other words, the so-called class struggle cannot be harmonized with the idea of international cooperation.

On the other hand, the strategy of (II) *economic development* seems to be today's most, appealing" ideology for both the Chinese Government and ordinary people.

Deng's *economic development* tenure represents the citizens' core social values base.

Even though (III) *traditionalism* (Zi, Yang, 2017) is seen as not being the official ideology in China, though, it is very appealing amongst Chinese citizen and political elites. It points out the idea of the importance of leadership in the decision-making process, improving China's international posture, or taking on more responsibilities in international affairs.

However, to what degree the three Chinese national ideologies will shape the current order?

Considering some of the leading scholars' findings "the fate of liberal ideology- the one that has emphasized the American's way of global governance, will be more affected by China as a dominant authority on the world stage, and also by the mode wherein the United States responds to China's increasing global weight" (De Graaff, N. & Van Apeldoorn, 2018, p. 113).

Due to the fact of the decaying state of liberalism, as a global acknowledge value, new ideologies are struggling now for gaining influence around the world. Perhaps, the future dominant ideology will come from that state that will be able to get more economic and political traction than today's amount of USA.

Because the power imbalances among China and the United States are getting short, Beijing's growth shall concurrently change the global arrangements from an US-rule to a multipolar system that will consist of two or more significant powers, such as China, the United States of America, India, Brazil, Russia, Germany. As significant, China's unstoppable rise and the idea it will rule and shape the world, has gained some support (Martin Jacques, 2009).

So far, China's economic growth seems to be the most consistent comparing the rising of others' great powers during the last five centuries. China's economic rise has consistency because of three characteristics, such as- "a stable government, high quality of human capital, and cooperation with developed economies" (Xingye Jin, David Daokui & Li Shuyu Wu, 2016, p. 272).

Considering China's spectacular economic raising and political influence around the world, they can transform it into the expected provider of a new global ideology. Moreover, China, as a future possible provider of the global governance rules, must imbue its values with the Western's ones. Combining the two actors' values "could generate a new and competitive set of ideas that help to establish a



stable international order” (Xuetong Yan, 2018, p.10). In other words, blending some of the Chinese core values, such as *benevolence*, *righteousness*, and *rites*, with the Western liberal values, like *equality*, *democracy*, and *freedom*, will create a genuinely win-win order (Yan Xuetong, pp. 11-17).

On the other hand, to what extent a Chinese supposed global ideology may threaten the citizens’ liberal values? In Petter Haris’s words “...whether or not its growing diplomatic clout will jeopardize the broader, rules-based (‘liberal’) international order that most Western countries are heavily invested in defending and extending”, we can find out the fear degree of other’s. (Peter Harris, 2017, p. 242).

The current debates on China’s threat level over the liberal order is often the product of the scholars’ misinterpretation of China’s foreign policy (Michael, Pillsbury, 2014). Contrary to these gloomy forecasts, China has been adopting and adapting to the liberal rules, and China’s accession to the World Trade Organization can be an excellent example of its adapting efforts. China’s most significant economic achievements have been possible only when ‘China’s economy has been integrated globally by relying on multilateral institutional frameworks, especially the WTO’ (Christopher, 2012, p. 750).

China has not acted as a spoiler at the international level, but rather as a free-rider. More or less, China’s international behavior has shown us that it never tended to change the operating way of the system, but instead adapting, using a step by step framework, to its requirements. Perhaps, Schweller’s and Xu’s insight is right, that ‘China seeks a gradual change of *Pax Americana* and not a direct challenge to it’ (Randall Schweller & Xiaoyu Pu, p. 53). Moreover, various studies have outlined how China has mostly integrated within the global system by linking itself by the current liberal establishments/ institutions, and also accommodating to the prevailing international standards and laws (Johnston, Iain, 2014).

However, most notable pundits or scholars are expecting a severe clash between China and the USA, if the latter has any intentions to prolong the existence of the liberal order. As Hugh White stated, ‘If America wants to perpetuate the old order, it will have to accept a very serious contest with China, and this is what some people now advocate’ (Hugh White, Mary Kay Magistad, Zha Daojiong, 2015).

In some instances, we can argue that The People’s Republic is already playing the leading role considering its political and economic leverage over the Third World countries. In the same train of thoughts, China can also be considered as being the

leader of those actors that are unsatisfied by the current order. Consequently, the China- Africa Cooperation Agreement, BRICS, and even Shanghai Cooperation Organization, points out China's pole position on such specific issues. The three institutions are shaped on the common idea that the Western-led order always kept them (actors that are not considering themselves as being part of the Western-led order) at bay, and the latter never seem them as peer competitors.

The case of the American retrenchment may undermine the USA global engagement, and so its clout over the other international regimes it has supported, so far. Moreover, giving up to global engagement, the USA also may weaken the global economic policies that are still an American-focused affair.

However, every emerging or established (great) power wishes to pursue and settle its core interests. Moreover, to what degree the USA has outsmarted this conventional policy-wisdom? Barry Posen sized this idea very well 'The USA has become so powerful so that it is not capable anymore of keeping in rein its ambitions', adopting a global-oriented policy instead, that is "resource-wasteful, futile, counterproductive and costly' (Barry Posen, 2015, p. 24).

The USA global-oriented policy has never been driven by security needs, contrary to conventional wisdom, rather than a domestic liberal ideology that has always been committed to creating a global rule-based order considering its image.

Moreover, even Donald Trump considers the American's external involvement as being against the USA interests. He argues that 'for many decades, we have enriched foreign industry at the expense of American industry; subsidized the armies of other countries while allowing for the very sad depletion of our military. We have defended other nations' borders while refusing to defend our own. Moreover, spent trillions and trillions of dollars overseas while America's infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay. We have made other countries rich, while the wealth, strength and confidence of our country have dissipated over the horizon. We have made other countries rich while the wealth, strength, and confidence of our country has disappeared over the horizon' (Donald Trump's Inaugural Adress', 2017).

The American case of offshore retrenchment is quite uncertain because ups and downs characterize Trump's foreign policy initiatives. While Trump is committed to preserving the American hegemony, he made the TPP redundant, pulled the

USA out from the Paris Treaty, and also he sought to revise NAFTA Treaty, the “worst ever deal” (Jef Coxx, 2018).

Since Donald Trump has taken office, the United States of America has adopted a bilateral approach as a foreign policy tool, denouncing thus the multilateralism as not being in the American interest. As a very less number of pundits have got it so far, the USA is choosing the same foreign approach as China do it. Beijing has always chosen to bilaterally ‘discuss’ with its neighbors or with other institutions. This bilateral approach does not take into account a foreign policy perspective influenced by aims as the rule of law or obeying human rights, but instead, it works in favor of creating more economic relationships. In the same train of thoughts, this approach emphasizes the suspicious character concerning governments seen as obstructing or limiting American independence of action. Moreover, even Donald Trump stated that ‘the world is not a global community but an arena where nations, non-governmental actors and businesses engage and compete for advantages’ (H.R. McMaster & Gary D. Cohn, 2017).

#### **4. Why Should China Keep the Liberal Order?**

The first argument is tied to both China’s fitting in the last one hundred years’ pattern of non-aggressive challengers and its international economic-collaborative behavior. China’s political elites are aware of the fact that keeping a high-rate of economic increasing, by cooperating with others, is more important than spending money on the army. Massive investments in weapons technology require massive spendings. At a time when the war is obsolete, paying attention to increasing whatever sort of cooperation (or economic influence) around the globe would be more appropriate than the ideas we mentioned above.

Although, “Chinese history is replete with wars, and most of these wars have served one purpose: to create and/or preserve the unity of China”, since the 1949s, China has been involved in small skirmishes with its neighbors (Elleman & Bruce A., 2001, p. 10). It had a draw with the USA in the Korean War and small victories with Vietnam in 1979 and India in 1962. China still has a real gap considering its power projection capacities – in terms of the overseas military bases, aircraft carriers, submarines, – against those of the USA. If China has any real intentions to replace the existing international order, be it through violent or non-violent means, then it must spread an ideology that should earn the hearts and minds of the

political elites and of the masses around the world that support the given ideology, too. China could do this during the Cold War when socialism was stronger than it is today. However, China's split with the Soviet Union made this an impossible task.

On the other hand, China's first step in gaining hegemony is to promote a strong ideology and institutions that could cover the interests of those who may support it, and not start a costly war. China must duplicate its ideology by emulating the core rules of its own social, political and economic institutions to the supporter states' core ideology. If this ideology is well-rooted in the domestic politics of these (client) states, then it will be transferred from generation to generation, and so on. We have to remember how the Great Britain had transferred its institutions and social rules to its colonies, and how the USA did with Japan, and Germany, and last but not least, how the seeds of the liberal hegemony were seeded in the ex-Soviet states. On the other hand, China has limited revisionist aims, so far. Generally speaking, China is that sort of revisionist power who support the existing order, while it is driven to earn more prestige on the US's expense, a prestige that should be commensurate with its actual power.

Gaining international recognition or prestige means a better place at a negotiation table, emphasizing own posture as a decision (power) broker (Tony Nash & Jay Heisler, 2018). So, China has no intention to reform the core rules of the incumbent order but to make some changes as regards its posture at the international level, or to alter, to some extent, the way in which the rules are applied.

On the other hand, China adopted some of the excellent Western practices. For example, China was very prone, during the Cold War, to deal only with its neighbors, so sole at the bilateral level. Since the end of the Cold War, China is working as a very successful promoter of regional cooperation, being present in organizations like ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3, APEC, BRICS, BRI, SCO, and so on. Only adopting a multilateral approach, China got more influence in regional affairs. Also, China uses Western institutions as vehicles of projecting its power into the future. For example, at the time when China was bargaining for its WTO accession, one of its ambassadors stated, 'We are aware that we have to play using your rules, but in ten years we will set the rules' (Fred Bergsten, 2008, p. 65).

Moreover, China seems to be entangled within the various institutional networks that are the core base of the existing order. Because China's substantial economic achievements underwent under the current order, it is unlikely as China to change

it. Furthermore, China supports the existent order, while it condemns the supposed wrongdoings of it. China uses a brilliant non-direct confrontational strategy with the existing order. Using the so-called *salami slicing* strategy, such as creating alternative regional institutions, blocking the USA votes in the Security Council, condemning the USA military actions, China might crumble the very core base of *Pax America*. “So as long the United States' image remains tainted, China will have greater leverage in multilateral settings. It would be foolhardy, however, for Beijing to challenge directly the international order and the institutions favored by the Western world- and, indeed, such a challenge is unlikely” (Wang Jisi, 2005, p. 43), stated Wang Jisi.

The second argument is related to how deeply rooted the liberal order is? The diffusion of power expects that the power should be concentrated around the hegemon. In other words, the USA-led order is deeply rooted through the strategy of spreading democracy. Consequently, the liberal order is highly supported by the masses and the democracies' around the world. Democratic countries' citizens consider their form of government being greater than others' is. So, that is why the liberal order is hard to overthrow. It has a solid base, even at times when more and more illiberal governments are occurring.

Moreover, even some of the Chinese elites are supporting the liberal order. According to a survey ran by Bentley B. Allan *at. all.*, ‘elites in Japan, India, Brazil, and China identify positively with both liberalizing policies (openness and free trade) and statist or socialist identities’ (Allan, B., Vucetic, S., & Hopf, T., p. 20). Moreover, ‘while the masses in some of these countries reject neoliberalism, elites identify with liberal policies’ (Allan, B., Vucetic, S., & Hopf, T., p. 24).

Over the last one hundred years, the liberal order dealt with even great dangers than it faces today, such as Two World Wars, the Great Depression, Nazism, the Cold War, communism, terrorism. Replacing the liberal order does not only involve ousting the USA from the top position but instead of overthrowing institutions, agreements, treaties, redrawing borders that have been enacted so far. The USA might accept China as a peer competitor, only if China will not have any intention to spread its influence in the USA sphere of influence.

Trying to overthrow the liberal order makes China just not the unipole target but the target of the latter's allies, too. Considering the unipolar system in charge today, the diffusion of power is more balanced than in the bi or multipolar systems. So, the second-ranked states or even the emerging powers (which have not enough

power to challenge the hegemon) have sufficient freedom of action. In other words, the balanced spreading of power makes the small actors less dependent and obedient in the face of hegemon's evil intention.

More importantly, if we discussed so far about the importance of *military* and *economic* spheres at times of power shifts, then we have to point out the relevance of *identity* among the great powers, too. Identity can be seen as a pillar of the current (liberal) order. If the identity of a given order(er) has a global-solid based, then there are fewer chances to be overthrown even if the ruler is declining. Moreover, the supporters of the current order would not find attractive or desirable the challenger's offer. The rising challenger, often, lags behind the hegemon, as in the Sino-American power competition, regarding – relative power, power projection capabilities, military expenditures, soft power and so on. China's lack of soft power makes China unable to attract strong partners into a counterbalancing coalition.

Moreover, there is a broad gap between China's authoritarian system identity and the liberal order's identity. What kind of scholar would expect as China to be fully integrated within a system that put under question, not only the Communist Party ideological ground, but also China's elites political future? Because of this incompatibility, China can never get full membership in the liberal order.

The third suggestion is linked with the open character of the liberal order. China is already a part of and benefits from this Western-led order. China's sticking to the liberal values got it more benefits than ever, so far. If at the start of the economic reforms in the 1980s “only 0.8% of China's teenagers got a postsecondary education diploma, then the figure grew up from 3.3% in the 1990s to 20.6% in 2010” (Yu Xie, Chunni Zhang, Qing Lai, 2014). As a consequence, China's government proceeded to build more education facilities, doubling the number of them – from 1022 in 1998 to 2263 in 2008 (Yu Xie, Chunni Zhang, Qing Lai, 2014). Also, China's Index for Human Capital per person is getting better since the liberal economic reforms were adopted. For instance, if the index was 1.11 in the 1950s (1 being the worse and 2,6 the best), then in the 1990s was 1,85, and in 2016 was 2,43<sup>1</sup>. Taking *World Data* figures into account, China took out of poverty

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<sup>1</sup> “Index of Human Capital per Person for China (HCIYISCNA066NRUG)”, [<https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/HCIYISCNA066NRUG>].

more than 700 million people (Tan Weiping, 2018, p. 3). Thus, if the Chinese poverty figure was 17,1 % in 2010, then in 2017 was 3,1%<sup>1</sup>.

Another instance is related to China as a slow developer economy. Since the 1980s, China began its economic development only using free-market rules, more than its East Asian neighbors did.

Moreover, China's GDP increasing commenced in an era of liberal globalization. At the time of the 1980s, China allowed foreign investments in its main sectors, like manufacturing and retail. However, today, China is playing a mixed game in the global economy: they obey the rules of the liberal order, and they also involve the state-controlled actors to get what they want from this liberal order, respectively. As importantly, the Chinese way of capitalism – the Sino-capitalism – which relies more on state intervention in the economy or has different institutional arrangements comparing with the American capitalism, does not have the same global support as liberalism, yet. More important, since Donald Trump has taken the presidential chair of the White House, the USA seems to refuse to be the only power who support the burden of providing security or financial aid to the world. Several years ago, the former US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton made a valuable insight regarding the existing order: “no nation can meet the world's challenges alone... too many players are competing for influence... we will use our power to convene our to connect countries around the world and sound foreign policies strategies to create partnerships aimed at solving problems”<sup>2</sup>. In other words, Hillary Clinton was proposing a “multi-partner world”, (Glenn, Kessler, 2009) and not to a “multi-polar world.” In the same train of thoughts, even J. Ikenberry suggests (Ikenberry, G. John, 2008, pp. 24-36) that ‘China is fully embedded in this liberal order’.

Consequently, for the sake of peace, and to avoid John Mearsheimer's gloomy predictions (Zbigniew Brzezinski & John J. Mearsheimer, 2009) about China's rise, the USA has to do its best to successfully incorporate China into the order that it created more than 70 years ago. The USA should not stop China in assuming a more central role in the international system, as it is done with Russia or Germany after the WWI, because the “*dragon*” will push harder and harder to get what it wants, so the US position in the international system might be undermined.

<sup>1</sup> “World Development Indicators” [https://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspxsource=2&type=metadata&series=SI.POV.NAHC].

<sup>2</sup> Discurs “Hillary Clinton - A Multi-Partner World”, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zepam4lxtTw].

The fourth suggestion is linked with the state of the liberal order that is more loose than tight. The best examples are Germany, which was able to integrate itself into both the global economy and world politics; China, after years of domestic turmoil, had decided to open its economy to the global markets; after it was destroyed by the US, Japan became stronger connected, economic and political, with the outside world. Not to say about the post-Soviet states, most of them being integrated into NATO or the European Union. This kind of order will hold as long as a powerful democratic actor will be at the top of international order. Indeed, because of the numerous domestic upheavals, and populist parties, corrupt rulers, the democracies around the world seem to be weak and less committed to backing the liberal order. However, these illiberal manifestations might be temporary. The liberal order has accepted systems that are almost incompatible with its core base like the Sino-capitalism is. That is the main answer wherefore the liberal order is loose.

The liberal order is the subject of a lot of rules and institutions, so it can never be driven by a single actor, that is, it is a multi-layered/multi-hierarchical global organization. This order creates incentives and rewards to every actor, while an imperial order would emphasize more a hegemon-centric approach.

The fifth argument is tied to the way in which the existing order works. This one has created powerful tools of global cohesion and governance, like NATO, the European Union, the IMF, OSCE, the World Bank. China needs the liberal order more than everybody else because only using the open markets it will be able to pursue the great dream of national rejuvenation. The liberal order, through its institutions, has worked more in China's interest rather than against it.

The sixth idea is geopolitically related. The People's Republic of China operates in a more dangerous geopolitical region with stronger neighbors than the USA's had at the time of its rising. The USA, in comparison with China, became a great power in a more security-stable realm, without any other peer competitor in the Western hemisphere. Ikenberry points out very well the Asian-geopolitical background. He argues that "the emerging order in East Asia is more multipolar and shaped by the balance of power impulses..... With the rise of China, the United States is no longer the only major great power in the region' (John Ikenberry, p. 42).

For the sake of peace, the best key scenario in the Western Pacific regarding the future regional order would be one related to a peaceful co-existence. Imbuing Chinese values with the liberal ones would be, at the very most, in the interest of the small players.



Whatever it does, the USA cannot contain China's rise. Contrary, the USA must prevent the Asia Pacific region from becoming only a Chinese sphere of influence. Coordinating the Western Pacific is not only a one person job. Instead, it is a "multi-actor" work. Moreover, competition without cooperation is none of their best interest, and even Ikenberry admits that "...American efforts to contain China and China's efforts to push the United States out of the region will both be self-defeating strategies" (John Ikenberry, p. 44).

The seventh argument is tied to what type of rising power China is? Is it one driven by interests like ousting institutions, or the ordering rules of the existing order, or it has more interests in gaining influence in the South China Sea and keeping economic growth? We consider the second being the best option for China's ideals. Considering China's international behavior so far, it either obeyed the ordering rules, or has tried to add its version to the international structure, such as the BRICS, the Asian Infrastructure and Investments Bank, the Development Bank, or the internationalization of the Yuan.

The last but not least argument is consisting only of questions, such as- Is China ready to build a new kind of security alliances, and, also, to provide security to its partners?. In other terms, will China be able to create a NATO Asian model? On the other hand, is China ready to offer an economical alternative to the world? Moreover, will China be able to create an alternative global institutional framework

### **Final Remarks**

Replacing the incumbent order might mean a devastating war, which would be very costly for every actor. Although the liberal order is in high contrast with China's authoritarian system, we state that is in China's interest to keep the liberal order, as much as this order satisfy its development requests. On the other hand, the liberal (economic) order it is more open to inside changes, it may offer a joint authority, mutual economic benefits, strong cooperation, than a hegemonic-centric order. However, establishing a Sino-centric order would curtail China's entries to (future) markets. Perhaps China is ready to offer a different economic order to the world, but it is not ready to provide an alternative institutional order.

In a nutshell, the changing of the existing order would not produce any benefits for China. Beijing must be focused more on a proper integration in the existing order

because according to history, the authoritarian states usually lose the competition with their democratic contenders.

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