
A World Without the West? Empirical Patterns and Theoretical Implications

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Introduction

For the first time in a century, a set of large, populous, and increasingly wealthy countries—this time China, India, and Russia—are on the cusp of achieving, or regaining, great power status. With good reason, those concerned with the trajectory of world politics are carefully watching how these states handle their ascent to international power and status: both history and theory suggest that rising powers can have a profound, sometimes violent, effect on international politics. The goal of this article is to build upon the existing literature that addresses these critical moments of transformation in the global distribution of power. We chart a research agenda that stands in contrast to traditional power transition paradigms. In doing so, rather than seeking to *prove* a new theory, we provide a sampling of empirical tests and theoretical innovations that could be used to explore new avenues of research in this domain.

The prevailing contemporary view of the international political economy is one in which economic globalization, fueled by technology, is leading to

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increasing interconnectedness throughout the world. The topographic image accompanying this prism has been popularized by Thomas Friedman as an increasingly 'flat' world.¹ Although economic powerhouses such as the USA, Europe, and Japan are still outsized nodes, political-economic activity around the globe is believed to be increasingly networked and distributed such that ties deepen among countries in a fashion that gradually equalizes the terms of global connectivity. Indeed, the common empirical preoccupation—even in times of economic downturn—is with documenting the *velocity* of global interconnectivity; and the theoretical preoccupation is with trying to understand the meaning of its magnitude.²

In this article, we investigate the *directionality* of political-economic flows. We probe the question of whether, in contrast to the notion of increasingly uniform interconnectedness, the largest and wealthiest countries in the developing world have begun to preferentially connect with each other and in so doing reduce their relative exposure to Western centers of power. We are particularly interested in examining whether an alternative international order is plausibly beginning to emerge in the developing world, a hypothesis we term a *World Without the West*.³ The development of a World Without the West, distinct from the liberal order led by the USA, would have profound implications for some of the most deeply held constructs of international relations theory. Most centrally, it challenges conventional and foundational theoretical assumptions about how rising powers strategically interact with ruling hegemonies; and how order itself is created and maintained in international systems. Our goal is not to present a new theory of state behavior; we seek instead a descriptive framework to understand the nature of international politics since the end of the Cold War. In doing so, we argue that the conventional conceptualization of international order has constrained the ability of analysts to understand key trends and fundamental changes in world politics.

In the following section, we briefly situate our argument in contemporary theories of change in international order, with a particular emphasis on power transition theory. Next—in the heart of the article—we identify some of the empirical trends that portend the development of an alternative to the postwar international order, the World Without the West.

¹ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

² See, for example, Dani Rodrik, 'How Far Will Economic Integration Go?' *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2000, pp. 177–86. For competing viewpoints on how globalization will affect nation-states and the political-economic relationships among them, two oft-cited works are Robert Gilpin, *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Susan Strange, *The Retreat of the State: Diffusion of Power in the World Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

³ Naazneen Barma et al., 'A World Without the West', *The National Interest*, No. 90, 2007, pp. 23–30.

In concluding, we consider the theoretical implications of a nascent empirical pattern where emerging countries bypass the Western power centers during the course of their collective ascent. We believe that existing theories—to the detriment of both foreign policymaking and international relations scholarship—do not, and cannot, fully capture the many significant international political phenomena now developing independently of the Western powers and the global institutions. The goal of this article is to open a research agenda to address this lacuna.

What is International Order?

Defining international order is an inherently contentious project, providing grist for a standoff between the major international relations paradigms and encompassing, as it often does, a normative stance on the appropriate content of such order.⁴ In this article, our focus is on the question of what role emerging powers might play in the making and shaping of world order. We take as our starting point a working definition of international order as the ‘set of rules and common practices imposed by a dominant state’.⁵ In an effort to understand periods of profound change in international politics, three related strands of international relations theory—power transition theory, theory of hegemonic war, and theory of long cycles—have examined the causes and consequences of rising powers challenging the predominant order.⁶ Though these theoretical approaches at times differ in foci, they all share a common conceptual framework for the evolution of international order. In contrast to balance of power theory, they conceive of a single hegemon shaping international order,⁷ ‘in which relations between states are stable and follow certain patterns and even rules of behavior promoted by the dominant power’.⁸

⁴ See T. V. Paul and John A. Hall, eds. *International Order and the Future of World Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999) for a seminal collection of papers on theories of international order and contemporary challenges associated with its evolution.

⁵ Jonathan DiCicco and Jack Levy, ‘Power Shifts and Problem Shifts: The Evolution of the Power Transition Research Program’, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 1999, pp. 684–5. Note that this view of international order identifies the global hegemon and its preferences as the central components of Hedley Bull’s classical definition of international order: ‘a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society’. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 8.

⁶ On power transition theory see A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1958); A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980); and Jacek Kugler and Douglas Lemke, *Parity and War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996). On hegemonic war theory see Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). On theory of long cycles see George Modelski, *Long Cycles in World Politics* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1987).

⁷ A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics*, pp. 313–6, 325–30.

⁸ Jonathan DiCicco and Jack Levy, ‘Power Shifts and Problem Shifts’, p. 681.

No order can last forever, however—as political, economic, and technological developments lead to differential rates of growth, the gap closes between the power of the hegemon and that of rising powers, who were once too weak to disrupt the hegemon's reign. In the short term, these rising powers are either 'satisfied' and will continue supporting the existing order, or they are 'dissatisfied' and will seek to revise the ordering elements of international politics in ways that better reflect the true distribution of power in the system.⁹ Great power war is a common mechanism of this change.¹⁰ In these precarious moments of disequilibrium, hegemons foresee decline and are incentivized to reestablish their predominance. For rising powers, the time is nearing in which the benefits of changing the system through war outweigh the costs of military conflict. The rise of Germany in the late 1800s and the ensuing world wars in Europe are paradigmatic of this process.

The existing literature outlines a dichotomous set of trajectories for the evolution of international order. In one instance, broad agreement among the key players in world politics leads to the maintenance of the predominant order. In the other, a rising power strongly objects to the common consensus and seeks to refashion the rules of the international game, such that 'the concept of status-quo orientation may be understood to refer to whether a state stands inside or outside of general agreements shared by most members of an international community'.¹¹ Put another way, international relations scholarship surmises that rising powers are presented with a binary choice: assimilate to the existing order, or challenge it. We hypothesize a distinct third possibility: the emergence of an alternative international order that exists parallel to the predominant order. Under this formulation, the focus of study should not be the behavior of a single rising power or waning hegemon, but rather whether a core set of states is gravitating toward a new set of patterns and rules of behavior in international politics. If this process is occurring, analyses wedded to the dominant assimilate-challenge paradigm will fail to see the forest for the trees.

⁹ On the notion of 'dissatisfied' powers see A. F. K. Organski, *World Politics*, chapter 12; A. F. K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger*, pp. 19–23; Steve Chan, 'Can't Get No Satisfaction? The Recognition of Revisionist States', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2004, pp. 207–38; Douglas Lemke and William Reed, 'Power is Not Satisfaction: A Comment on de Soysa, Oneal and Park', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 42, No. 4, 1996, pp. 511–6.

¹⁰ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*; George Modelski, *Long Cycles in World Politics*.

¹¹ Steven Chan, *China, the U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 32.

A World Without the West Take Shapes: Two Empirical Patterns

What would the empirical underpinnings of such an alternative international order look like? We illustrate the emergence of a World Without the West by analyzing patterns of state interaction in two key international domains: (i) global trade and (ii) voting in the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN). We identify the major partners in trade and UN voting of the largest non-Western economies in the world. Our goal is to assess the nature of the connectivity of these emerging countries with different sets of partner countries—in short, we examine how they, as a group, connect among themselves versus how they connect with the West. By connectivity, we mean the extent to which countries interact across a range of political and economic dimensions. A World Without the West takes plausible shape in the empirical data when major non-Western economies trade and coordinate at the United Nations with each other above and beyond what is expected given their level of development, geographic position, market size, domestic political institutions, and geopolitical and colonial ties.

We distinguish two main categories of countries: the West itself, and a second group of emerging countries. We define the West as those countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). By this definition, the West transcends some of its traditional geographic boundaries, as we include Japan, Mexico, South Korea, and Turkey in the group of Western countries. Rather than focusing on geography per se, we use a political and institutional criterion to define membership in the West—a commitment to democracy and a market economy, the two defining institutions of the Western international order.¹² Membership in the OECD serves as our criterion to identify this commitment to democracy and market economy. Given the exploratory nature of this study, the exact boundaries of the West are not a critical component of our argument; our aim is rather to use a well-recognized distinction between the countries at the center of the liberal international order and those emerging nations that may be outside it. We name this second group of countries the *in-play* countries. These are the twenty-nine countries with the largest economies that are not members of the OECD.¹³ With their growing collective might, they are the new emerging powers; it is within this group that we probe for patterns of connectivity that constitute evidence of a nascent alternative international order.

¹² G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Building of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹³ The in-play countries include Algeria, Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Africa, Syria, Thailand, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, and Vietnam.

Our methodology builds upon a standard workhorse of comparative political economy: the gravity model.¹⁴ There are many reasons why countries would trade and coordinate foreign affairs with each other. The gravity model establishes a baseline for the extent of connectivity between countries, whereby bilateral trade (in logs) is a function of the distance between the countries and their joint income (in logs). Following the conventions of political economy scholarship, we augment the basic model with a series of additional factors that are likely predictors of bilateral trade, which include past colonial relations, political institutions, geographic remoteness, cultural commonality, and alliance relations. Our strategy is to measure the ‘usual suspects’—those factors that would predict flows of bilateral relations—and then search for what is unusual in the trade and political relations of non-Western countries.¹⁵

As any of the parameters in the gravity model changes, we would expect a change in the degree of connectivity for reasons explained by established economics and political science theories. For example, from economic theory, we expect that two countries experiencing a period of economic expansion would trade and interact more.¹⁶ From democratic peace theory, we expect that two countries that adopt democratic political institutions would also trade and interact more.¹⁷ As non-Western countries develop and adopt democratic institutions, therefore, they would be more closely linked to each other. These expectations, however, are not *per se* sufficient to establish deepening interconnectivity in the World Without the West.

We argue that a World Without the West is emerging if we detect patterns beyond what we would expect from established international relations theories of change. The kernel of our analysis centers on what is not captured in the gravity model—the *residuals*. If we show that the residuals from the gravity models are far from random noise, but exhibit a systematic temporal trend—that is, if the gravity model loses its predictive ability over time and in the ways that we suggest it will—then we have an indication that

¹⁴ James E. Anderson, ‘A Theoretical Foundation for the Gravity Equation’, *American Economic Review*, Vol. 69, No. 1, 1979, pp. 106–16. The gravity model has been employed to study several aspects of the international political economy including migration, FDI flows and equity flows. See John F. Helliwell, ‘National Borders, Trade and Migration’, NBER Working Paper 6027, 1997; Bruce A. Blonigen, ‘A Review of the Empirical Literature on FDI Determinants’, *Atlantic Economic Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 4, 2005, pp. 383–403; Richard Portes and Hélène Rey, ‘The Determinants of Cross-Border Equity Flows’, *Journal of International Economics*, Vol. 65, No. 2, 2005, pp. 269–96.

¹⁵ Our empirical strategy resembles the one employed by Rose to measure the effect of WTO membership on bilateral trade. Andrew K. Rose, ‘Do We Really Know That the WTO Increases Trade?’ *American Economic Review*, Vol. 94, No. 1, 2004, pp. 98–114.

¹⁶ Jeffrey H. Bergstrand, ‘The Gravity Equation in International Trade: Some Microeconomic Foundations and Empirical Evidence’, *Review of Economics and Statistics*, Vol. 67, No. 3, 1985, pp. 474–81.

¹⁷ Bruce M. Russett and Harry Bliss, ‘Democratic Trading Partners: The Liberal Connection, 1962–1989’, *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 60, No. 4, pp. 1126–47.

a novel empirical phenomenon might be under way. Over time, large non-Western countries would be connected in political and economic interactions *in excess* of what we would otherwise expect.

International Trade

In this section we offer a preliminary test of the hypothesis that an alternative international order is emerging in the developing world. We examine the directionality of trade flows, asking: with whom are the *in-play* countries trading, and what are the dynamics of these connections? We compare actual trade, measured in bilateral imports, between each pair of countries with trade predicted by the gravity model, calculate residuals from the difference between the two, and then normalize these residuals by dividing by actual trade. These normalized residuals are a measure of excess trade: this is trade that is not predictable using standard determinants such as economic size or bilateral distance. Instead, this residual trade is either idiosyncratic, or it can exhibit systematic patterns. If it is idiosyncratic, the theory of trade captured in the gravity model offers an appropriate portrayal of international trade. But if it is not, we are then confronted with an empirical puzzle that calls for a different explanation.

In Figure 1, we report the trade residuals, i.e. the unpredicted imports, of the group of *in-play* countries amongst themselves and with the countries

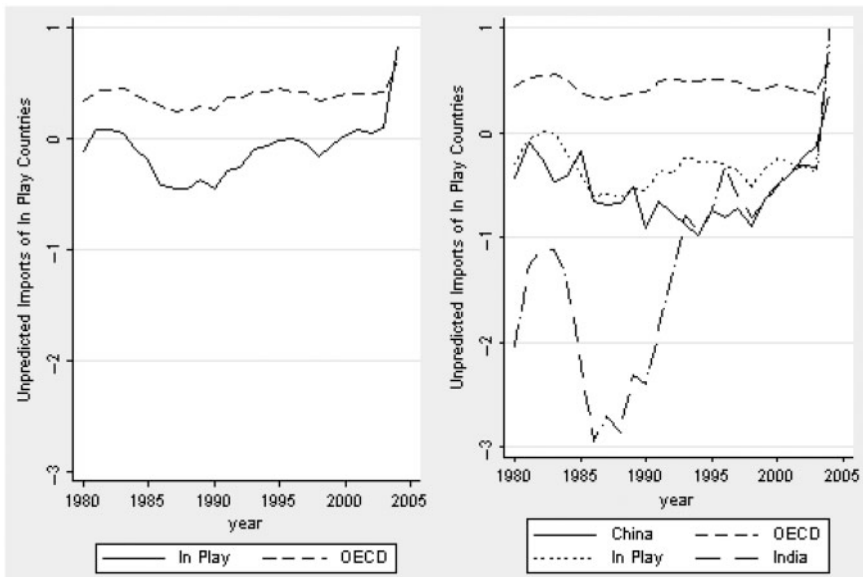


Fig. 1 Trade Patterns of *In-Play* Countries, 1980–2004.

Note: The lines represent the residuals, normalized by actual trade, from a gravity model of trade.

of the West. The West continues to be a major trading partner for the *in-play* countries as indicated by the fact that their trade levels with the West were consistently above prediction for the entire period. Yet that relationship shows no upward or downward trend over the time period. On the other hand, we find that *in-play* countries have found other *in-play* countries as more and more important trading partners in the last 25 years. It is the trend over time that is significant: Figure 1 shows an increase in trade of the *in-play* countries with themselves that is not predicted by the gravity model, especially from 2000 on.

In the right panel of Figure 1, we disaggregate the overall patterns of trade of the *in-play* countries. In particular, we single out China and India, often described as the two most important rising powers. These two countries capture an increasingly larger portion of the trade of the *in-play* countries. From about the mid-1990s with China, and even earlier with India, *in-play* countries have shifted their trade in a manner that appears inconsistent with our usual theories of trade. Over the past 10–15 years, the directionality of global trade is plausibly shifting in a manner that illustrates preferentially deepening economic interconnectivity among the group of *in-play* countries, particularly around leadership poles within that group.

United Nations Voting

In this section we examine whether the deepening economic interaction occurring among the *in-play* countries is matched by greater political affiliation. We analyze United Nations (UN) voting patterns to see whether a core set of states is gravitating away from the Western liberal order toward a new and increasingly coherent ‘set of rules and common practices’. Note that this trend would present a pattern quite distinct from that of individual ‘dissatisfied’ rising powers bucking an international consensus. Scholars have used a variety of measures to assess the extent to which states adhere to the predominant international order.¹⁸ The dissatisfaction of a rising power, understood as the desire to revise the existing rules of international politics, is measured as the ‘degree of agreement between its policies and those of the dominant state’.¹⁹ A common measure for dissatisfaction is the similarity of the ‘alliance portfolios’ between the hegemon and rising power.²⁰ Although this variable is appropriate for research on tightly-aligned regions such as Western Europe, it is insufficient for studies

¹⁸ Jonathan DiCicco and Jack Levy, ‘Power Shifts and Problem Shifts’, pp. 690–1.

¹⁹ Woosang Kim and James Morrow, ‘When Do Power Shifts Lead to War’, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 1992, p. 912.

²⁰ See Woosang Kim, ‘Alliance Transitions and Great Power War’, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 35, No. 4, 1991, pp. 833–50; and Woosang Kim, ‘Power transitions and great power war from Westphalia to Waterloo’, *World Politics*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 1992, pp. 153–72.

that extend into the frequently non-aligned developing world.²¹ Seeking a more comprehensive measure of foreign policy similarity, we examine United Nations General Assembly votes.²² As Steven Chan explains:

The United Nations offers the closest approximation to the contemporary international community. The political distance that separates a state from its counterparts can be indicated by the extent to which it finds itself in the minority in voting on resolutions presented to the General Assembly or by the Security Council. These votes should be informative about which states are in or out of step with the rest of the world.²³

To empirically assess this political dimension of the World Without the West, we examine the voting record of different countries in the General Assembly of the United Nation. In terms of connectivity, the similarity of UN votes offers an observable measure of the political accord or discord between two countries' political agendas. We use Erik Gartzke's index of bilateral voting similarity, an index that ranges between -1 and $+1$, whereby -1 indicates complete voting dissimilarity and $+1$ indicates complete voting congruence.²⁴

Figure 2 displays the plot of the standardized residuals we obtain for an estimation of the gravity model on the voting similarity indicator, using the same empirical strategy described for the trade data in the previous section. Over the last 20 years, *in-play* countries have, as a group, exhibited voting patterns that are more similar than those we would otherwise expect from their level of democracy, GDP levels, size and location of the country, alliance ties, and colonial past. Temporally, however, we observe that in the five years from 1990 to 1995, the *in-play* countries manifested a decrease in voting congruence amongst the group to the 'advantage' of the voting congruence of the group with the OECD countries. This trend was reversed in the second half of the 1990s. From 1995, the *in-play* countries started

²¹ Most regimes in the developing world have few, if any, formal military alliances. This makes the alliance data not useful as a measure of foreign policy similarity outside of the great powers and the West. Ely Ratner, 'Reaping What You Sow: Democratic Transitions and Foreign Policy Realignment', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2009, p. 403.

²² United Nations General Assembly votes are commonly used to measure states' foreign policy preferences. See Bruce E. Moon, 'Consensus of Compliance? Foreign-Policy Change and External Dependence', *International Organization*, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1985, pp. 297–329; Erik Gartzke, 'Kant We All Just Get Along? Opportunity, Willingness, and the Origins of the Democratic Peace', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 1998, pp. 1–27; and Ely Ratner, 'Reaping What You Sow'.

²³ Steven Chan, *China, the U.S., and the Power-Transition Theory*, p. 34.

²⁴ Erik Gartzke, 'Kant We All Just Get Along?' Erik Gartzke and Dong-Joon Jo, 'UN General Assembly Voting', January 2002. <http://dss.ucsd.edu/~egartzke/>. The UN voting similarity data are not directional as is the case for trade. That is, unlike trade where the flow from country A to country B is likely different from the flow from country B to country A, the voting similarity between any two countries is symmetric. The regression model is therefore estimated on a un-directed dyad dataset. See Scott Bennett and Allan C. Stam, *The Behavioral Origins of War* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004).



Fig. 2 UN Voting Patterns of *In-Play* Countries, 1980–2003.

Note: The lines represent the residuals, normalized by the absolute value of the affinity index of UN voting similarity, from a gravity model of the affinity index.

to regain some of the previous levels of voting congruence with each other, while distancing themselves from the group of OECD countries.

These data patterns suggest that there was broad and growing acceptance of the liberal international order in the years that immediately followed the end of the Cold War. Since the mid-1990s, however, there appear to be growing preferences for an alternative set of rules and norms in international politics that are distinct from those upheld by the USA and the West.

This convergence toward new rules and behaviors among the *in-play* countries is coupled with the deepening of economic interconnectivity. These two sets of empirical patterns taken together provide plausible evidence for the development of closer forms of interactions in a cluster of key emerging states. In turn, the empirical contours of a plausible World Without the West suggest profound implications for international relations theory. In the remaining section, we return to foundational international relations scholarship to build a series of propositions for future research.

Theoretical Implications of a World Without the West

Contemporary international relations theory is inadequate to fully understand the implications of a nascent empirical pattern where emerging

countries are deepening their interconnectivity during the course of their collective ascent. In the spirit of articulating the contours of a new research program, we critique two dominant paradigms of international relations—power transition theory and liberal institutionalism—to demonstrate the types of theoretical innovation required to examine a World Without the West. First, we point out that rising powers are not restricted to the binary pathways conventionally imputed to them. Second, we outline the framework of alternative governance on which the World Without the West may be taking shape. Third, we tackle the question of the foundations of international order.

The Strategic Choices of Rising Powers

Existing international relations theory outlines two strategic choices for rising powers: simply put, they will either fight against or assimilate to the existing order. In contemporary international politics, China is the current preoccupation of those concerned about the paths that rising powers might take. Aaron Friedberg outlines the dichotomous set of possible futures regarding the emblematic rising power of today's world: 'What is likely to be the character of the relationship between the USA and the People's Republic of China over the next two or three decades? Will it be marked by convergence toward deepening cooperation, stability, and peace or by deterioration, leading to increasingly open competition, and perhaps even war?'²⁵

Viewing the US–China relationship through this lens, the first-order task for American policymakers is to identify which of these alternative futures is unfolding. Is China preparing for hegemonic war and are there signs that its power is beginning to outpace its prestige? Evidence abounds for the proponents of this viewpoint.²⁶ China's military spending has increased at an impressive clip, growing at around 15% per year.²⁷ Meanwhile, China is developing a space program and planning to send rovers to the moon.²⁸ The successful test of an anti-satellite missile in January 2007 was the nail in the coffin for those who fear that China is preparing to fight for systemic change when its economic and military might are ripe.

Others are far less pessimistic, pointing out that the USA ascended without initiating a major-power war, and that post-war Japan and Germany

²⁵ Aaron L. Friedberg, 'The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?' *International Security*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2005, pp. 7–45.

²⁶ Bill Gertz, *The China Threat: How the People's Republic Targets America* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2002).

²⁷ Most experts agree that Beijing underreports these figures. For a side-by-side comparison of several outside estimates of China's military spending see U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Secretary, *Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2007*, p. 26.

²⁸ 'China's Space Plan in 2008 Arouses Foreign Media's Attention', *China Daily*, 14 January 2008.

have peacefully reintegrated into the existing system. As China nears great power status, so the story goes, it is likely to integrate into the American-led liberal order. Some believe this will be the case because economic development fosters political moderation.²⁹ Others believe that even an autocratic China will choose to join, rather than fight, the existing order. John Ikenberry, for example, argues that the existing liberal order—built around multilateralism, alliance partnerships, and rule-based cooperation—is so deeply integrated and institutionalized that it will be extremely difficult to overturn.³⁰ A number of scholars have joined Ikenberry in arguing that participation in international institutions has already begun to socialize China into the liberal international order.³¹

Ikenberry argues that the deeply institutionalized nature of the international economy will further ensure that China assimilates to the existing order. The rapid growth of the Chinese economy is the bedrock of its domestic political control. As such, as the Chinese economy continues to expand, the economic incentives to maintain the current international order will far outweigh any designs of systemic change. In this formulation, the World Trade Organization will be an important safeguard to protect China from discrimination; and as its economy grows so too will its influence in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Meanwhile, the Chinese economy has become deeply interdependent with that of the USA, further decreasing the likelihood that China would want to traumatize the existing world order.³²

So which is it: will China fight or assimilate? The difficulty in answering this question is in no small part because the existing theoretical paradigm has deeply constrained the ability of scholars to understand the full variance of China's behavior. Analysts—intent on determining whether China is either revisionist and challenging or assimilative and status quo³³—often appear to be forcing square pegs into round holes. American Sinologist

²⁹ Edward L. Morse, 'The Transformation of Foreign Policies: Modernization, Interdependence, and Externalization', *World Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 1970, pp. 371–92.

³⁰ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory*.

³¹ See Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980–2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Socialization in International Institutions: The ASEAN Way and International Relations Theory', in John Ikenberry and Michael Mastanduno, eds., *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), pp. 107–62; Robert Lawrence, *China and the Multilateral Trading System* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2006); and Ann Kent, *Beyond Compliance: China, International Organizations, and Global Security* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007).

³² For a classic statement of how trade and membership in international organizations lead to a reduced incidence of conflict, see Bruce Russett and John Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).

³³ Alistair Ian Johnston, 'Is China a Status Quo Power?' *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2003, pp. 5–56.

Robert Ross, for instance, has argued that, ‘China is a revisionist power, but for the foreseeable future it will seek to maintain the status quo’.³⁴ Similar uncertainty could be applied to India, which appears to be taking a tack that is neither perfectly assimilative nor challenging to the liberal order.³⁵

If the World Without the West hypothesis is correct, scholars would be well-served by embracing a more expansive conceptual framework, whereby the ongoing confusion about the future behavior of non-Western powers will reveal itself as a by-product of the overly limited perspectives of existing international relations theory. In reality, the strategic choices facing rising powers extend beyond the fight versus assimilate paradigm. Rising powers have a third option: they can route around the existing order and help to define and join an alternative international order. Whether this is an explicit and conscious strategy of some players or an evolutionary development that is emerging in a cumulative and nearly unintentional fashion is not at issue here—except to say that for critics to demand that it be the former in order to constitute a real and significant phenomenon, is not justified and raises the bar too high.³⁶ ‘Routing around’ is an alternative paradigm we suggest both the discipline and the policy community should consider.

An Alternative Governance Framework

Consider the commonplace narrative of post World War II (WWII) order: the United States emerges victorious, a giant among exhausted competitors, and uses its power to take the lead in creating the postwar liberal international order in its own image—an open economic system and a rule-based and institutionalized approach to fostering international cooperation on security affairs. It plays the iconic role of a benevolent hegemon, providing the essential global public goods that were the foundations of post-WWII prosperity and stability: the Bretton Woods international financial system with the US dollar as backbone; and NATO, a collective security arrangement that depended in the final analysis on US force projection and its nuclear umbrella.³⁷

Along with its allies, the USA organized international politics around open markets, a set of state-society bargains on economic stability, multi-lateral institutions, and the principle of cooperative security. Combined with

³⁴ Robert Ross, ‘Beijing as a Conservative Power’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 2, 1997, p. 34.

³⁵ As an introduction to India’s rise on the global stage see the essays in Sumit Ganguly, ed., *India as an Emerging Power* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

³⁶ For a discussion of how international order can develop out of the pursuit of national interest rather than strategic intentionality, see Naazneen Barma and Ely Ratner, ‘China’s Illiberal Challenge’, *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, No. 2, 2006, pp. 56–68.

³⁷ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory*.

a high level of normative legitimacy, the post-war order became ‘not essentially an American empire but rather an empire of capitalist democracy’.³⁸ Ikenberry argues that the world has thus seen, ‘the emergence of a one-world order where all the parts of the globe are loosely integrated into a single governance system’.³⁹ In his telling, institutional depth ensures the survival of the prevailing order even in the face of declining US power. The embedded liberalism that defined the US-led global order in the post-WWII period⁴⁰ spread farther and deeper throughout the world, beginning on the crest of the third wave of democratization and culminating with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

What would a World Without the West look like instead? As the emerging nations within it continue to preferentially deepen their interconnectedness with each other, they might use their mutual transactions to form an alternative international order that would upend the tenets that the liberal international order is predicated upon—we suggest this is already beginning to occur. The foundation of the World Without the West is, very simply, an alternative governance framework that routes around several key tenets of liberal internationalism. Replacing the liberal notion that states have the right and obligation to enforce domestic governance and economic norms based on individual rights across the globe, this alternative order operates according to a principle of inviolable sovereignty, or ‘neo-Westphalianism’. The notions of liberal individualism that form the basis of the American-led international order are redefined to emphasize the economic, social, and cultural over the political and to privilege the collective over the individual.

As a corollary to the re-hardening of the sovereignty norm, states in the World Without the West are adopting sustainable innovations in domestic-level governance models.⁴¹ Disenchanted with the Washington Consensus and its neoliberal prescriptions, many developing countries are now choosing among variations on the theme of state-controlled capitalism, a pattern that has become even more pronounced in the wake of the 2008–09 global economic crisis. The goal is economic growth that supplants rather than stimulates demands for political opening.

Power in this nascent alternative order flows from more traditional resource endowments (energy, commodities and geography) than from knowledge and other ‘intangible’ factors of production. The rules and

³⁸ G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Order Imperial Ambition: Essays on American Power and International Order* (Malden: Polity, 2006), p. 8.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ John Gerard Ruggie, ‘International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order’, *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1982, pp. 379–415.

⁴¹ Naazneen Barma et al., ‘Open Authoritarian Regimes: Surviving and Thriving in the Liberal International Order (Project Description)’, *Democracy & Society*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2009, pp. 8–11.

terms of trade increasingly reflect a modern version of resource nationalism. Meanwhile, preferences around nuclear energy and proliferation are distinctly different from that of the West, and the resources for design of reactors and weapons, as well as fuel cycle technologies, no longer depend on access to the United States and its Western allies. The next 'non-proliferation bargain', if there is a global bargain to be struck, will have to take account of this, or the World Without the West will fashion its own bargain.

The rising powers of the 21st century do not want either conflict or assimilation. The World Without the West carries with it a set of ideas about order and governance that are not suited to liberal internationalism. The democratic liberal order is particularly threatening to weak and autocratic regimes, whose precise sources of control and legitimacy are often in direct conflict with the rules and norms that support the existing order. Poor regimes are at risk of becoming beholden to international financial institutions, and non-democratic regimes face international pressure for domestic reform. As they pursue their own national goals and regime survival, rising powers are facilitating the development of an alternative international order, backed by their increasing collective heft that neither directly opposes nor adapts to the American-led order.

Sovereignty Redux and a Transactional Order

The empirical existence of a World Without the West and the notion that an alternative international order could co-exist with the American-led liberal system challenge traditional theories about how order is established in international politics. For structural or neo-realists, the international system is defined by the ordering principle of anarchy, the undifferentiated nature of security-seeking states, and the global distribution of capabilities.⁴² Governance of the system, as defined by the rights and rules afforded to states, is established and regulated by great powers. Systemic change—a transformation of the rights and rules of international politics—therefore occurs through a reorientation of the distribution of power. Robert Gilpin offers a causal explanation for the mechanism through which changes in the distribution of power lead to systemic change.⁴³

In the international economy, a dominant paradigm holds that a hegemon is necessary for order to be maintained in the global system of trade and finance.⁴⁴ Hegemonic stability theory posits that self-interested hegemons can overcome collective action problems and provide the public goods

⁴² Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979).

⁴³ See Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, pp. 39–44 for his discussion of 'systems change', 'systemic change', and 'interaction change'.

⁴⁴ Charles P. Kindleberger, *The World in Depression, 1929–1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

necessary for order—acting as a lender of last resort and providing a market for excess commodities, for instance. Under this formulation, institutions are epiphenomenal to the interests of the strongest states in the system. As with Gilpin's theory, hegemonic stability theory predicts that order and stability will diminish as the hegemon declines.

Critics of hegemonic stability theory reject the notion that order cannot endure in the absence of hegemonic control, pointing, for instance, to the persistence of institutionalized cooperation in the face of the decline of post-war US supremacy.⁴⁵ Neoliberal institutionalist regime theory thus explores the capacity of institutions to perform tasks that realists thought could only be performed by great powers. Regimes and institutions would provide order in the international system by managing the problems associated with uncertainty, imperfect information, high transaction costs, and enforcement, thereby overcoming the underprovision of public goods.⁴⁶ Not only could institutions facilitate cooperation, they have a stickiness that allows them to act as causal forces themselves shaping power and interest.⁴⁷ As Ikenberry argues, these institutions can be self-reinforcing and provide an extremely resilient backbone to the existing international order.⁴⁸

According to realist theory, then, order is established by the most powerful states and, in order to become leaders of an international system, revisionist powers would have to challenge the hegemony of the USA and, by definition, the institutions it leads. The neoliberal institutionalist alternative argues that international institutions can maintain order by overcoming the collective action problems that prevail in the anarchical international environment.⁴⁹ The future of international order will therefore be determined by the degree to which rising powers either work within existing institutions or seek to replace them. When viewed through the existing theoretical paradigms of international order, two pieces of evidence—the inability of any rising power to fight against the USA, along with the continuing predominance of the post-war liberal institutions—are used in

⁴⁵ See Stephen D. Krasner, 'State Power and the Structure of International Trade', *World Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 1976, pp. 317–47 and Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

⁴⁶ Robert O. Keohane, 'The Demand for International Regimes', *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1982, pp. 325–55. Krasner et al. define regimes as 'principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors expectations converge in a given issue-area'; and institutions as persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe and proscribe behavioral roles, constrain activities, and shape expectations about likely behavior. See Stephen D. Krasner, ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁴⁷ Stephen D. Krasner, 'Regimes and the Limits of Realism: Regimes as Autonomous Variables', *International Organization*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 1982, pp. 497–510.

⁴⁸ G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory*.

⁴⁹ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony* is the classic statement.

support of the claim that the world has yet to see any kind of systemic innovation that would affect the de facto reign of the liberal order.

This is, we believe, a false conclusion. In reality, a World Without the West can form an alternative international order distinct from the liberal order by reinforcing the sovereignty norm and reorienting international order away from institutions and toward transactions.

The conception of sovereignty is one of the key defining features of an international system. John Ruggie articulates this in describing the transition from the medieval system—defined by overlapping and entangled sources of authority—to the modern state system—‘defined by mutually exclusive jurisdictional domains’.⁵⁰ For Ruggie, seeking to understand systemic change within the confines of neo-realism, the key transition was a change in the ‘differentiation’ of units.⁵¹ This differentiation ‘serves as an exceedingly important source of structural variation’, and acts as one of the key determinants of systemic change.⁵² Having identified this mode of change in the international system, Ruggie then draws on the work of Emile Durkheim to understand the determinants of that change. For Durkheim, ‘growth in the volume and dynamic density of societies modifies profoundly the fundamental conditions of collective existence’.⁵³ Changes in conceptions of sovereignty could result from changes in the ‘dynamic density’ of the system, which Durkheim understood as the ‘quantity, velocity and diversity of transactions that go on within society’.⁵⁴ Dramatic changes in this ‘dynamic density’—such as could be caused by major demographic shifts, significant changes in industrial production and financial investment, rapid technological innovation, and growing resource constraints—could lead to systemic change by encouraging alternative conceptions of sovereignty.

We submit that a World Without the West could conceivably develop, in precisely this manner, as an alternative international order built on the dynamic density of the transactional flows within its own sphere. Ruggie was looking forward, at the future of Europe, trying to see how new modes of differentiation could lead to a post-modern international system.⁵⁵ Although he foresaw how the progression of the liberal international order was already redefining traditional notions of sovereignty, he did not

⁵⁰ John Gerard Ruggie, ‘Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Towards a Neorealist Synthesis’, in Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and its Critics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 143.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 142. As opposed to Waltz, who took this term to mean ‘sameness’ or ‘difference’, Ruggie uses the more traditional sociological definition of differentiation to mean ‘the principles on the basis of which the constituent units are separated from one another’.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁵⁵ John Gerard Ruggie, ‘Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations’, *International Organization*, Vol. 47, No. 1, 1993, pp. 139–74.

consider that systemic innovation could come from greater transactional flows and a return to harder notions of absolute sovereignty, rather than a great innovation in the ‘unbundling of territoriality’.⁵⁶

The development of the World Without the West does not conform to traditional conceptions of how order is established in the international system. As modernization theory mistook the unique European domestic political experience as universal, so too has an emphasis on brick and mortar international institutions mistakenly ignored the degree to which an environment that is built up of a dense set of transactions between fully autonomous units—and in which the transactions are configured in ways that *reinforce* rather than undermine the autonomy of the units—could produce an international order. In either the neorealist or neoliberal institutionalist formulation, order in the international system is a public good provided by powerful states, through institutions that are either epiphenomenal (realism) or come to facilitate rule-based order themselves over time (institutionalism). What the World Without the West begins to demonstrate is that international rules and patterns of behavior can become deeply embedded in an international order without formal institutions to facilitate them. That is, transactional networks have emergent properties. As they develop, transactional networks spread ideas and norms; they make them part of normal interactions and, thus, they build structures that shape patterns of behavior beyond their original purpose.

The World Without the West, as a transactional network, is bound to become an order that eschews traditional international institutions in part because those institutions have proven unable to constrain great powers (as in the case of the US war in Iraq), unable to deliver on critical issues (as with the Doha trade round), and relatively easy to obstruct (as in the case of UN action in Darfur.). But, more profoundly, we should not expect to see the proliferation of large formal, multilateral institutions in the developing world because dynamic transactional density and an emphasis on absolute sovereignty are the differentiating features of the World Without the West. Formal institutions are not necessary to facilitate the deepening transactional interconnectivity of the World Without the West. Furthermore, such institutions are by definition a surrendering of some degree of sovereignty, which the World Without the West is organized against. When multilateral institutions have developed within the World Without the West—such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—they have principally served as umbrellas for bilateral transactions. An alternative institutional order in the World Without the West is thus governed by a deepening network of transactions, which serve to regulate state behavior, rather than through formal international institutions.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Conclusion

We have argued in this article that world politics and the international order may be entering a new phase as a group of emerging nations become increasingly powerful. But, contra conventional wisdom, it is not a period of confrontation between rising powers and status-quo powers; nor is it a point at which the global playing field flattens and international competition intensifies. Rather, it is a new phase in which the directionality and hence fulcrum of global interactions are moving away from Western power anchors and toward new centers outside the West. We call this new system and phase in global politics a *World Without the West*. We have presented some initial patterns that indicate that this transformation is under way and we have sketched some of the theoretical implications entailed for the analysis of world politics. We see our effort not as a conclusive statement, but rather as an opening shot in establishing a new research agenda in international relations to account for nascent empirical trends that current theoretical paradigms are unable to explain.

Appendix

Table A1 Gravity Model of Trade

Variables	Coeff.	SE	P-value
Log of GDP per capita, importer	0.619	0.049	0.000
Log of GDP per capita, exporter	0.950	0.047	0.000
Log of area, importer	-0.336	0.035	0.000
Log of area, exporter	0.608	0.084	0.000
Log of remoteness, importer	1.301	0.220	0.000
Log of remoteness, exporter	-0.975	0.220	0.000
Log of distance	-0.985	0.023	0.000
Contiguity	1.064	0.093	0.000
Regime type, importer	0.004	0.002	0.037
Regime type, exporter	-0.006	0.002	0.009
Regime type, interaction term	0.001	0.000	0.000
Common language	0.386	0.051	0.000
Defence alliance	0.236	0.060	0.000
Common colony	0.940	0.064	0.000
Colony	1.145	0.103	0.000

Note: OLS regression; year fixed effects; importer fixed effects; exporter fixed effects; coefficients for the intercept and the fixed effects not reported; number of observations = 212 482; $R^2 = 0.717$; RMSE = 1.711.

Table A2 Gravity Model of Voting Similarity at the UN General Assembly

Variable	Coeff.	SE	P-value
Log of GDP per capita, min.	-0.013	0.002	0.000
Log of GDP per capita, max.	-0.031	0.003	0.000
Log of area, min.	0.000	0.004	0.899
Log of area, max.	-0.001	0.004	0.730
Log of remoteness, min.	0.531	0.029	0.000
Log of remoteness, max.	-0.011	0.020	0.578
Log of distance	-0.002	0.002	0.315
Contiguity	0.003	0.001	0.000
Regime type, min.	-0.010	0.001	0.000
Regime type, max.	0.000	0.000	0.000
Regime type, interaction term	-0.027	0.004	0.000
Common language	0.018	0.008	0.022
Defence alliance	0.114	0.007	0.000
Common colony	0.054	0.005	0.000
Colony	-0.045	0.015	0.002

Note: OLS regression; year fixed effects; country fixed effects; coefficients for the intercept and the fixed effects not reported; number of observations = 124 435; $R^2 = 0.657$; RMSE = 0.165.