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The Power Transition Basis of Counter-Hegemony in the Context of Neo-Gramscianism: The China-U.S. Rivalry in World Politics

Mehmet Ali AK* & Hamza YURTERİ**

Abstract

Contrary to the traditional perspective of international relations theories, neo-Gramscian theory perceives hegemonic structure and power transitions in the international system as a result of both material and social interactions. Inspired by neo-Gramscian theory, this article argues that as in hegemony, counter-hegemony is also built on consent, which is created by non-military instruments. Among many instruments building consent, the article focuses on economic, institutional, and ideational ones that make the counter-hegemonic model attractive. In this sense, the rising power must invoke non-material forms of consent to build its “legitimate order” in the same way the hegemon invokes these to maintain its predominance. The article explores counter-hegemony processes via a comparative historical case study of developments in the Pax Britannica and Pax Americana systems. In doing so, it juxtaposes the U.S. positions, initiatives, and counter-hegemony models against Pax Britannica, and those of China against the present Pax Americana. The regional and global reflections of China’s counter-hegemony model is analyzed through a neo-Gramscian framework with reference to the U.S. counter-hegemony projection.

Keywords

Hegemony, counter-hegemony, neo-Gramscianism, Pax Americana, China

* Research Assistant, Bursa Uludağ University, Department of International Relations, Bursa, Türkiye. E-mail: mehmetaliak@uludag.edu.tr. ORCID: 0000-0003-1377-055X.

** PhD Candidate, Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt University, Department of International Relations, Ankara, Türkiye. E-mail: hamzayurteri@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0003-2723-3958.

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Introduction

Regional and global power struggles have been a common feature of world politics throughout history. The distribution of power among states has shaped the structure of world order. The international system across diverse periods has been defined by unipolarity, bipolarity, and multipolarity. However, no established order has been able to continue its existence unabated. Every established order has encountered resistance and faced the rise of alternative models. Traditional theories of International Relations (IR) have not adequately explained these changes and the reorientation in the system. The changes have been associated with the anarchic structure of the system, and the will and search for power stemming from the modern state's appeal to rational authority.¹ The deterministic relationship established by these dynamics, which are considered fixed and given, with international politics is not sufficient to explain, understand and interpret existing developments. This reductive approach towards the relationship is also dysfunctional in providing solutions. As the power relations produced in the modern period can be analyzed only superficially by the existing approaches indexed on material phenomena and factors, the essence of these power relations cannot be fully understood and thoroughly analyzed.

Neo-Gramscian theory, which derives its foundations from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of the power relations between the Italian city-states, has been reformulated and deployed by Robert Cox to analyze international power relations. Gramsci opposed positivist epistemology premised on the universal acceptance of a value-free, unreflective and ahistorical examination of social phenomena. As a matter of fact, social phenomena can only be understood by interpreting dynamic and reflectivist phenomena. Power relations cannot, therefore, be explained by the vicious and reductive judgments of positivist epistemology due to their variable and dialectical structure. In this context, the power structure must control both matter and meaning in

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order to ensure its legitimacy so that complete control can be achieved. Modern power uses “coercive” tools such as the military and police to maintain its political ascendancy and “consent” tools such as media, ideology, values, and norms to maintain its legitimacy.²

Each hegemonic power also feeds counter-hegemonic structures. Existing studies in the literature mainly focus on hegemonic power and analyze the power structure of the hegemon, and how power relations are established between actors and power designs.³ This has led to an analytical neglect of challenges posed against existing orders or hegemons. A systematic study of how hegemony is challenged has so far eluded the relevant literature. However, counter-hegemonic initiatives have the potential to shape existing hegemonic relations and power relations in the next world order. To address this issue, this study aims to analyze the forces that have created a counter-hegemony within the system by challenging the orders of *Pax Britannica* and *Pax Americana* respectively, which have constituted the foundations for the hegemonic order of modern world politics, by utilizing the neo-Gramscian perspective as a theoretical tool.

In this context, power transition theory can be applied to understand the circumstances in which the counter-hegemon increases its power and how it poses a challenge to the hegemon. Power transition theory, which was introduced in 1958 by Organski in his seminal textbook titled *World Politics*,⁴ has become over time one of the most notable structural theories in world politics. The main reason for using this theory here is the question of whether the “satisfied” global power discourse employed in the theory will lead to a smooth transition of leadership to China in a balanced but non-warlike manner. If the main objective is to preserve the international social order by accepting the principles of culture and identity imposed by the West, then the U.S. can transfer hegemony to China just as Britain transferred hegemony to the U.S. in the past. It is important to note at this point, however, that Britain and the U.S. come from the same social and political background. Yet, the probability of war will increase dramatically if China tries to use the power transition to establish its own counter-hegemony by building a principled global culture against Western international rules and norms by harboring well-founded complaints just as Germany practiced counter-hegemony against Britain in the

run-up to World War I and II. This study will explore the principles that China can adopt based on the available choices offered by power transition theory.

The study's main contention is that just as consent is a necessary element in the construction of hegemony, it is of vital importance in the construction of counter-hegemony as well. Economic transition, institutional initiatives and ideational designs, which would be able to remediate the problems of the existing hegemon or hegemonic order, may be conducive to consent; or, in other words, they form a ground for the counter-hegemony strategy in the context of power transition understanding.

In the counter-hegemony process, the main purpose of building consent is to render the current revisionist effort attractive. In doing so, many instruments can be used—especially economic, institutional, and intellectual ones. This article will focus on these three. Culture and identity, which are among the most important instruments in the process of constructing consent, are the subject of a separate study. The seeking of alternative models against the deficiencies of the current hegemony, on which a consensus has been achieved, can enable the construction of consent in counter-hegemony processes. Moreover, consent can also be constructed through the aforementioned three instruments, which are non-military tools and can produce common benefits within a certain circle. At this point, a counter-hegemony model that reveals the deficiencies of the current system and produces benefits for the actors who currently suffer under its shortcomings can emerge on the basis of consent and make itself attractive for all actors.

In addition, the regional and global reflections of China's counter-hegemony will be analyzed from a neo-Gramscian perspective, with reference to the U.S. counter-hegemony projection towards *Pax Britannica*. The article also explores the limitations and obstacles to a Beijing-centered world order including China's potential to foster the consent elements needed to pursue a successful counter-hegemony initiative against the previous hegemon. Specifically, the study offers a comparative case study exploring the U.S. positions, initiatives and counter-hegemony models, which built a counter-hegemony against *Pax Britannica*, vis-à-vis those of China, which is presently constructing

a counter-hegemony against *Pax Americana*. The case study seeks to ascertain causal mechanisms in the course of the U.S. and China's attempts to establish their counter-hegemony, and closely observes why and how these counter-hegemony attempts were conducted.

Gramsci and the Idea of Hegemony in International Relations

The modern state emerges from the unity of political and civil society. The state does not dominate the political sphere exclusively with “coercive” tools, such as law enforcement, the military, or the police, all of which allow the ruling class to dominate the political sphere. It also enjoys “consent” tools such as the media, education, cultural dominance, and ideology to manage civil society. In other words, the state does not exist only via its monopoly on the use of violence, as Max Weber stated, but also by its ability to create consent.⁵ The power established by the combined use of consent and coercive tools is called “hegemony” by Gramsci. One of the primary purposes of hegemony, which is established by consent rather than coercive tools, is to ensure that the values, moral norms and worldview of the ruling class are adopted by the ruled class.⁶ Thus, the power relations achieved by force have been rearticulated as elements of consent. In this context, hegemony is also defined by Gramsci as “consensus protected by the armor of force.”⁷ Robert Gilpin states that hegemony is established as a result of the unity of coercive power over other actors and their desire to participate voluntarily in the system.⁸ On the other hand, Joseph S. Nye Jr. considers this difference as an effort by the hegemon to convince other states to adopt its will voluntarily rather than force it upon them.⁹ An active role must be taken to achieve hegemony in the economic sphere. First, national orientations in the social, political, and intellectual sphere should be integrated with global tendencies.¹⁰ Second, institutions should have the capacity to direct civil society and establish moral hegemony, and should include the demands, expectations and interests of the governed classes within power relations and base hegemony on active consent.¹¹ Intellectual and moral leadership can only be founded on active consent.¹² Finally, ideational designs should construct norms, transformations, and forms by obtaining the universal consent of other groups. Thus, Cox re-conceptualized the phenomenon of hegemony,

which Gramsci uses to explain the relationship between classes on a national scale.¹³

The hegemony achieved through force and consent on a systemic scale means that other states give consent to the dominant state's position, which establishes its global hegemony through the ruling classes.

Hegemony ensures its continuity not by suppressing the other states' demands by force, but by bringing the system into conformity with its demands. In other words, the peripheral countries imitate and emulate the hegemon.¹⁴ Institutions, on the other hand, prepare an environment where different groups are represented and their interests are included in the system. This understanding ensures the continuity of the hegemon, with institutions providing its legitimate basis.¹⁵

According to Cox, hegemony is a phenomenon that shows its influence on three levels: the social forces shaped by the relations of production, the forms of state and world order. These three levels mutually interact, and Cox emphasizes the importance of relations of production in the interpretation of historic structures. However, relations of production are not just economic relations, and ideas, social norms and social codes are also evaluated within their framework. Against the Westphalian system, which reduces the state to a unitary structure, the social aspect of the state is emphasized, drawing attention to the historical and social interactions of political and civil societies. Cox states, moreover, that a change in production relations on a national scale can change state structures, and a shift in state structures can lead to a transformation in the world order.¹⁶

These power transitions demanded by the counter-hegemony are implemented both structurally and dynamically. Structurally, they are constructed through hierarchical realizations between nations that cooperate and compete in degrees of economic, political and social power that alter the global order. This hierarchy outlines the relative roles of nations, the rules, the workings of the system, and then, how powerful countries try to manage international politics. This static table

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of structure and rules is complemented by dynamic factors that show how and why power transitions occur in the international system. The concept of power links the structural framework to dynamic change. In this sense, the theory predicts that political interactions between nations are based on the status quo, the widespread acceptance of international rules and norms, and the changing commitment of national elites involved in the establishment of hegemony. Power transition theory does not always characterize the leading nation in the global hierarchy as the hegemon, instead creating the concept of the dominant nation. However, in this article, the dominant nation is limited to hegemons. Hence, while the challengers of the dominant nation can potentially be more numerous, the counter-hegemony claim is more limited as it has different variables.¹⁷

Cox identifies Gramsci's counter-hegemony with the concept of the counter-historical bloc, which in the socialist order was characterized as the proletariat. He describes a power relationship in the international arena through the phenomenon of hegemon, not an ideological counter-historical bloc. Meanwhile, he also explains that a counter-hegemon may rise in opposition to the hegemon's world order. According to Cox, just as counter-hegemonic movements may emerge as a result of joint initiatives that challenge the decisive role of the dominant states in world politics, they can manifest themselves as global alliances of non-governmental organizations or economic organizations that challenge the position of dominant social forces in the center.¹⁸ Cox argues that there is a variety of possible scenarios for the future.¹⁹ The fact is that capitalism builds its hegemony on the moral, social and information production processes, and the economic and systemic sphere has revealed victim classes in these areas. Their consciousness against hegemony causes the aggrieved classes to come together in a counter-hegemonic movement. Therefore, beyond economy-based class aggrievement produced by the system, counter-hegemony should be built on a doctrine which includes all aggrievement by "people-nations"—be it based on gender, race, culture and/or ecology.²⁰ The resolution of class-based economic aggrievements alone will not abolish capitalist hegemony.

The Counter-Hegemony of the U.S. against Pax Britannica

The post-Vienna Congress order after 1815 is usually regarded as the beginning of British hegemony. According to Karl Polanyi, the onset of British hegemony points to an “unheard-of phenomenon, that is, a century-old peace process” in the history of Western civilization.²¹ Britain had achieved an unrivaled position on a global scale with its economic power and established its preeminence in manufacturing, trade, finance and the military. Thanks to its early industrialization with the invention of the steam engine, and later steamships, Britain enjoyed rising industrial production and trade, achieved the highest gross national product in Europe in 1820, and maintained its lead until 1913. In this period, Britain’s share of global production rose from 1.9% to 9.5%.²² Although Britain’s share of global industrial production rose to 32% by the 1870s, its share was declining by the time it established its hegemony and it was controlling 24% of world trade in the 1870s.²³

Economic Transition

Just as the transformations in the international system gave rise to British hegemony, they also undermined its influence and led to the emergence of counter-hegemonic powers. The revisionist policies of the core countries such as Germany, which took advantage of the power vacuum caused by the transformation of the dynamics on which hegemony was founded, laid the groundwork for the collapse of British hegemony.²⁴ As free trade became unworkable, states shifted towards protectionism in order to guard their economies. As the gold standard broke down, the U.S. managed to increase its share of global industrial production to 29% by 1881, surpassing Britain, and to 38% by 1906.²⁵ The transformation in the historical structure was further advanced by the relative weakening of British hegemony before World War I and the gradual loss of its global role in the seas; Germany’s unification shifting the balance of power; the increasing influence of the U.S.; and, finally, the prementioned collapse of the gold standard.²⁶ Eric Hobsbawm considers the Great Depression

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of 1929 as the development that prepared the end of the gold standard, which shook British economy to its core.²⁷

The gradual weakening of Britain's economic and ideological dominance in the period after 1870 led to the dissolution of *Pax Britannica* and the emergence of a non-hegemonic world order. According to Immanuel Wallerstein, in the last quarter of the 19th century, the U.S. and Germany began to challenge Britain, similar to the challenge of Britain and France to the United Provinces in the 17th century, which was a process that saw the replacement of economic liberalism with protectionism.²⁸ Germany, which completed its unification in 1871, challenged Britain's political and military influence over continental Europe and its colonies, while the U.S. challenged Britain's global role with its industrial capacity. In other words, Germany directly and the U.S. indirectly challenged Britain as counter-hegemons.²⁹

Starting with World War I, Britain abandoned its free trade doctrine, which it saw as one of the main pillars of its hegemony, and preferred more protective policies in order to protect its industry and national economy. Germany's challenge against Britain in World War I failed. The period of uncertainty after the war and the economic depression of 1929 forced all countries to follow protectionist, namely beggar-thy-neighbor, policies. The economic cost of the war, its swelling budget deficit, and international economic instability eroded the British economy, which was already stagnant before the war. This situation made the U.S. the new net creditor in global markets and, by implication the counter-hegemon.³⁰

Institutional Evolution

The lack of a rule-maker and the prevalence of nationalist (protectionist) economies would cause capitalism's bankruptcy after the war and allow communist ideology to increasingly find opportunities in the global system. According to Patrick K. O'Brien, the U.S. had to be a temporary and relative stabilizer for the anarchic structure created by the chaotic atmosphere of the system in the post-World War II period.³¹ According to Susan Strange, on the other hand, the U.S. hegemony was based on three fundamental dynamics: control over outputs, the structural power provided by the privileged position of the dollar in global markets and the ideological power fed by the neoliberal doctrine.³² Institutions such

as the IMF, the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), established by the Bretton Woods Conference, and the United Nations, established by the San Francisco Conference, ensured that the U.S. held the leadership role.³³ The U.S. hegemony, which built the infrastructure of financial adequacy and international institutions, tried to establish an international regulatory regime for the continuity of the system by preventing global crises. The IMF and the World Bank both ensured the regulation of loans to be given to states and allowed other states to control financial developments and capital accumulation on a global scale. In short, the U.S. built the global financial system through the international organizations it designed in the post-World War II period and obtained other actors' consent by allowing them to take part in the system and protect their interests. Member countries adopted and observed the economic and political demands of the Bretton Woods institutions to achieve their national development goals. Thus, postwar treaties like Bretton Woods have guaranteed the adoption of U.S. norms through international organizations. The U.S. built the postwar order not on the axis of multilateralism but on the axis of institutionalism.³⁴ These institutions, which increase the dependence of other actors on the system, form the basis of the leading role of the U.S.³⁵

Through the Bretton Woods organizations, the U.S. cooperated with the elite classes and gained influence through them in developing and underdeveloped countries. Through these organizations, the U.S. provided economic and military protection to foreign elites. In return, they tried to build a pro-American political understanding in their countries by being integrated with the dominant historical structure.

Through Bretton Woods institutions, the U.S. hegemony has bound the consent of other actors with institutional grounds, unlike the previous hegemonic powers. This situation made the power of the current hegemon more sustainable and strengthened its legitimacy. This understanding manifests how the moral leadership of the U.S. was established.³⁶

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John Agnew states that U.S. hegemony started to weaken in the 1970s when four developments brought about the questioning of the U.S. global role. First, the Vietnam War turned into a military stalemate with serious economic costs. Second, multinational companies shifted their production, especially to the East Asian region, due to cheap labor, which led to a surplus of imports causing a budget deficit. Third, starting in the 1970s, West Germany and Japan began to take a more active role and increase their share of global trade economically. Finally, as a result of the conflict between Israel and Arab countries, the unfaltering U.S. support for Israel led to the OPEC oil crisis.³⁷ Due to these developments, the Bretton Woods system was gradually phased out as the fixed exchange rate system and was replaced by a floating exchange rate system.³⁸ The U.S. abandoned the payment of gold in exchange for dollars, turned to wage and price controls, increased taxes on imported products, and finally devaluated the dollar. The unilateral policies of the U.S. indicated the collapse of the Bretton Woods system.

Ideational Designs

U.S. hegemony is ideologically based on liberal values, democracy, stability, international peace and human rights.³⁹ Although the U.S. has ensured its dominance by creating institutions, it has delegated the burden to other states, making them dependent stakeholders of the system and, therefore, increasing the importance of international institutions. These organizations' legal infrastructure was also created in favor of U.S. leadership, and an order was established to control the states' economic, social, and political organizations.⁴⁰ Unlike Britain, eschewing colonial initiatives and instead adopting the principle of self-determination has been vitally important in establishing this consent. According to John Ikenberry, the most important reason for other actors' consent rather than resistance to the U.S. hegemony is that the U.S. provides global services such as security, protection, and a free market.⁴¹ Nye, however, believed that the system built by the U.S. after World War I and II is based on Wilsonism and the balance of power.

Challenging the U.S. Hegemony: 1970s-2008

During *Pax Americana*, Washington witnessed ideational, institutional and economic crises. An ideational crisis emerged following the U.S. military intervention in Vietnam in 1963-1973. Washington's attempts to use its superpower status in favor of its national interests, with regard to international norms that underpinned the consent element of its hegemony, called into question the legitimacy of U.S. hegemony.⁴² Thus, the necessity for the harmonious and legitimate operation of coercion and consent tools emerged. Using coercion tools in an irrational, exclusive and privileged way, in other words, without considering the international community, may lead to the questioning of the tools that construct consent. Thirty years later, after September 11 attacks, the U.S. also unilaterally invaded Iraq in 2003 by declaring a "global fight against terrorism". However, it could not even fully convince its Western allies about the legitimacy of this military intervention. "You're either with us or against us in the fight against terror" approach adopted by the George W. Bush administration in this process shows that the tools of coercion took precedence over the tools of consent for the U.S. Thus, the harmony between coercion and consent was disrupted.

The institutional crisis faced by U.S. hegemony was the 1971 economic crisis as a result of which the U.S. dollar, the only valid exchange unit on the U.S. gold exchange, was withdrawn from the market. In other words, the U.S. abandoned the Bretton Woods institutions that were at the heart of its economic hegemony. In addition, due to the

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U.S. support to Israel in the Arab-Israeli wars, the OPEC, which mainly consists of Arab countries, created an artificial scarcity to drive up oil prices, thereby hampering oil-based global production and trade to generate a global crisis. Far from fulfilling its stabilizing role, the hegemonic power, triggered new crises and undermined its leadership role.

The economic crisis took place in 2008 when the U.S.-centered financial crisis turned into a global problem. The situation is considered to have introduced into the background the concepts of risk and control alongside the understanding of “laissez faire et laissez passer” (let it be and let it pass), the basic motto of the neo-liberal policies implemented after the 1980s. The mortgage crisis, which emerged in the real estate market, spread to all financial markets. The U.S.-centered problem spread first to Europe and then to the world and turned into a global economic crisis. The impact of a U.S.-centered crisis on all global markets has caused the developed and developing states to review their integration into the U.S. economy and caused growing economies to take national measures.

Until the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, it was envisaged that U.S. hegemony and unipolar world order would be a prominent and permanent element of international politics.⁴³ However, with the crisis, U.S. hegemony was shaken, and doubts about the *Pax Americana* increased, all the while China continued its economic growth, enabling global capital to shift from the West to the East.⁴⁴ Since the global financial crisis, the military, economic and ideological superiority that forms the basis of U.S. hegemony has gradually been eroding, and Washington is increasingly losing its ascendancy in these areas. However, it should be noted here that the resolution of *Pax Americana* is not the result of a global crisis, but of a process that has been going on for decades. According to Christopher Layne, there are two reasons for the erosion of U.S. hegemony: one external and one internal. The external reason is the rise of China, and the internal reason is the U.S. financial problems. In fact, the point that distinguishes the current weakening of the U.S. hegemony from the weakening in the 1980s is not the existence of an external cause in the context of the rise of a new power, but the chronic budget and current account deficit of the U.S., excessive consumption, low savings,⁴⁵ income inequality and stagnant real incomes.⁴⁶ As a consequence of its financial and economic decadence, the unchallenged era of U.S. hegemony is waning.⁴⁷ Furthermore, at the G20 summit in 2009, President Obama stated that the U.S. could not be an engine for the recovery of global markets, and pointing to the rising powers, he stated that everyone should fulfill their responsibilities.⁴⁸ In other words, apart from losing its economic control, the U.S. now lacks the

political and ideological power to rehabilitate or rebuild the system.⁴⁹ According to John Mearsheimer, the liberal international order that the U.S. and its allies tried to build in the post-Cold War period faced three challenges.⁵⁰ The first of these was a group of initiatives such as the export of democracy and regime change in authoritarian countries, increased nationalist tendencies on a regional and global scale, and strengthened norms such as self-determination and sovereignty. Second, with globalization, borders are gradually losing their importance. In addition, the deepening and widening of international institutions' decision-making powers over national governments have triggered political and social fragility within liberal states. Thus, national identity and sovereignty once again became the dominant value of political and social events. Finally, hyper-globalization has caused liberal states to lose power economically. With the shift of capital to the Asia-Pacific, liberal states are trapped in a spiral of unemployment, increasing inequality in income distribution, and the gradual weakening of the middle class.⁵¹ Thus, while the global financial system has become increasingly unstable, liberal states have faced severe economic, social, and political tensions. Mearsheimer has pointed out that China gradually increased its production power by taking advantage of the reflections of the hyper-globalizing age. China is seeking to dominate the global market with global projects such as the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), BRICS, the New Development Bank, Made in China 2025 and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).⁵² In addition, as Mearsheimer states, China is using its economic influence to try to integrate Asian countries into the order fed by Beijing, rather than by Washington.⁵³ In short, these initiatives are footprints of the China-centered "bounded order", to use Mearsheimer's term.⁵⁴

China as a Counter-Hegemonic Power against Pax Americana

Drawing on Cox's emphasis on economic capacity, institutions and ideational design in power building, Bo Peng examines China's position in the international system across three historical periods.⁵⁵ The first period is between 1949 and 1971 when China refused to take part in the current system and the UN, Bretton Woods and NATO—i.e. the projections of U.S. hegemony. The second period saw the acceptance

and integration process covering the period between 1971 and 2008. During this period, in addition to accepting the norms of the existing system, China constantly sought to entrench its position within the system. The process that began with “ping-pong diplomacy” with Washington in 1971 evolved into competitive cooperation between the U.S. and China, and advanced within the framework of the Deng Xiaoping government’s “Reform and Opening-up Policy” of 1978. During this period, the Chinese economy became the second largest in the world with a long-term growth unprecedented in history. Thus, China ceased to be an actor in opposition to the system and integrated into the existing order’s institutions. The last period has been ongoing since the 2008 global crisis, and has seen China adopt a more proactive role.⁵⁶

Economic Capacity

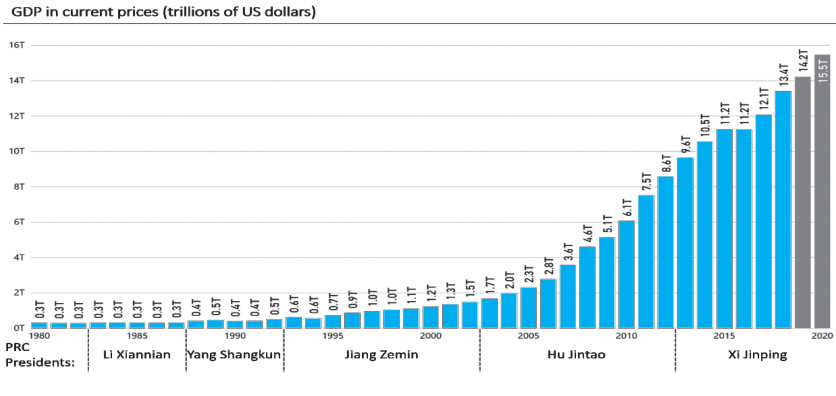
In the wake of Mao Zedong’s death in 1978, Deng restructured the Chinese economic system and integrated it into the global financial system. By abandoning the ideology-based isolationist model of the Mao era, Deng initiated a development model fed by reform and opening similar to the East Asian Tigers model. The most urgent plan for China was to bring together a country that was isolated during the Mao era with technology and integrate high-value-added products and labor advantage.⁵⁷ China grew its GDP each year by more than 10%

In 1978, China performed about 1% of global industrial production, while by 2015, it was able to perform 12% of global industrial production.

from 1978 to 2010.⁵⁸ It became the world’s largest exporter in 2009 and the world’s second-largest economy in 2010.⁵⁹ The 2008 economic crisis affected both China’s economic development and the global markets. China’s GDP growth became 7.9% in 2012 and 6.9% in 2017. According

to World Bank data, China’s national income increased from \$149.541 billion in 1978 to \$309.488 billion in 1985, \$734.547 billion in 1995, \$2.286 trillion in 2005, \$11.000 trillion in 2015, and \$13.608 trillion in 2018.⁶⁰ In 1978, China performed about 1% of global industrial production, while by 2015, it was able to perform 12% of global industrial production.⁶¹ Thus, China has succeeded in surpassing the U.S. by increasing its share in global production.

Table 1: China's GDP Growth



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook, 2019

While the U.S. industrial production was \$1.790 trillion in 2006, China has stood at \$1.150 trillion. In 2016, the U.S. industrial production amounted to \$2.116 trillion, while China's industrial output increased to \$3.225 trillion.⁶² Thus, as of 2010, the U.S. lost its leadership in global production, which it took over from Britain at the end of the 19th century, to China. China became the largest industrial power in 2010, accounting for almost 20% of global industrial production. As of 2013, China has had the largest share of international trade. In terms of purchasing power parity, China reached \$19.617 trillion in 2017, surpassing the U.S. with \$19.519 trillion in purchasing power parity, and became the country with the highest purchasing power parity.⁶³ These developments are perceived as signals of a shift in the global economic balance of power towards Asia.⁶⁴

China's position during this period was described as "wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits" by Xi Jinping, China's president. According to him, it is necessary to build a system where all parties have a more equal say in the system and where shares are distributed more fairly. In this context, by announcing the "New Asian Security Concept", China drew attention to the importance of regional security and economic cooperation. By promoting economic integration with regional actors, China strove to build a common regional perspective.

Institutional Processes

China is promoting new international initiatives to strengthen its regional and global position while strengthening its role in existing Western-based organizations. In this context, as mentioned earlier, the AIIB, BRICS, BRI and the New Development Bank stand out as new initiatives that China offers to regional and global governance. The Shanghai Five, designed as a regional and collective security organization, was reformed as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization under China's leadership. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which envisages a free trade agreement that will improve cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, and BRICS, which envisages Chinese partnership with countries such as Russia, India, South Africa, and Brazil, constitute alternatives to the institutional structures of U.S. hegemony. In addition, China established global cooperation with the BRI and enriches alternative institutionalization initiatives by integrating them with different dimensions. This initiative, which aims to connect the East Asian basin with the European basin, covers countries with growth potential along this route. A modern Silk Road has been designed by integrating contiguous land, sea, and rail transportation systems along the route. This initiative is a global design, unlike China's regional initiatives, and foresees the construction of important trade centers at strategic points with port investments made on the sea route. In this context, Chinese companies are carrying out the infrastructure and construction of many ports in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe—such as Gwadar in Pakistan, Hambantota and Colombo in Sri Lanka, Kyaukpyu in Myanmar, Lamu in Kenya, Bagamoyo in Tanzania, Piraeus in Greece, and Khalifa in the United Arab Emirates.⁶⁵ With the BRI, a significant part of global trade will become integrated with China, increasing China's influence on global trade, and contributing approximately 7% to it. China is building the economic infrastructure of the post-hegemonic order and is integrating itself into this order via the vital networks it has established.⁶⁶

Ideational Instruments

With its counter-hegemonic movement and its regional and global initiatives, China aims to attract the consent of other actors by offering new concepts to the existing global financial doctrine, integration models,

common security understanding, dominant ideology, norms, and paradigms. In other words, China seeks to form a sociopolitical ground for its counter-hegemony strategy. To reformulate the global governance design, China proposes innovative ideas and designs that consider the current power distribution rather than that of the post-Cold War era. Otherwise, it would be impossible to erode the existing hegemonic structure. The fact that China does

not interject its political claims in its foreign policy rhetoric shows that it does not want to challenge the U.S. in the sphere of political power. Based on Chinese discourse, such as broad consultation, joint contribution, shared benefits, economic integration and development, China seems to want to maintain the struggle for counter-hegemony in different spheres of power, rather than in the political and military sphere.

The trade and economic relations based on a win-win understanding that China offers, especially to underdeveloped and developing countries and bilateral relations compatible with a global system that respects the sovereign rights of other countries are seen as an alternative development model. In the words of Joshua Cooper Ramo, the model China presents has been defined as the “Beijing Consensus” in juxtaposition to the “Washington Consensus.”⁶⁷ Stefan Halper, on the other hand, believes that the American model is no longer the only alternative as the Beijing Consensus provides an alternative to the instruments of the American model (i.e. free market and liberal democracy).⁶⁸

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Does China Challenge the Western Hegemonic Model or Seek to Establish a New System?

Arguing that the unipolar structure of the existing order has eroded, Mearsheimer states that the U.S. should give up its claim to international order and surround China by building a “bounded order” as in the Cold

War period.⁶⁹ According to Mearsheimer, China will first seek regional and then global hegemony.⁷⁰ China's attempts to expand its influence and become a geopolitical power center in its own region, just as the U.S. established a regional sphere of influence against British hegemony in the early 20th century, may pave the way for a U.S.-China conflict.⁷¹ Although China describes its rise as a peaceful rise, China's growth is threatening. Equivalent rises against the then current system can be evaluated with reference. Likewise, Layne considers the rise of China to be no exception making room for itself in the institutional structure of the existing system, since China is seeking to develop new institutional mechanisms to replace existing institutions. By establishing asymmetric relations through these initiatives, China deepens its economy-based dependence and gains a vital position in the eyes of all actors.⁷²

According to the general view, even if China increases its dominance in other areas, it is considered incapable of catching up with the U.S. militarily. While Layne states that the U.S. should maintain its military superiority in three vital geographies, namely Europe, the Middle East and Asia, he draws attention to China's goal of being militarily decisive in its region.⁷³ Therefore, according to Layne, China and the U.S. have different geopolitical strategic priorities. He argues that currently China has the military power to challenge the status quo in Asian region, but it does not have the geopolitical goal of challenging U.S. military supremacy in every corner of the world.

While the U.S. also made global initiatives economically in the *Pax Britannica* process, it adopted a regional strategy rather than a global strategy militarily, since it sought to consolidate its power in Asia instead of colonizing it like Britain. In the same way, while China is developing its global enterprises economically, it signals that it has no intention of balancing the U.S. militarily outside the Asia-Pacific region. At this point, the similarity between the regional military priorities of the U.S. and China rather than global initiatives in their quest for counter-hegemony is remarkable. Just as the U.S. established a regional sphere of influence against British hegemony in the beginning of the 20th century, China would seek to become a geopolitical power center in its region.⁷⁴ In short, China has reached the capacity to challenge U.S. hegemony's economic, military and institutional projections on the regional scale.⁷⁵

The second view regarding China's capacity to build hegemony predicts that the rise of China will not pose a threat and will affect the distribution of power in the existing order rather than the order itself, thus preserving the liberal order. According to this view, proposed by Ikenberry, the liberal hegemonic order is gradually weakening.⁷⁶ In other words, while the liberal hegemonic order was an "inside order" in the Cold War era, it became an "outside order" in the post-Cold War period.⁷⁷ For this, the current liberal order needs to be reshaped, reordered, and reformed according to the existing global design rather than the Cold War design.⁷⁸

Ikenberry states that if the U.S. enters into one-on-one competition with China, China will eventually undermine its global position. However, if the U.S. puts mutual competition with China aside, seeks to strengthen liberal values—if it does not see China's economic growth as a threat—and forces it to stay in the liberal order, it could maintain its global position. Ikenberry argues that the rise of China will not pave the way for geopolitical transformations.⁷⁹ Even if the global position of the U.S. erodes, the liberal international order will continue to be the determining dynamic of international politics in the 21st century.⁸⁰ In fact, this means that China will never be a hegemonic power, as it will not be able to achieve ideological superiority and rule-making power, or, in other words, gain moral leadership. In short, emerging powers are not challenging liberal norms and institutions but rather the distribution of power in the existing order. Therefore, Ikenberry contends that the structure of the existing system should be reformed, not its essence.⁸¹

The last view on China's capacity to build hegemony is that China cannot transform the current system or the power distribution in the system. The fact that China can take the place of the U.S. economically does not mean that it can take its place on a geopolitical scale. China ranks 26th according to the latest published index in terms of attractiveness of its values, while the U.S. is in the top three. Meanwhile,

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U.S. military spending is four times higher than China's.⁸² There are two reasons why China does not choose to challenge the U.S. military role: First, in the hegemonic establishment, such as *Pax Britannica* and *Pax Americana*, military superiority gradually loses its meaning. The increasing destructiveness of military facilities makes the superiority in this field increasingly meaningless. In this context, deterrence capacity and technological infrastructure are more important than superiority of military power. Second, while the U.S. is searching to maintain its military superiority in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, China considers its military deterrence sufficient at its regional level.

Although other countries are increasing their economic, military, and political shares on a global scale and the share of the U.S. is gradually decreasing, at the moment, it is not possible, including China, for any country to take the global role of the U.S.⁸³ According to Nye, the U.S. should abandon the Wilsonian interventionist foreign policy approach because each intervention in the name of democracy and liberal values triggers resistance, and Wilson's legacy of developing international organizations must be embraced.⁸⁴ Leadership is different than dominance and requires sharing. By sharing its economic and political power through these organizations, the U.S. should gain the consent of other actors and, in this manner, secure its leadership. Thus, Nye argues that the global role of the U.S. cannot be threatened by an emerging economic power from outside, but by emerging populism fed by income and tax inequality at home.⁸⁵

Conclusion

The counter-hegemony model is a concept used within alternative power systems created to challenge hegemony. According to neo-Gramscian theory, in order to create this model, first material dominance must be ensured and then it must be supported by establishing a consent mechanism with social forms. This article focuses on the consent construction aspect of counter hegemony. Challenging *Pax Britannica*, the U.S. overthrew Britain's power primarily materially, without clashing the international system in place. After World War I and II, when Britain was weak and had lost its international sovereignty, the U.S. took on the role of being a direct counter-hegemon. The U.S. implemented this

by establishing forms of social dominance after gaining material power and upheld *Pax Americana* between 1945 and 1970s. In the 1970s, China could challenge *Pax Americana*, acting in harmony with the international system. Until 2008, China became an important counter-hegemon to *Pax Americana* by realizing material factors in regional and global terms. According to the post-2008 Chinese discourse, an attempt to create a *Pax Sinica* started by activating social forms.

Table 2: Evaluation of U.S. and Chinese Counter-Hegemony Initiatives

	<i>U.S. counter-hegemony</i>	<i>Chinese counter-hegemony</i>
<i>Environment</i>	Absence of leadership	Sustaining privileged position of the U.S. (<i>primus inter pares</i> , or first among equals)
<i>Order</i>	Multipolar world	Multiplex world ⁸⁶
<i>Method</i>	Building counter-hegemony with isolationist policy	Building counter-hegemony by enhancing, deepening, and expanding institutions
<i>Means</i>	Wilsonism and self-determination	“Eastphalian” sovereignty
<i>Aims</i>	Washington Consensus	Beijing Consensus

Table 2 illustrates the distinctions between the two counter-hegemony initiatives when compared according to the neo-Gramscian perspective, which underscores the tools of consent rather than the tools of coercion in the sustainability of hegemony. The different tendencies can be summed along five points. First, when investigating the environment in the counter-hegemony attempts of the two powers, Britain, which was the power that the U.S. would indirectly challenge, had lost its role as hegemon on the world stage in the anarchic period between World War I and II, and the U.S. benefited from the power vacuum in the international system. On the other hand, China is faced with a hegemon that has not lost its power at all. The position of the U.S. might have eroded, but it has sustained its privileged position especially militarily and financially. The U.S. position can be perceived as *primus inter pares*, or first among equals; it accumulated power and founded an order around a single center that consolidated its global role by integrating ideas and norms with economic power. *Pax Sinica* would also represent a hegemonic understanding similar to *Pax Americana* by integrating economic power and ideas in the complex world order.

Second, when *Pax Britannica* was declining, a multipolar order was dominant in the international system. In terms of systemic design, multipolarity referred exclusively to material capabilities. The phenomenon conceptualized as multipolarity in the international system today does not entail only the distribution of material capabilities. Multipolarity at a time when the U.S. led order is in decline signals more than distribution of power. Amitav Acharya conceptualizes the system as a multiplex world,⁸⁷ only one component of which is the distribution of power. This concept puts emphasis on various components that influence great power relations, including economic interdependence, domestic systems, norms and multilateral institutions. Thus, the Chinese counter-hegemony initiatives are taking place in a multiplex world rather than the multipolar world in which the U.S. pursued its own counter-hegemony initiatives against Britain. Third, the U.S. became stronger by methodically pursuing a policy of isolation, protecting its borders from foreign interventions, and promising “bounded and hierarchic order” or “less than global order”⁸⁸ rather than international or global order. Beijing provides significant economic input to developing countries through its huge interconnected and deepened investments.⁸⁹ It seeks to deepen and institutionalize regional relations with regional organizations, and has embarked on building South-South relations to diversify global governance through organizations such as BRICS, and promoting the BRI to offer a new role model for global cooperation. Increasingly, China appears to be in pursuit of enriching alternative regional and global institutionalization initiatives by integrating them into different dimensions. In this context, China gives its development a universal character.

Fourth, unlike Britain’s colonial aggrandizement, the U.S. was able to obtain consent for its counter-hegemony process by adopting the principle of self-determination. However, the hegemon’s unilateral action and using “coercion” tools in an irrational, exclusive, and privileged way in other words, without considering the international community—has undermined and led to a questioning of the self-determination principle. China has opposed military interventions to facilitate regime change, the undertaking of responsibility to protect initiatives, and unilateral intervention based on presumed human rights violations, offering instead the model of “Eastphalian

sovereignty” which stresses the right of non-interference.⁹⁰ It is a new form of sovereignty that may pave the way for gaining the consent of other actors without engendering worries of unilateral action by the hegemon without the consent of the international community. This is analogous to the self-determination and Wilsonism that attracted actors concerned by the colonial initiatives of Britain to consent to the U.S.-led counter-hegemony.

Last but not least, the liberal values that marked the 20th century are today faced with certain dilemmas. China has proven that economic growth can be achieved not only within the framework of liberal policies but also with an authoritarian approach, especially in the period after the 2008 global financial crisis. In this context, in the international system, where conflicts deepen day by day and instability is increasing, management systems show a more authoritarian orientation. Thus, the magic of the political, economic, military, and ideological projection that China offers is increasingly replacing the appeal of liberalism.⁹¹ However, the Chinese model premised on Beijing Consensus is complicated to imitate unlike the Washington Consensus. China has not been seeking to export its model to other countries until now because the Chinese model is a system that emerged from the political experiences of China and is a product of China’s geographical, influence, and demographic structure.⁹² On the other hand, it seems that China is becoming an alternative power not only for the Asian countries, but also for other countries of the world. As a potential hegemonic power, it has succeeded in rapidly developing the instruments necessary for its transition to a global player by the changes it has made in its foreign policy understanding.

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