

# China and Liberal Values in International Relations

Opposing the Promotion of Democracy, Human Rights and Liberal Market Economy

Clingendael Report

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### **About the authors**

**Ties Dams** has a Master's degree in political theory from University College London, and contributed to this article during an internship at Clingendael Institute.

**Frans Paul van der Putten** is a senior researcher at the Clingendael Institute.

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Clingendael Institute  
P.O. Box 93080  
2509 AB The Hague  
The Netherlands

Email: [info@clingendael.nl](mailto:info@clingendael.nl)  
Website: <http://www.clingendael.nl/>

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# Summary

China and the West have different views on the role of liberal values in international relations. Western countries promote the concepts of democracy, human rights and liberal market economy – which express key liberal values – at the international level and strive to establish and strengthen international norms that are derived from these concepts. Although liberal values and related norms play a significant role in the contemporary international system, China's leaders have found ways for their country to exist and even thrive in such an environment, while at the same time keeping political and economic liberties highly constrained at the domestic level. Still, as China becomes a global power, the question should be asked as to whether China might use its influence to diminish the role of liberal values at the international level. This Clingendael Report explores how China's rise as an influential global actor relates to the position of liberal values in international relations, in particular to Western policies of promoting liberal values. Given the still relatively early stage of China's emergence as a global power, this question will be approached from a theoretical perspective, by means of identifying and discussing relevant theories, concepts and views.

This report finds that the relationship between the rise of China and Western interests in norms that are based on liberalism in global governance is ambiguous. Such norms have been crucial to the West in general, and the United States in particular, in building the post-war international order according to their national interest. Still, the peaceful evolution approach – in both the economic and the political spheres – is of vital importance to Western powers' foreign policy at large, and these tools of Western power rest to a great extent on justification and legitimization by the normative framework of liberalism in global governance. In this sense, it can be said that the fact that China's views on liberal values are gaining a greater share in the global marketplace of ideas negatively affects Western and, in particular, American interests. Even though China's peaceful rise narrative embraces the coexistence of multiple ideologies in global governance, and therefore does not constitute a threat to liberalism as communism did, it may still be a cause for conflict. China does not present liberalism with a counter-ideology, but it does oppose the promotion of liberal values through its counter-norm of international diversity. Such a struggle over norms-setting would most likely take place at the level of multilateral governance organizations, both within traditional organizations and between these and recently established alternatives in which China has a high degree of influence.

# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

China and the West have different views on the role of liberal values in international relations. Western countries promote the concepts of democracy, human rights and liberal market economy – which express key liberal values – at the international level and strive to establish and strengthen international norms that are derived from these concepts. Michael McFaul observed that, by the early twenty-first century, democracy promotion as a foreign policy goal had become acceptable to most of the international community and that it consequently had become an international norm.<sup>2</sup> According to Christopher Hobson and Milja Kurki, ‘the current international order is one uniquely predisposed towards fostering democracy’. Furthermore, ‘democracy has become an important benchmark for full legitimacy and acceptance in contemporary international politics’.<sup>3</sup> If this is the case, it confronts China with a severe challenge, since it implies that as long as it remains a non-democratic country, China will not enjoy ‘full legitimacy’. Even worse for the Chinese leadership, in such an international system, efforts by other states and international actors to foster democratization in China are morally legitimate. Similar legitimacy issues could also be relevant to efforts by outside actors to improve human rights in China and to diminish the role of the state and the Communist Party in the Chinese economy.

Clearly, China’s leaders have until now found ways for their country to exist and even to thrive in a world where liberal values play a significant role. Yet as China becomes a global power, the question should be asked as to whether China might use its influence to diminish the role of liberal values at the international level. Indeed, according to Edward Friedman, China’s rise has enabled it ‘to contribute to a roll-back of democracy globally’,<sup>4</sup> a process that he believes has already begun. John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge argue that Western liberal democracy is already in crisis and that the West needs to respond to the challenge posed by the authoritarian state models of China and Singapore by innovating with their own governance model. As they see it, ‘whoever wins this contest to lead the [next] revolution in modern governance will stand a good chance

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1 The authors are grateful to Jikkie Verlare, who conducted part of the research on which this report is based, and to the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs for giving financial support.

2 McFaul, M. (2004), ‘Democracy Promotion as World Value’, *The Washington Quarterly*, 28:1, p. 148.

3 Hobson, C. and Kurki, M. (2013), ‘Democracy Promotion as a Practice of Liberal World Order’, in Tim Dunne and Trine Flockhart (eds), *Liberal World Orders* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 200.

4 Friedman, E. (2009), ‘China’s Rise Challenges Democracy’, p. 1, paper available at <http://www.bibliopedant.com/niFkl224yl10RwhXpSl7> (accessed 20 September 2014).

of dominating the global economy'.<sup>5</sup> However, as will be discussed in more detail below, G. John Ikenberry argues that China will continue to accommodate what he calls the 'liberal international order', because ultimately this provides it with greater benefits than if it tries to change this order.<sup>6</sup>

This report explores how China's rise as an influential global actor relates to the position of liberal values in international relations, in particular to Western policies of promoting liberal values. Given the still relatively early stage of China's emergence as a global power, this question will be approached from a theoretical perspective, by means of identifying and discussing relevant theories, concepts, and views.

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5 Their solution for the West is to innovate with the state by taking good ideas wherever they can find them and to limit the role of government in the economy; see John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge (2014), 'The State of the State: The Global Contest for the Future of Government', *Foreign Affairs*, July/August, p. 132.

6 Ikenberry, G.J. (2011), 'The Future of the Liberal World Order: Internationalism after America', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June, pp. 57-58; and G. John Ikenberry (2014), 'The Illusion of Geopolitics: The Enduring Power of the Liberal Order', *Foreign Affairs*, May/June, pp. 56-68.

# Liberal Values and International Relations

Liberalism has shaped the contemporary international system. Two different strands of liberalism, in particular, are relevant: one dating back to the early modern period emphasizing sovereignty and the equality of states; and a more recent one focusing on a notion of moral universalism.<sup>7</sup> The 1648 Peace of Westphalia gave rise to the idea that states are the sole legitimate actors of the international political arena. Moreover, states are free and equal therein, meaning that each country is at liberty to choose its own social, political and economic system and that it has the right of non-interference by foreign states on domestic matters. The Westphalian international order rests solely on the voluntary consent of the states engaging in it.<sup>8</sup> According to Ikenberry, 'Westphalian norms have been violated and ignored, but they have, nonetheless, been the most salient and agreed-on parts of the international order'.<sup>9</sup>

During the twentieth century, a second project of liberalism – led by the United States – introduced norms of moral universalism, based on the liberal values of democracy and human rights. The aim of promoting democracy abroad had been a core element in how the United States exercises its international power ever since it assumed political control over the Philippines in 1898.<sup>10</sup> As the geographical reach of the United States' political influence expanded, democracy promotion became a major and eventually an integral part of US foreign policy. From the late 1970s, human rights promotion was added as an important twin objective to democracy promotion in US foreign policy.<sup>11</sup> In the post-Cold War era, many other state actors, in particular the European Union (EU), its member states and various other allies and close partners of the United States, have also fostered democracy and human rights internationally. There is also a substantial group of non-Western democracies, including influential countries such as India, Brazil and

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7 Ikenberry, 'The Future of the Liberal World Order', pp. 58–59.

8 Ginsburg, T. (2010), 'Eastphalia as the Perfection of Westphalia', *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies*, 17:1, pp. 29–30; and Ikenberry, 'The Future of the Liberal World Order', pp. 58–59.

9 Ikenberry, 'The Future of the Liberal World Order', p. 59.

10 Smith, T. (2012), *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), p. 5.

11 Smith, *America's Mission*, p. 62.



South Africa, that regard democracy and political human rights as important values but that do not engage in active promotion of these values abroad.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of the US-led drive to promote democracy and human rights as global values, the concepts of ‘universal human rights’ and (more recently) the ‘responsibility to protect’ became prevalent in international political discourse. These norms have become institutionalized in bodies such as the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and they give the international community in certain situations not only the formal right, but even the moral obligation, to interfere in the affairs of another sovereign nation-state.<sup>13</sup> This seems to contradict with Westphalian norms of sovereignty. Tom Ginsburg states:

“ It is a commonplace notion that Westphalian sovereignty has been diminished by the post-war system of the United Nations and its associated human rights instruments that purport to make domestic treatment of citizens a matter of international concern. [...] While the protection of human rights was a normative goal of the system, the actual operating system of international law continued to emphasize state consent, non-interference and sovereign equality.<sup>14</sup>

Apart from these political norms, economic norms form an important and related part of international liberalism in global governance. During the second half of the twentieth century, US foreign policy – which strongly influenced the main multilateral organizations in the economic sphere – built on the policy of promoting economic liberalism that had previously been pursued by Great Britain when it was a global power. By the 1990s, the ‘Washington Consensus’, a term coined by John Williamson,<sup>15</sup> played a key role in the development policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the World Trade Organization (WTO) and Western governments. In broad terms, the Washington Consensus entailed development aid to countries under certain conditions of policy reform. These pertain to controlling inflation and reducing fiscal deficits, opening domestic markets to the rest of the world through trade and capital account liberalization, and the liberalization of domestic product and factor markets

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12 Indonesia, as a large non-Western democracy, actively promotes the concept of democracy through the Bali Democracy Forum, which aims to create a ‘dialogue-based on sharing experiences and best practices that adhere to the principle of equality, mutual respect and understanding, with the participating countries sharing its ownership’; see [http://bdf.kemlu.go.id/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=445&Itemid=106&lang=en](http://bdf.kemlu.go.id/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=445&Itemid=106&lang=en) (accessed 16 November 2014).

13 Etzioni, A. (2011), ‘Changing the Rules’, *Foreign Affairs*, 90:6, p. 172; and Ikenberry, ‘The Future of the Liberal World Order’, p. 61.

14 Ginsburg, ‘Eastphalia as the Perfection of Westphalia’, p. 30.

15 Williamson, J. (1990), ‘What Washington Means by Policy Reform’, in J. Williamson, *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 1990).

through privatization and deregulation.<sup>16</sup> After the 1990s, when Asia suffered its financial crisis and economic growth proved disappointing in Latin America and the former Soviet countries, the policy package was augmented to include more institutional reforms such as financial regulation and prudential supervision, governance and anti-corruption measures, legal and administrative reform, labour-market ‘flexibility’ and social safety nets.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, more emphasis was placed on this idea in the process of a country modernizing – that the spread of democracy and human rights ought to go hand in hand with free market reforms.<sup>18</sup> Although the term ‘Washington Consensus’ is no longer widely used and the concept has been severely criticized, the United States and other Western governments continue to promote openness of economic systems internationally.

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16 Gore, C. (2000), ‘The Rise and Fall of the Washington Consensus as a Paradigm for Developing Countries’, *World Development*, 28:5, pp. 789–790.

17 Rodrik, D. (2010), *The Global Governance of Trade as if Development Really Mattered*, report submitted to the UNDP, p. 11.

18 Lum, T. (2008), *Comparing Global Influence: China’s and US Diplomacy, Foreign Aid, Trade, and Investment in the Developing World*, CRS Report for the US Congress, p. 9.

# China's Rise and Liberalism

Since the 1970s, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has emerged as an important actor with regard to global governance. China has acquired membership of various institutions of international cooperation, most notably the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in 1971 and the WTO in 2001. China is in many ways different from the powers that have shaped global governance so far. From the 1940s, and even more so after 1990, the United States and its Western allies heavily influenced the evolution of the system of global governance. These countries favour a strong role for liberal values in international relations, and support the expansion of norms related to economic liberalism and liberal democracy. However, the Chinese government is no supporter of liberalism, neither internationally nor domestically. The country itself is not a liberal democracy, and its economy, although partly liberalized since the 1980s, remains firmly controlled by the state.

Theorizing about the relationship between the rise of China and norms based on liberalism in international relations can take a number of forms. One possibility is to take a liberal perspective, by arguing that liberalism will prove to be the end of history. In this view, although China certainly comes from a different past, its future is liberal, in which it will accept economic and political norms based on liberalism, and institutions as universally true and applicable, by the virtue of reason. Within this liberal framework, it might be expected that China will change the international order in practice, while adopting liberalism in theoretical essence. China's rise would thus be part of the evolution of the system, rather than the end of it. However, a theory on the other side of the ideological spectrum would say that China will turn out to be a radically different kind of superpower than any that we have seen so far, with its rise bringing a fundamentally different ideological system to the table. Such a theory rejects the assumption of the universality of liberal values and puts forward a communitarian approach to the theory and practice of international political order, relying on notions of Chinese essentialism.

G. John Ikenberry is clearly a proponent of the liberal view, as he states:

“ China and other emerging great powers do not want to contest the basic rules and principles of the liberal international order; they wish to gain more authority and leadership within it. Indeed, today's power transition represents not the defeat of the post-1945 world order, in which liberalism plays a major role, but its ultimate ascendance.<sup>19</sup>

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19 Ikenberry, 'The Future of the Liberal World Order', pp. 57–58.

Ikenberry argues that there are several reasons for this liberal international order to persist. First, the period since 1945 is the longest period of 'great power peace' in modern history. According to Ikenberry, this is because of the dominance of democracy, assuming that democratic countries are less likely to wage war in general and especially on one another, and because of nuclear deterrence, which raises the cost of war. It would not be in any party's interest to disrupt such a peaceful order. Moreover, Ikenberry argues, the liberal international order is 'easy to join and hard to overturn'. Multilateral institutions bear a relatively low threshold for entry and provide great economic and political gains. Finally, Ikenberry finds that emerging powers such as China do not pose a fundamentally different alternative to the existing international order. Actually, he concludes that China, as well as other influential non-Western countries such as Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa, are becoming increasingly more compatible with norms based on liberalism and are becoming integrated into the existing world order.<sup>20</sup>

A number of points can be made regarding Ikenberry's trust in the triumph of liberalism. First, the correlation between modernization and democratization that Ikenberry assumes to exist has so far not been affirmed in China's case. China is developing successfully under authoritarian rule, with strict limits on political and civil freedoms. A shift of its political system towards democracy has not happened so far, and China's economy seems to thrive nonetheless. Tom Ginsburg states that the democratic peace theory to which Ikenberry adheres does not fit the trajectory that many Asian countries are currently on: 'Only if Asia's political preferences and infant regional institutions magically transformed into mirrors of Europe would we expect an Asia-centred economic order to converge with the European model of politics and law. This outcome seems highly unlikely'.<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that it is impossible that China will eventually democratize in some way or another. Martin Jacques, author of a widely read but also controversial book, *When China Rules the World*, predicts: 'Chinese democracy will share certain universal characteristics with democracies elsewhere, but will also of necessity be highly distinctive, expressive of its roots in Chinese society and traditions'.<sup>22</sup>

From the late nineteenth century, when it lost its status as East Asia's leading power, until the present, China has actively pursued integration into the existing order. This integration has given China great benefits and the costs of 'exiting' would be high. In this regard, it makes sense to say, as Ikenberry does, that the international order is not to be discarded as a relic of the twentieth century, but rather that rising powers

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20 Ikenberry, G.J. (2010), 'The Liberal International Order and its Discontents', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, 38:509, pp. 514–515.

21 Ginsburg, 'Eastphalia as the Perfection of Westphalia', p. 28.

22 Jacques, M. (2009), *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books), p. 220.

such as China are finding their place within it. This is coherent with China's 'peaceful rise' policy, which has been at the centre of the 'opening up' philosophy that started in Deng Xiaoping's era and has defined China's foreign relations strategy ever since. In 2005, Zheng Bijian wrote that 'China's peaceful rise will further open its economy so that its population can serve as a growing market for the rest of the world, thus providing increased opportunities for – rather than posing a threat to – the international community'.<sup>23</sup> China acknowledges the importance of international cooperation and global governance to its economic development. As Barry Buzan observed, 'China put its own economic development as top priority, and deduced from that the need for stability in its international relations both regionally and globally'.<sup>24</sup> Finally, Alastair Iain Johnston stated that, to the extent that one can identify an international community on major global issues, the PRC has become more integrated into international institutions than ever before.<sup>25</sup>

In 2001, its accession to the WTO meant a great deal to China, precisely because of the economic benefits resulting from accession. However, China's behaviour in negotiations is still deemed controversial. The problem may lie in China's relationship to norms based on liberalism. China's two most important goals in the WTO are to protect its interests better and to build its international image.<sup>26</sup> China seems to have little sense of duty to promote liberalism; rather, China feels that it is, at the moment, to its benefit to partake in it. To argue that China integrates into the international order for the sake of liberalism would be to reason the wrong way around: China will be compatible with norms based on liberalism as long as such norms are compatible with Chinese interests. China is not integrating into the liberal international order because it shares the liberal ideology, but because it serves China's needs. Although Ikenberry assumes that China will indefinitely continue to find it useful to act within a system based on liberal values, it could also be argued that at some point in the future, China, as a full-on superpower in both economic and political terms, and finding that its own interests conflict with certain norms based on liberalism, will not be constrained by moral or ideological considerations to neglect these. China currently applies a similar approach to human rights issues, or to its dispute with the United States and the European Union on the value of the yuan.

China is often said to value strongly the idea of Westphalian sovereignty and non-interference. Generally, it has not been supportive of US military interventions, or the institutional-reform side of the Washington Consensus. China's so-called

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23 Zheng Bijian (2005), 'China's "Peaceful Rise" to Great-Power Status', *Foreign Affairs*, 84:5, p. 24.

24 Buzan, B. (2010), 'China in International Society: Is "Peaceful Rise" Possible?', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 3, p. 12.

25 Johnston, A.I. (2003), 'Is China a Status Quo Power?', *International Security*, 27:4.

26 Jing Gu, John Humphrey and Dirk Messner (2007), 'Global Governance and Developing Countries: The Implications of the Rise of China', *World Development*, 36:2.

'century of humiliation'<sup>27</sup> gave the Chinese government ample reason to be defensive about Chinese sovereignty.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in this sense, China may well out of ideological motivation share a liberal norm with the West.<sup>29</sup> However, as Chinese interests are changing, China's support of sovereignty may be changing too. In June 2007, as a member of the UNSC, China persuaded the Sudanese government to accept UN Resolution 1769, which empowered UN troops to use 'all necessary means' to protect themselves, defend civilians and secure the safe passage of aid. Moreover, despite China's initial reluctance to continue supporting a UN mission in Somalia in the 1990s, which it viewed as being intrusive, it later – to the surprise of all other fifteen UNSC members – took the lead in proposing foreign intervention in this same country.<sup>30</sup> Under pressure of protecting its own investments in other countries and maintaining its image in the international community, China is also increasingly willing to let go of its principled support of Westphalian sovereignty, at least when it does not concern invasions of its own territory.

Wang Gungwu argues that because China has often seen the United Nations unable to respond to critical power shifts in various parts of the world, prevent violations of the sovereignty of weaker countries by stronger neighbours, help economic development in poorer societies, or save lives in man-made conflicts and natural disasters, it is not wholeheartedly convinced that the liberal international order really works. According to Wang, '[t]herefore, China can be seen as being simply realistic, if not cynical, when it uses the dominant framework to protect and advance its own national interest. There may be not much faith in the system, and little readiness to go out of its way in its defence'.<sup>31</sup> Wang relates China's stance towards norms based on liberalism in global governance to the idea of perpetual change, as put forward in the ancient Chinese *Book of Changes*, or *Yijing*, that 'the only proposition that does not change is that everything else is subject to change'.<sup>32</sup> From this perspective, China has a fundamental distrust in ideas such as Immanuel Kant's perpetual peace and the universality of human rights, which runs against Ikenberry's notion of a lasting liberal international order that will outlive America's hegemony.

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27 This refers to the period from the First Opium War to the time when the communists came to power, including the Japanese occupation of China.

28 Jacques, *When China Rules the World*, pp. 70–100.

29 Ginsburg indeed argues that China may be more in touch with the roots of liberalism than many Western countries, as the former promotes Westphalian sovereignty, and the latter undermine them by means of human rights and responsibility to protect; see Ginsburg, 'Eastphalia as the Perfection of Westphalia'.

30 Roque, P.A. and Alden, C. (2008), 'China and the UN Security Council: From Observer to Activist', *SAIIA China in Africa Policy Briefing*, 2, p. 3.

31 Wang Gungwu (2008), 'China and the International Order: Some Historical Perspectives', in Wang Gungwu and Zheng Yongnian (eds), *China and the New International Order* (London: Routledge), p. 22.

32 Wang, 'China and the International Order', p. 23.

# China's Counter-norm: Diversity

China's approach to liberalism in international relations is not one of wholehearted acceptance, but of pragmatism. This pragmatism has so far resulted in a certain degree of adaptation, but will this change as China becomes more influential? Ikenberry thinks that a fundamental alternative to liberalism is nowhere to be found. Others disagree, arguing that China may well provide a viable alternative. Should that indeed be the case, two things can happen. First, a new international order based on illiberal values might replace the current liberal order, leading to a paradigmatic shift in international politics. This would be a Hegelian approach to the history of ideas, where an inherent contradiction of two systems leads to an absolute outcome: thesis; antithesis; synthesis. However, similar to 'End of History'-style liberalism, one might reject the epistemology of this approach. The second possibility is that although China's view on the role of values in international relations is theoretically distinct from its Western counterparts, in practice it might be fit for coexistence, or co-evolution. The future of the international order could thus be ideologically pluralist in nature.

Over recent decades, one of the most discussed candidates for a 'China model' would be the 'Beijing Consensus', as popularized by Joshua Cooper Ramo in his 2004 paper of the same name. In this document, Ramo proposes a 'New Physics of Chinese Power', consisting of three theorems. The first theorem relates to innovation, insisting on the necessity of bleeding-edge innovation (for example, fibre optic) rather than trailing-edge technology (such as copper wires). The second theorem stresses the importance for governments to look beyond measures such as per capita GDP and focus instead on quality of life, implying a development model where sustainability and equality become primary considerations, not luxuries. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, 'the Beijing Consensus contains a theory of self-determination, one that stresses using leverage to move big hegemonic powers that may be tempted to tread on your toes'. Ramo concludes that by the power of these theorems, 'China's very emergence is remaking the international order'.<sup>33</sup>

In the paper 'Beijing Consensus: Beijing "*Gongshi*"', Arif Dirlik points to some problems with Ramo's argument, especially concerning the first two theorems. The last theorem has, in Dirlik's eyes, more value:

“ The most important aspect of the Beijing Consensus may be an approach to global relationships that seeks, in multinational relationships, a new global

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33 Cooper Ramo, J. (2004), 'The Beijing Consensus' (London: Foreign Policy Centre), pp. 13–14.

order founded on economic relationships, but which also recognizes political and cultural difference as well as differences in regional and national practices within a common global framework. This global order would also be founded, not upon homogenizing universalisms that inevitably lead to hegemonism, but on a simultaneous recognition of commonality and difference.<sup>34</sup>

China's development, as captured by the term 'Beijing Consensus', thus gives other developing countries an alternative to the 'Washington' doctrine. While the term has not been used often in recent years, the underlying key notion remains relevant. China offers countries the precedent of modernizing without adhering to universalistic liberal political and economic norms. China has not democratized, it has not become a full-fledged human rights advocate, nor has it followed the rules of shock doctrine market liberalization. It makes sense that China's success will give the idea of the Beijing Consensus increasingly more momentum. Indeed, this momentum is felt, and often feared, in the West.<sup>35</sup> China is able to support other countries' divergence from liberal values by being a strong diplomatic and economic partner for these countries. China's relations with Sudan,<sup>36</sup> Mozambique,<sup>37</sup> Ethiopia and Rwanda<sup>38</sup> can be seen as examples of this mechanism. In 2011, South Africa even denied the Dalai Lama a visa to attend the 80th birthday celebration of a fellow Nobel laureate, Desmond M. Tutu, presumably under pressure from the PRC.<sup>39</sup>

The Beijing Consensus may be more than merely China's capitalization of the developing world's disgruntlement with the West. The focus on autonomy and self-determination is not just a reaction to Western hegemony of international liberalism; it is fundamentally different in an epistemological sense. It is both pragmatic and ideological in nature, as it contains many ideas about politics, quality of life and the global balance of power, but it does not deduce a universally applicable model from those ideas, leaving room for localization of globalization practices.<sup>40</sup> The Beijing Consensus cannot be interpreted as a coherent ideology, a set model of values and institutions, like international liberalism.

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34 Dirlik, A. (2006), 'Beijing Consensus: Beijing "Gongshi". Who Recognizes Whom and to What End?', *Globalization and Autonomy Online Compendium*, available at [http://www.globalautonomy.ca/global1/position.jsp?index=PP\\_Dirlik\\_BeijingConsensus.xml](http://www.globalautonomy.ca/global1/position.jsp?index=PP_Dirlik_BeijingConsensus.xml), p. 5.

35 See, for instance, an 18-page special report in *The Economist* on 'The Rise of State Capitalism', with special emphasis on China's role in that process; *The Economist* (21–27 January 2012).

36 Jakobson, L. (2009), 'China's Diplomacy toward Africa: Drivers and Constraints', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 9, pp. 403–433.

37 Robinson, D.A. (2012), 'China's Engagement with Africa: The Case of Mozambique', *Portuguese Journal of International Affairs*, 6, p. 5.

38 Naidu, S. and Mbazima, D. (2008), 'China–African Relations: A New Impulse in a Changing Continental Landscape', *Futures*, 40:8, pp. 748–761.

39 Polgreen, L. (2001), 'Dalai Lama's Visa Request is Denied by South Africa', *New York Times* (4 October 2011).

40 Cooper Ramo, 'The Beijing Consensus', pp. 6–7 and 29–30.



Dirlik rightly describes the “Beijing Consensus” as a notion, rather than as a concept or an idea, because it does not have any of the coherence that we associate with either of those terms.<sup>41</sup> China is a country of continental size, with people living in abject poverty, incredible luxury, distant rural areas, cosmopolitan metropolises, with a state mixing capitalism, communism, ignominy, hegemony, dynasty and modernity. Moreover, China and all of its components are changing at a rate that renders any picture of the status quo blurred. A ‘China model’ would assume contemporary Chinese society to be a utopian example of what a developing country could be, just as Western countries embody the success of liberalism. This is simply not a point where China is at yet.

William Callahan, who studies China from a critical theory perspective, defines China as ‘a country in flux’.<sup>42</sup> In his book *Contingent States: Greater China and Transnational Relations*, he defines the Chinese civilization by four narratives: nativism; conquest; conversion; and diaspora.<sup>43</sup> These are all different cultural relationships that are of influence on the Chinese identity, and on China’s behaviour in global governance. The four narratives are at work at the same time, although they might contradict each other. Although they are all real, none of them entails a single Chinese essence that explains China across time and space. Callahan thus resists notions of Chinese essentialism. They share the same epistemological weaknesses as an Ikenberryian notion of liberalism. Callahan comments on Thomas Kuhn’s argument that ‘revolutions close with the total victory for one of the two opposing camps’ by saying: ‘What used to be true, must now be false’.<sup>44</sup>

The Beijing Consensus allows for such a critical epistemological stance, as it embraces local interpretation of modernization, international pluralism and the coexistence of different ideologies. Moreover, it is in the very fundamental sense based on social change, rather than some theoretical utopian status quo. This relates to Wang Gungwu’s idea that change is important in Chinese thought, as was discussed before. The rise of China will thus put forward a fundamentally different set of norms in global governance, but it will not challenge liberalism in the sense that communism did in the Cold War. The opposite is the case: although China rejects any ideological universalism in an epistemological sense, and acts from this belief, it accepts that norms based on liberalism are a part of the pluralist international order, albeit with its national interests in mind. Rather than countering liberalism with an alternative, homological grand

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41 Dirlik, ‘Beijing Consensus’, p. 1.

42 Callahan, W.A. (2008), ‘A Different World’, *Harvard International Review*, pp. 4–5.

43 Callahan, W.A. (2004), *Contingent States: Greater China and Transnational Relations* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press), p. 28.

44 Callahan, W.A. (2001), ‘China and the Globalization of IR Theory: Discussion of “Building International Relations Theory with Chinese Characteristics”’, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 10:26, pp. 75–88.

narrative, China's ideological strategy is pragmatic and based on seeking legitimization of its actions through specific and localized rhetoric.<sup>45</sup>

Although China does not confront liberalism with a counter-ideology, it does approach the actual or potential norm of promoting liberal values with the counter-norm of international diversity. The central idea in the latter concept is that respect for differences between countries in terms of their political and economic systems is a fundamental precondition for a stable and morally just international system. The current Chinese policy of supporting the concept of international diversity can be traced back to the 1950s and is rooted in a worldview that goes back much further.<sup>46</sup> Although the degree to which China actually implements this notion in its foreign policies has fluctuated in the past and could change again over time,<sup>47</sup> for the foreseeable future it is likely to remain a constant element at the rhetorical level. For now, the active promotion of diversity as an international norm serves China's foreign policy aims very well.<sup>48</sup> It helps China to secure itself against foreign interference in its own affairs, and it also strengthens its standing in the developing world, where many governments feel sympathetic to the idea that (particularly Western) actors should refrain from attempts to foster liberal values across borders.

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45 Dams, T. (2012), 'Ideology/Paralogy: China's Ideological Strategy and Options for the West', extended research thesis, Utrecht University College, p. 41.

46 Van der Putten, F.P. (2013), 'Harmony with Diversity: China's Preferred World Order and Weakening Western Influence in the Developing World', *Global Policy*, 4:1, February, 53–62.

47 According to William Callahan, elite Chinese discussions suggest that China may eventually strive to establish a Sino-centric harmonized world order rather than truly respect diversity; see William A. Callahan (2012), 'Harmony, Unity and Diversity in China's World', in Frans Paul van der Putten (guest editor), 'The Focus: Africa and the Chinese Way. Dealing with Political–Economic Diversity in the Developing World', *The Newsletter*, 60, summer 2012 (Leiden: International Institute for Asian Studies), pp. 22–23.

48 Van der Putten, 'Harmony with Diversity', pp. 53–62.

# Repercussions for Western Political and Economic Interests

We can now continue to the question: how does China's stance towards norms that are based on liberalism relate to Western interests in the international order? The ambiguity of China's place in the international order is of key concern here. Although China values integration, it resists assimilation; even though it does not see itself as a norm entrepreneur like the United States, its growing power and the example of its development could have considerable ideological impact on other countries. China may support pluralism because of pragmatist motives; it cannot deny that this in itself is nonetheless an ideological stance.

Robert Kagan predicts that the growing power of China will mean the return of conflict over political and economic norms in global governance. In an article called 'The End of the End of History', Kagan writes about the future of the international order:

“ Now the re-emergence of the great autocratic powers, along with the reactionary forces of Islamic radicalism, has weakened that order, and threatens to weaken it further in the years and decades to come. The world's democracies need to begin thinking about how they can protect their interests and advance their principles in a world in which they are, once again, powerfully contested.<sup>49</sup>

Kagan finds a correlation between conflict and ideological pluralism. He argues:

“ Nations are not calculating machines. They have the attributes of the humans who create and live in them, the intangible and immeasurable human qualities of love, hate, ambition, fear, honor, shame, patriotism, ideology, and belief – the things people fight and die for, today as in millennia past.<sup>50</sup>

Hence, in Kagan's opinion, the ideological dichotomy between democracy and autocracy that China's rise brings back to international politics necessarily leads to conflict, as states are, by virtue of human nature, ideological entities. However, aside from this notion of human and state nature, and assuming that China's peaceful-rise philosophy makes for a rising power that is not hostile towards global governance

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49 Kagan, R. (2008), *The End of the End of History*, available online at <http://www.tnr.com/article/environment-energy/the-end-the-end-history> (accessed 10 October 2014).

50 Kagan, *The End of the End of History*.

institutions, but instead pragmatic, and its behaviour can therefore be influenced by the manipulation of its real strategic and economic interests, why would conflict for the sake of ideology arise? Perhaps a belief in the moral superiority of liberal values over illiberal values gives ample reason for Western states to advance liberalism and democracy across the globe at the cost of conflict, but is there not more at stake here? What is the relation between the national interest of Western powers and norms based on liberalism in global governance?

In the article 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power', Kupchan and Ikenberry link norms in global governance to the strategic interests of states. 'The exercise of power – and hence the mechanism through which compliance is achieved – involves the projection by the hegemon of a set of norms and their embrace by leaders in other nations',<sup>51</sup> they argue. Apart from the manipulation of material incentives, substantive beliefs are a significant component of hegemonic power. The hegemon often uses both for inducing secondary states to change policies, according to its own interests.<sup>52</sup> Socialization of these norms occurs primarily after wars and political crises – that is, times when domestic politics of secondary states are in a state of turmoil. Material incentives trigger the socialization process, but socialization nevertheless leads to outcomes that are not explicable simply in terms of the exercise of coercive power.<sup>53</sup> A shared belief by an international community in certain universal values limits the bounds of what is understood to be a legitimate policy choice, thereby securing the continuing dominance of the hegemon. Following Max Weber, Ikenberry and Kupchan note a seemingly universal need for those who wield power to legitimize exercising that power.<sup>54</sup>

Ikenberry and Kupchan describe how during the Second World War and its immediate aftermath, the United States constructed the international order according to its own interests by promoting the socialization of norms based on liberalism in Western Europe and Japan. It institutionalized these norms in the UN Charter and the Bretton Woods agreements, and used coercive power to achieve support for these policies, either by placing political conditions on financial aid (for instance in the context of the Marshall Plan, or in the case of the post-war loan to Great Britain), or by direct intervention and internal reconstruction of political institutions (as it did in Germany and Japan).<sup>55</sup> The strategic importance of these allies for the United States' position in global governance is evident. US foreign policy has relied on the latent or active support of Western Europe and Japan, and it is certainly in the American interest that there is a

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51 Ikenberry, G.J. and Kupchan, C.A. (1990), 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power', *International Organization*, 44:3, p. 283.

52 Ikenberry and Kupchan, 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power', p. 286.

53 Ikenberry and Kupchan, 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power', p. 284.

54 Ikenberry and Kupchan, 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power', p. 289.

55 Ikenberry and Kupchan, 'Socialization and Hegemonic Power', pp. 299–307.

normative framework in which this support can be justified. According to Ikenberry and Kupchan, it can be concluded that the advancement of norms based on liberalism in global governance has been crucial to the United States' post-War rise to hegemony and the cohesion of the Western power bloc at large.<sup>56</sup>

During this post-Second World War period, China was not part of the international order to the extent that France, Germany, Great Britain and Japan were, and consequently it did not experience a similar process of US-led socialization. Nevertheless, at the onset of the Cold War, the West started another policy of propagating liberal values in China and other countries, often referred to as 'peaceful evolution', which was first proposed during the 1950s by then US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles as 'the use of peaceful means' to 'accelerate the evolution of government policies within the Sino-Soviet bloc' and 'shorten the expected lifespan of communism'.<sup>57</sup> More specifically, 'the strategy of peaceful evolution aims to transform the Chinese political system by encouraging the introduction of private ownership, free markets, human rights and liberal democracy, all of which would eventually lead to the erosion of Marxism-Leninism as an official ideology in China as well as the end of the China Communist Party (CCP) political monopoly', as Russell Ong explains.<sup>58</sup>

The peaceful evolution strategy does not target the Chinese state directly, but mainly aims to infuse Chinese society with notions of the Western, bourgeois way of life by cultural, educational and intellectual exchanges. However, as the Chinese state still quite strongly bases its power on communism, as articulated in the Four Cardinal Principles, peaceful evolution is considered a political security threat. Actually, Ong argues, it appears to China that peaceful evolution might be the most viable foreign policy instrument that the West could use against it, especially since the use of military force is becoming increasingly less cost-effective. Given the multiple areas in which China is in strategic competition with the United States, such as on issues of Taiwan and trade, peaceful evolution is a key weapon for the Americans. Indeed, it is often seen as being crucial to 'keeping China in check'.<sup>59</sup>

According to Ong, peaceful evolution as a strategy is closely linked to the policy of 'regime change', which is an important part of foreign policy for many Western countries, but most importantly for the United States. Regime change entails the removal of a government that is hostile to or considered illegitimate by the United States and its replacement with a new one, mostly according to the ideologies, values and interests

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56 See also Smith, *America's Mission*.

57 Ong, R. (2007), "'Peaceful Evolution', 'Regime Change' and China's Political Security", *Journal of Contemporary China*, 16:53, p. 717.

58 Ong, "'Peaceful Evolution', 'Regime Change' and China's Political Security', p. 718.

59 Ong, "'Peaceful Evolution', 'Regime Change' and China's Political Security', p. 720.

of the United States, and consequently to norms that are based on liberalism in global governance at large. From the United States' perspective, if more of these authoritarian states can be changed into pro-Western liberal democracies, US national security improves.<sup>60</sup>

Relating this back to Ikenberry and Kupchan's theory on the importance of the socialization of certain norms by secondary states for hegemonic power, it can be said that a normative framework in global governance that justifies both peaceful evolution and regime-change policies is still crucial to the strategic position of the United States and the West in general. Norms that are based on moral universalism, such as human rights and the responsibility to protect, provide such a framework. Moreover, it has great economic benefits, as economic norms that are attractive to the United States are often integrated into regime-change policies, under the heading of the Washington Consensus. Indeed, Sean Lynn-Jones argues that the spread of democracy, which is analogous to the advancement of liberal values by either peaceful evolution or regime-change strategies, is in the United States' national interest, because democracies will not go to war with the United States, democracies will not support terrorism against the United States, democracies will ally with the United States in international conflicts and democracies make better economic partners.<sup>61</sup> To quote a 2008 report to the US Congress by the Congressional Research Service: 'For the United States, its particular interest lies in value preservation and the projection of those values. Many Americans view the spread of democracy and free markets as enhancing national security and often seek improvements in human rights as part of their negotiating goals'.<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, it might be that – under the influence of China's rising power – Western interests in norms based on liberalism also change. In 1993, Deng Xiaoping convinced the Clinton administration to drop the human rights conditionality on China, thus acquiring the 'Most Favored Nation' trading status.<sup>63</sup> In 1997, when Denmark introduced a motion to the UN's Commission on Human Rights to look into the human rights situation in China, the CCP regime disinvited a Danish trade mission. Later, when France stopped supporting such motions, it received multi-billion dollar deals with China.<sup>64</sup> However, China also pressured France greatly after French President Nicolas Sarkozy met with the Dalai Lama in Warsaw in 2008. On Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's tour of Europe, which was aimed at improving trade relations between

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60 Ong, "'Peaceful Evolution', 'Regime Change' and China's Political Security', p. 722.

61 Lynn-Jones, S.M. (1998), 'Why the United States Should Spread Democracy', *Discussion Paper 98-07* (Boston, MA: Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University), pp. 8–9.

62 Lum, *Comparing Global Influence*, p. 6.

63 Friedman, 'China's Rise Challenges Democracy', p. 10.

64 Friedman, 'China's Rise Challenges Democracy', pp. 10–11.

China and the EU, he skipped France, while visiting all of the other major European countries.<sup>65</sup> In June 2007, then Australian opposition Labor Party leader Kevin Rudd refused to meet the Dalai Lama in Canberra after protests from China, even after Rudd criticized Conservative Prime Minister John Howard for doing the same thing in 2002. When China's President Hu Jintao addressed the Australian Parliament in 2003, the Australian government managed to mute protests from some members of the opposition, in response to direct pressure from the Chinese side. Given the current economic turmoil in the Western world, and China's economic power, it is not hard to imagine that the cost of promoting liberal values in China by means of peaceful evolution strategies is increasing rapidly. China's influence can also be noticed in the corporate sphere. Companies such as Yahoo and Walmart have already caused controversy by complying with Chinese policies that, in the West, are deemed against liberal values.<sup>66</sup>

In general, the peaceful evolution strategy is based on the assumption that reform of political norms will accompany the socialization of economic liberal values. Economic engagement with China by the West thus ought to expose the Chinese to Western ideals, consequently slowly turning China into a country that accepts international liberalism. However, China's authoritarian political system and its pragmatic, anti-ideological stance in global governance perhaps give China an edge in the game of global capitalism. For instance, China can trade with such countries as Iran and North Korea – which were labelled 'rogue states' by the United States under President George W. Bush – without being hampered too much by the international normative framework of liberalism in global governance. China forms an attractive partner for trade and aid for developing nations, as it provides support for self-determination and requires no grave institutional reforms. In this setting, it is not unlikely that only 'secondary states' start to value norms based on liberalism less and less, but also that Western powers facing Chinese competition in the international marketplace will become more flexible. In other words, as the international system becomes less liberal, the West may adapt by eventually becoming more pragmatic and less driven by ideology.

As long as Western countries remain committed to liberalism, they have an interest in maintaining and strengthening an international order that is based on liberal values, just as China has an interest in limiting their international role. China's counter-norm of diversity implies a rejection of promoting values across borders, whether through coercion or peaceful evolution. This applies to bilateral relations among states, but also to the multilateral level. In fact, multilateral governance organizations such as the UN, the World Bank, the IMF, or newer additions such as those established by the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), are of particular relevance for

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65 Wu Guoguang (2009), 'A Shadow over Western Democracies: China's Political Use of Economic Power', *China Perspectives*, 2, pp. 82–83.

66 Wu, 'A Shadow over Western Democracies', pp. 84–85.

the shaping of international norms. It is at this level that the West and China compete most directly for influence over the shaping of international norms.<sup>67</sup> China's support for recent initiatives such as the G20, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank of the BRICS countries – new governance structures in which Western governments play a smaller role than in longer-existing institutions, or no role at all – are direct outcomes of this competition.

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67 Van der Putten, F.P. (2013), 'China and Ideological Diversity', *East Asia Forum*, 17 May, available online at <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/05/17/china-and-ideological-diversity/>, (accessed 17 November 2014).



# Conclusion

The relationship between the rise of China and Western interest in norms based on liberalism in global governance is ambiguous. Such norms have been crucial to the West in general, and the United States in particular, in building the post-Second World War international order according to their national interests. Still, the peaceful evolution approach – in both the economic and the political spheres – is of vital importance to Western powers' foreign policy at large, and these tools of Western power rest to a great extent on justification and legitimization by the normative framework of liberalism in global governance. In this sense, the fact that China's views on liberal values are gaining a greater share in the global marketplace of ideas negatively affects Western and, in particular, US interests. Even though China's peaceful-rise narrative embraces the coexistence of multiple ideologies in global governance, and therefore does not constitute a threat to liberalism as communism did, it may still be a cause for conflict. China does not present liberalism with a counter-ideology, but it does oppose the promotion of liberal values through its counter-norm of international diversity. Such a struggle over norms-setting would most likely take place at the level of multilateral governance organizations – both within the traditional organizations and between these and recently established alternatives in which China has a high degree of influence.