Can the Rise of China Change the Global Order?

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Since the onset of the reform in the early 1980s’ rural land system, China’s explosive economic growth and active diplomacy has largely changed its importance on the international stage economically and politically (Chin, 2005). The increases of Chinese power and influence are transforming East Asia, and will undoubtedly change the world’s political drama in the twenty-first century (Ikenberry, 2008). But how exactly this political map will be changed is a questionable mark. Will China overthrow the existing global order and establish a new one, or gradually become a part of the Western-oriented order, thus achieve the steady transformation of the powers?

This paper discusses the relationship of international order, power and leadership which mainly based on Charles P. Kindleberger’s discussion in the paper of ‘Dominance and Leadership in the International Economy: Exploitation, Public Goods, and Free Rides’ (1981), argues that China’s peaceful development in the global stage doesn’t need to struggle for dominance with the U.S., Washington doesn’t need to contain China. The existing U.S.-leaded Western liberal order has enough capacity to co-opt the rising and influential power of China, the U.S., China, and other strong powers can co-operate leadership in the international system through strengthening and modifying of the existing multilateral institutions.

**I. The Theories of International Order, Power and Leadership**

The relationship between global order, power, and leadership now is a hot topic in the fields of international economy, international relations and political science. Many essays involve the discussion of power, leadership and ‘the international’ evolution, the G8, hegemony and liberalism in the changing global order. Many points of view are valuable to watch what have happened with which kinds of games in the international stage. Among them I prefer Kindleberger’s theory which emphasizes that dominance was giving way to leadership, zero-sum game can be shift to non-zero sum game, leadership must be powerful to provide public goods to free riders, and two or more countries can carry leadership together in international order (1981).

First of all, ‘the international’ has been evolving its order. According to Robert W. Cox, the imposing order through ‘passive revolution’ will fail because its lack of the legitimacy. The legitimacy of the new order in the world should be based on the human life and the respecting of the different coexisting views of the diverse world. The self-organizations of social and political power relations have to be considered as the way of people’s communization about the transformation of the world which they live in. The world’s historical evolving involves the encounter of the surviving state system of the American ‘Empire’ and the new forms of structuring social power (2007).

Second, the G8 recognized the growing powerful countries as new powers in the order, but the new powers to be included in the range of G8 in future have to show the willing to co-operate with G8. Anthony Payne points out that the G8 trans-governmental mechanism is based on that the key national governments gain from cooperation in a context of interdependence. The existential nature of the G8 system now is expected to change in some fundamental way, because the global politics has moved on a long way since its establishment in 1945, especially after 1989 when Soviet Union’s disintegration. As the winner’s club of late twentieth century history, the G8 drawing Russia into its activities demonstrates the triumph of the Western capitalism over the rival Soviet socialism system. (2008).

Third, the West’s failing to address on the Middle East affairs, the nuclear proliferation, the trade liberation, and the global warming means that there was a systematic problem in the West’s stewardship of the international order. Kishore Mahbubani proved that the West (the USA and the Europe) is a major source of not only facing the global challenge, but also the world’s problems. With 12 percent population in the world the West must learn how to share the international power and the responsibility with the other 88 percent people for its management of the global issues. The West’s sharing power must consider the democracy which is based on the principal of ‘one person, one vote,’ the rule of law in which every member had to obey the regulations, and the social justice (2008).

The views of Cox, Payne, and Mahbubani worked out some truth of the relationship between international order, power and leadership from different views, but they omitted several basic concepts which Charles Kindleberger found which the key to analyze the international order are. First of all, Kindleberger proved that the practical way of world’s hegemony power has evolved from dominance to leadership, but it is difficult to differentiate exploitation and dominance from leaderships in the international relationship; the zero-sum game the former dominators believed may now change to non-zero sum game. Second, as world’s leadership you have to provide public goods as the cost of the system for the free riders, for example, small-sized states, in the systematic order; you have to have enough capacity to stabilize the world’s economy by some degree of managing the structure of foreign-exchange rates and coordinating the domestic monetary policies, like British during the late 19th century and the early of 20th century and America during 1945 and 1971 had demonstrated. The middle-sized states are big enough to damage to the system but not substantial enough to stabilize the order. Thus just the countries powerful enough take leadership responsibilities of the system. Third, leaders can be overthrow by refusal of followers to submit to what they have come to think of as exploitation. Generally the leaders did not get their full shares but only limited benefits from public goods, comparing the private goods read the national interests. From 1945 to 1971 the USA had provided the public goods for the stabilization of the international economy, but now the USA doesn’t play this role because its own no will and the international no acceptance. Forth, there are possibilities two or more countries providing leadership together (1981).

The theories of the relationship between power, leadership and global order provides us guide to analyze the situation of today’s international relations and the new power’s rising. For example, people now understood that today’s problems of economy, politics, and military partially because the lack of efficient leadership and the former leader America’s becoming corrupt to dominate, discharge, and resign, thus the international power and the global order have to be transformed and changed.

**II. China’s Power in the Global Order**

The need of power and leadership in the global order instead of dominance declares that the United States is coming to decline and the American age will inevitably end. 1 The opportunities are opened to the existing and newly rising powers now. Many political scholars and observers believe that China and other newly raised big market countries already had and will have a much more portion of power in the forming global order. The studies of the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China), Beijing’s coalition of the willing, and China’s hard and soft power provided the side profile of China’s rising in the evolving global order.

Andrew Hurrell groups the BRICs as important second-tiers countries of the world because they possess economic, military, and political power resources to contribute the international and regional orders; they want to play a more influential role in world affairs; they develop the contractual relationships among them and between other many countries; they differentiate from other second-tier states and middle-sized power by their economic and military size and growth rate; most sensitively, they share the feeling of uncertainty and vulnerability to US hegemony and desiring to change character of international society. Among the BRICs, China’s power is special not just because its power resources and potential development of a different order, but also as a state’s needs of maintaining the strength and coherence, and its awareness of its powerful rising to its neighbour’s potential threatening (2006).

Stefan Halper watches Beijing’s coalition of the willing. He observes that Beijing has forgiven billions in loans to African nations and helped them with infrastructure projects. Over the past decade and a half, Beijing has already built a coalition of countries – many of them in Africa – large enough ‘that can be trusted to vote China’s way in an increasing clogged alphabet soup of international fora,’ which include the United Nation (UN) and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Beijing actively developed friendly relationship with ‘failed’ countries which for the West are a problem, but for China, they are an opportunity. Beijing paid particular attention on Brazil, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, South Africa, which own large reserves of oil and natural gas. Beijing controlled the policy-making of its huge cross-area trade and international investment. According to the statistics of Derek Scissors, in 2005-09, Chinese have invested in billions of dollars to Africa $62.6, North America $59, Australia $58.5, EU $53.1, Middle East $49.5, Asia $44.9, and Latin American $19.2. China was buying not just minerals, oil and other goods, but ‘diplomatic favors and loyalty’ (as cited in Halper, 2010). Furthermore, Beijing has ability to build international multilateral organizations: the Forum of China-Africa Cooperation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the East Asia Summit (2010).

G. John Ikenberry concludes that China is well on its way to becoming a formidable global power because its speed economic, military, and diplomatic development. He demonstrates that China has become one of the world’s manufacturing centres, accumulated more than $1 trillion reserves at the end of 2006, increased military spending over 18 percent, an inflation-adjusted rate, of per year, and extended foreign diplomacy in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Middle East (2008).

**III. China’s Leadership, the Global Order Change, and America’s Strategy**

China is rising, while the United States is declining and its “unipolar moment” is inevitably coming to end. 2 According to the theories of international order, power and leadership, the U.S. will have to share its leadership with other existing and newly rising power, like the G8, the Europe Union, the BRICs, etc., to share the responsibilities of system’s public goods for operating cost on international stage. As demonstrated in this essay’s part II, with its speed rising hard power, including economic power and military power, and soft power, including cultural power, diplomatic policy power, and other resources-based power, China will get its reasonable portion in the changeable global order, some of them will from America. But the transition can be very different from those past, because the post World War II order is the liberal international system created by America with institutions and regulations, within which China faces not just the United States but “a Western-centred system which is opened, integrated, and rule-based, with wide and deep political foundations” (Ikenberry 2008). America can peacefully co-opt the China’s rise with a positive outcome of a non-zero game. The leadership shared by America, China and other strong powers can be cooperated in the systematic international stage through the strengthening and modifying of the existing multilateral institutions.

First, I don’t agree Robert Kagan’s view that the U.S. must contain China because Westerners cannot ‘manage’ the rise of China to ‘integrate’ China into the ‘international system,’ but I do agree G. John Ikenberry’s view that the U.S. can accommodate China’s rise and reach a peaceful power shift and order change in the international system. As a common sense, there were two kinds of power transition in the world history- on peace or on war. Kagan just found one-on war, but Ikenberry found all of them. In the article ‘the Illusion of “managing” China,’ Kagan summed up that the history of the new powers’ rising inevitably produced several world wars: Europe’s reaction to Germany’s rise after 1870 eventually caused World War I; Japan’s rise after 1868 caused two rounds of warfare- with China and Russia at the late of 19th century, and with the United States and British in World War II (2005). Except Kagan’s conclusion, Ikenberry found one more - the power’s peaceful transformation: the Great British ceded the authority to the United States in the early 20th century but didn’t cause great conflict; the Japan’s rapid economic growth from 1940s to 1990s didn’t challenge the existing order (2008). As a result, a dense set of rules and various institutions in the international system can provide peaceful opportunity to China’s rising step by step.

Secondly, China’s rise of power in the global order is based on its diplomatic principal in Mao era and leadership philosophy in Reform-and-Openness era. After the Second World War, flourishing the movements of national independence and liberation in Asia, Africa and Latin America, newly independent nations including the New China demanded the establishment of new patterns of international relations based on equality to maintain national sovereignty and develop economy. The founders of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Mao Zedong (1893-1976) 3 and Zhou Enlai, in 1950s advanced a theory that the reasonable international relation or order must be built on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, “which are mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence” (Backgrounder, 2005). Mao also insisted on an anti-hegemonic diplomatic policy in new China’s foreign affairs and built a normal diplomatic relation with the U.S., thus as a leader of ‘the third world,’ China changed the world’s order in 1970s.4 As a development, in October 2007 on the 17th Party Congress the PRC’s president Hu Jintao added two points as China’s leadership philosophy, which are that Chinese believe the base of the international relations are built on the win-win strategy by opening up, and China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development and integrating into the world to build a multi-polar and harmonious world (2007). Mao’s theory and Hu’s philosophy consisted of the cornerstone for China’s leadership developing the relation with America or other countries and guiding the China’s behavior of changing global order.

Finally, China can rise peacefully in the international system. According to Ikenberry, the nature of the rising state’s regime, the degree of its dissatisfaction with the old order, and the character of the international order are the factors of shaping a rising state’s choice between challenging or integrating into that order (2008). Based on the defined nature of China- ‘the path of peaceful development’ by the PRC’s president Hu (2007), the satisfaction of China’s practical peaceful rising in the past three decades with the global order, and the character of the historically postwar Western order- the U.S.-led more accessible, legitimate, and durable order to distinct the imperial one, integrating into the existing order and gradually change the rules inevitably become China’s choice.

In conclusion, the open one-world system managed by cooperative great powers can co-opt China to share the leadership peacefully. China was already included as a permanent member of the UN Security Council initially and member of the WTO, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank, etc., in the existing order. With its powerful rise, the reasonable portion of power will be steadily shifted to China. The high-priced policy of containing and conflicting China will not be a good strategy for America. The leadership of America, China and other strong powers can be cooperated in the systematic international stage through the strengthening and modifying of the existing multilateral institutions.

Notes

1. G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?” *Foreign Affairs*, 87(1), 2008, 23-24.

2. G. John Ikenberry, “The Rise of China and the Future of the West: Can the Liberal System Survive?” *Foreign Affairs*, 87(1), 2008, 25.

3. Jonathan Spence, *Mao Zedong*, New York: Viking, 1999, pp.1, 178.

4. Jonathan Spence, *Mao Zedong*, New York: Viking, 1999, pp.143-144.

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