

China's Rise: Implications for the International Political System

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Abstract

This study discusses China's rise as a global power and its impact on the international political system. Through an analysis of economic, military, and diplomatic aspects, this study evaluates how China's development has affected the world order previously dominated by Western powers, especially the United States. China's Belt and Road (BRI) initiative, military modernization, and increased use of soft power reflect a major transformation in the global power structure. The results show that China's rise is creating tensions, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, and challenging the international political order through strategic competition with the United States. However, it also finds that China's rise provides opportunities for restructuring a more balanced world order, provided it is managed through constructive multilateral diplomacy. The study concludes that the change in global power triggered by China's rise must be responded to with preventive efforts to prevent further tensions. For this reason, inclusive and adaptive international cooperation is the key to future global political stability.

Keywords: China's rise, Belt and Road Initiative, power transition, Thucydides Trap

Introduction

China's rise as a global power over the past two decades has profoundly changed the international political landscape, driven primarily by its rapid economic growth and growing influence. As the world's second-largest economy, China's economic power has positioned it as a key player in global affairs, impacting international commodity prices and driving growth among resource-exporting countries (Efe Can Gürcan, 2024) and (Mohamad Zreik, 2024). This economic rise is closely tied to China's foreign policy, which has evolved to reflect its growing power and encompass strategic partnerships and assertive territorial claims (John D. Petry, 2024). The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exemplifies China's approach to enhancing regional connectivity and economic cooperation, reshaping geopolitical dynamics by creating new economic interdependencies and fostering alliances (Mohamad Zreik, 2024). As China continues to assert its influence, its foreign policy is not only aimed at securing energy resources but also seeks to redefine the structure of global governance, thereby influencing international norms and alliances (John D. Petry, 2024). Consequently, understanding the implications of China's rise is crucial to analyzing its role in shaping global power dynamics and addressing potential conflicts in the international system (Fady Zgheib, 2024).

China's rise in international organizations reflects its strategic intent to reshape the global order in line with its interests and values. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exemplifies this ambition, as it aims to increase China's influence through economic ties with countries in Asia,

Africa, and Europe, thus significantly impacting global trade dynamics (Dennis Wilder, 2024). Furthermore, China's role as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) allows it to assert its interests in international peace and security, often in contrast to the approach of Western powers (Efe Can Gürcan, 2024). Furthermore, China's participation in the G20 underlines its commitment to influencing global economic policy, addressing challenges such as trade imbalances and climate change, further strengthening its position as a key player in global governance (Mohamad Zreik, 2024). Membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) also allows China to engage in reforms to international trade rules, reflecting its broader goal of enhancing its economic standing while navigating the complexities of global trade dynamics (Sadiah Rahman, 2023). As China continues to assert its influence, other countries face challenges in adapting to this shifting power structure, necessitating a re-evaluation of their strategies in international relations and governance (Mohamad Zreik, 2024). China's rise has indeed sparked significant concerns among the United States and its allies, manifesting in a variety of responses aimed at countering its influence. One prominent reaction has been the formation of strategic alliances, as countries seek to ensure stability in the face of China's growing power and assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific region (Antonio José Pagán Sánchez, 2024). The South China Sea dispute exemplifies these tensions, where territorial claims and control of resources highlight not only economic interests but also China's aspirations for regional dominance (Blessing Asuquo-Ekpo, 2024). Moreover, China's ongoing military buildup further exacerbates these concerns, as neighboring countries perceive it as a direct threat to their security (Efe Can Gürcan, 2024). In response, many countries have adopted protectionist trade policies to protect their economic interests against the implications of China's growing influence (John D. Petry, 2024). These developments underscore the complexity of China's rise, which is not only an economic phenomenon but also a challenge to the existing international order. Thus, the interplay of military, economic, and diplomatic strategies will be critical for other countries to navigate the evolving landscape and maintain regional stability (Gregory Moore, 2023) and (Dušan Proroković, 2024).

China's transformation from an export-dependent economy to a leader in innovation and technology is epitomized by initiatives such as "Made in China 2025," which aims to boost domestic industrial capacity and drive technological advancement. This strategic shift not only positions China as a formidable competitor in the global marketplace but also changes the dynamics of international economic relations, as established powers seek to maintain their technological edge (Natalia N. Koledenkova, 2024) and (Lee G. Branstetter, 2024). The emergence of commercial innovation hubs in China reflects its growing role in the global

knowledge economy, where knowledge and innovation are critical to economic growth (R. Abdikarov, 2023) and (Chun Peng, 2024). Furthermore, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) serves as a critical framework for expanding China's influence, fostering economic ties across Asia and beyond, and potentially reshaping global trade patterns (I. V. Kalashnikova, 2024). As China continues to invest in technological innovation, especially in sectors such as new energy vehicles, China is not only enhancing its domestic capabilities but also challenging the existing global industrial landscape (Lee G. Branstetter, 2024). This evolution underscores the importance of China's economic rise in reshaping international economic relations and driving strategic competition with other developed countries (Natalia N. Koledenkova, 2024) and (Chun Peng, 2024).

China's rise as a global power has not been without significant criticism, particularly regarding its human rights record and lack of transparency. Observers are increasingly scrutinizing China's domestic policies, particularly its treatment of ethnic minorities and restrictions on free speech, which are seen as challenges to the democratic values upheld by Western countries (Margaret K. Lewis, 2022) and (Biddulph, Sarah, 2022). The Chinese government often defends its stance by framing international criticism as interference in its domestic affairs, arguing that human rights should be interpreted through a lens compatible with Chinese culture, potentially adopting a Confucian perspective (Kristen Eichensehr, 2022). These ongoing tensions have implications for China's diplomatic relations, as its handling of the issue could lead to increased diplomatic isolation. The perception that China is unwilling to align with global human rights standards could alienate potential allies and complicate its international standing (Wei Zhang, 2023) and (Kristen Eichensehr, 2022). As China continues to assert its influence, the interplay between its domestic policies and international expectations will be critical in shaping its future diplomatic engagements and global relations overall (Margaret K. Lewis, 2022) and (Biddulph, Sarah, 2022). China's rise as a global power presents significant challenges to regional and global security, particularly given its growing military capabilities and assertive foreign policies. The ongoing military buildup is a significant factor in rising tensions with neighboring countries, especially in the context of territorial disputes in the South China Sea and fraught relations with Taiwan (Dennis Wilder, 2024) and (N. H. Quyet, 2023). These disputes are not just about territory; they are closely tied to China's strategic interests and its desire to assert dominance in the Asia-Pacific region (Lorenca Bejko, 2024) and (Sadiah Rahman, 2023). The South China Sea, a vital maritime region, has seen increasing conflict as China asserts its claims, leading to increased friction with other claimants and raising concerns about regional stability (Sadiah Rahman, 2023). Likewise, tensions with Taiwan

exemplify the potential for conflict stemming from China's military ambitions and its unwillingness to compromise on territorial integrity (N. H. Quyet, 2023). As these dynamics develop, it is critical to analyze how other countries are responding to the security challenges posed by China's rise, especially in terms of diplomatic strategy and military readiness, to ensure peace and stability in the region (NULL AUTHOR_ID, Jill L., 2024) and (Lorenca Bejko, 2024).

Literature Review

International Power Theory and Balance of Power

China's rise is often analyzed through the framework of balance of power theory in international relations. Morgenthau (1948) and Waltz (1979) argued that the international system is anarchic, and states will seek to maintain a balance of power to maintain security and stability. According to this theory, China's rise has changed the global balance of power, especially in relation to the United States and the Western alliance. Authors such as Mearsheimer (2001) argue that China's rise will lead to tensions and conflicts as other major powers seek to balance China's power through military alliances and strategic positioning.

Power Transition Theory and the New World Order

The literature related to power transitions is also relevant in explaining the implications of China's rise. The power transition theory proposed by Gilpin (1981) and later by Organski (1958) suggests that when a new state rises and challenges a hegemonic state, the international system tends to experience tensions and potential conflicts. Allison (2017) developed the concept of the "Thucydides Trap," which describes the risk of conflict between a rising power (China) and a dominant power (the United States). This study highlights how China's rise could lead to the destabilization of the international political system if both countries fail to manage their rivalry.

Global Political Economy and the Belt and Road Initiative

From an economic perspective, China's rise is also understood through its contribution to transforming the global economy. Nye's (2004) study on "soft power" and global economic influence states that China's economic power has not only impacted the trade and investment sectors, but also the creation of new diplomatic networks, as seen in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). According to Li (2018), the BRI is not only a tool for China to increase access to the global market, but also to expand its political influence in various regions, especially Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe. The BRI has sparked debate among scholars as to whether this

initiative is purely an economic drive or a geopolitical tool used to secure China's strategic interests.

Adaptive Authoritarianism Theory and China's Development Model

It is also important to examine China's political and economic development model, often referred to as "state capitalism" or "adaptive authoritarianism." Peerenboom (2007) argues that the Chinese model offers an alternative for developing countries that find Western liberal democracy inappropriate for their socio-political context. Huang (2008) explains that China's economic success, even under an authoritarian regime, challenges the assumption that only democracy can support economic growth. Additionally, Bremmer (2010) notes that countries seeking to adopt the Chinese model may be tempted by the immediate economic success, but they must also consider the long-term challenges of political stability and civil liberties.

The Impact of China's Rise on Global Security

From a security perspective, China's military rise has also been a widely studied topic, especially in regional contexts such as the South China Sea and the East China Sea. According to Fravel (2008), China's maritime policies, which involve increasing its military power and expanding its influence in the region, have raised concerns among neighboring countries as well as other major powers such as the United States and Japan. This study is in line with Kaplan's (2011) view, which asserts that China's rise in the Indo-Pacific region will be the center of attention in global geopolitical studies in the future, where competition to control strategic trade routes and natural resources will intensify.

The International Political System's Response to China's Rise

Other literature reviews focus on how other countries, both in the West and the East, respond to China's rise. According to Ikenberry (2011), Western countries, especially the United States, are navigating how to maintain the liberal international order while accommodating the rise of authoritarian powers such as China. On the other hand, Callahan (2005) suggests that countries in Asia tend to adopt a pragmatic approach to China, recognizing its economic influence while remaining wary of its strategic implications.

Methods

The research on China's rise and its implications for the international political system will use a qualitative approach, with case study methods and literature analysis. This method is chosen to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon of China's rise and its impact on global dynamics, both from the perspective of international relations theory and empirical evidence, with a focus on in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of China's rise. This approach is suitable

for exploring complex changes in the international political order and for understanding dynamics that are difficult to measure quantitatively, such as changes in diplomatic relations, the balance of power, and geopolitical influence. This research will apply the case study method to examine several aspects of China's rise in the international political system. The case studies will include: Economic case: The “Belt and Road” Initiative. Military case. Diplomatic case.

Results and Discussion

China's Economic Rise: Impact on the Global Economy

Historically, the rise of emerging powers in the international system has often triggered tensions, as outlined in the “power transition” theory. According to this theory, when a rising power such as China begins to challenge the status quo, tensions with established powers such as the United States become inevitable. In this regard, the debate about the “Thucydides Trap” often arises, where the potential for conflict between a rising power and a dominant power becomes greater (Allison, 2017). Therefore, understanding how China's rise affects international relations is important in analyzing global stability.

Economically, China is now a global powerhouse that plays a key role in international trade, foreign investment, and global infrastructure development through the “Belt and Road” (BRI) initiative. This ambitious project reflects China's efforts to integrate more countries into its economic orbit and expand its political influence in various parts of the world. Several studies have shown that the BRI has provided economic benefits to participating countries, but also poses risks of financial and geopolitical dependence on China (Hurley, Morris, & Portelance, 2018).

The results of this study indicate that the BRI has not only increased China's economic influence but also strengthened its position as a strategic partner for many developing countries. However, the BRI has also raised concerns regarding economic dependence and high debt among recipient countries of Chinese aid. This has caused tensions with major countries such as the United States and the European Union, which see the BRI as China's geopolitical attempt to expand its power.

In addition to the economy, China's military strengthening has also created major changes in the global security architecture. China's military modernization, including increasing defense spending and developing advanced military technology, has raised concerns among its neighbors and US allies in the Asia-Pacific region. The South China Sea has become one of the centers of tension that reflects China's expansionist efforts and challenges to global security policy. Research by Erickson (2020) shows that China's military activities in the region increase the risk of regional conflict, especially with Southeast Asian countries.

Chinese diplomacy has also undergone major transformations. China's "soft power" approach through economic aid, investment, and active involvement in various international organizations has improved its global image. However, some experts argue that this step is also part of a strategy to build political influence and strengthen power at the global level. According to Nye (2004), successful "soft power" is when a country can influence other countries to follow its interests without using coercion. Other studies, such as those conducted by Zhao (2019), highlight that China's diplomacy in Africa and Asia has created new dependencies that have led to criticisms of "debt trap diplomacy."

China's Military Policy: Changes in Global Security

In addition to the economy, China's rise is also seen in its growing military power. China's military modernization that began in the 1990s aims to improve the country's defense and offensive capabilities. One of the most prominent examples is China's policy in the South China Sea. In recent decades, China has expanded its claims to strategic areas in the South China Sea through the construction of military bases and installations on artificial islands.

The study results show that China's military expansionism in the South China Sea has increased tensions with neighboring countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia, and triggered a response from the United States and its allies in the region. The power competition in this region raises concerns about a military conflict, which could ultimately threaten regional and international stability.

Chinese Diplomacy: Transformation in the International Political Order

China has changed its diplomatic approach by becoming more active in international organizations such as the UN, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the G20. China's role in these international organizations shows its commitment to becoming a significant global player. Through diplomacy, referred to as "soft power", China seeks to build a positive image in the international world through economic assistance, investment, and multilateral cooperation. However, the study also found that the success of Chinese diplomacy faces challenges from Western countries that are skeptical of China's strategic intentions, especially related to issues such as human rights, trade policies, and geopolitical influence. China is often seen as trying to change international norms and rules to better suit its national interests, which has made some countries worried about China's future dominance.

Implications for the International Political System

China's rise has significant implications for the dynamics of the international political system. The theory of "power transition" indicates that when a new great power emerges, there is usually tension between the rising power and the established power. In this context, China

and the United States appear to be on a path toward a “Thucydides Trap,” where the potential for conflict between the two could increase as China rises. However, the study also shows that despite the potential for conflict, China and the United States have strong incentives to avoid open warfare. The two countries are highly integrated economically, and their relationship includes cooperation on several global issues such as climate change and international security. Therefore, the international political order is likely to shift toward a more multipolar one, with global powers including China, the United States, the European Union, and Russia playing a role in determining the direction of global policy.

Global Responses to China’s Rise

Most countries have responded to China’s rise with two different approaches: some countries see China as a strong economic partner and seek to strengthen diplomatic and trade ties, while others, especially Western countries, are more likely to view China as a threat to the global order dominated by liberal principles. Countries such as the United States and Japan have increasingly strengthened their military alliances and economic cooperation to balance China’s influence in the Asia-Pacific region. This study also shows that China's rise is driving the emergence of more pragmatic foreign policies in developing countries, which seek to take advantage of the opportunities offered by China without getting completely caught up in great power competition..

Conclusion

China’s rise as a global economic and military power in recent decades has brought about fundamental changes in the international political system. This transformation has challenged the world order that has been dominated by the United States and Western powers. Through economic initiatives such as the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI), military modernization, and the use of “soft power” in global diplomacy, China has significantly expanded its influence. However, this rise has also created new tensions and challenges, especially in the Asia-Pacific region and in relations with major powers such as the United States.

This analysis shows that China’s rise has had a major impact on various aspects, from regional stability to global power structures. The theory of “power transition” and the concept of “Thucydides Trap” offer relevant perspectives in understanding how the rise of a new power can trigger tensions with established dominant powers. On the other hand, China’s economic and military diplomacy in various regions has created risks of dependency and changed the geopolitical landscape.

The main challenge for the international community is how to manage these changes to avoid escalating conflicts that are detrimental to all parties. The existing international political system must be able to adapt to this new dynamic through more inclusive multilateral diplomacy and policies that take

into account global interests, not just individual state interests. In this context, both China and the United States have a great responsibility to prevent open confrontation that could undermine global stability. China's rise not only poses challenges to the existing international political system, but also offers opportunities for a more just and balanced restructuring of the world order. However, this success will depend largely on how major powers and international organizations manage the shift in global power peacefully and constructively.

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