

Beyond The Liberal Global Order:



**A Decline in the Global Order or
the Emergence of 'A New Way' ?**

Editorial Note

Our issue for this year's VOX Journal seeks to tackle a great question facing the contemporary international order: are we witnessing the restructuring of the post-Cold War, liberal global order that has previously shaped the nature of contemporary political and economic relations, or rather are we witnessing the emergence of a new global order - one that is no longer bound by liberal norms.

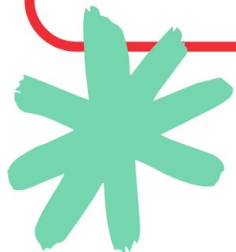
This question comes at a time of great strife: Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 signified a reversal to the use of traditional tactics of warfare in contrast to the civil wars and COIN operations that had dominated the post-Cold War period; emerging economies and developing countries now challenge previously western-dominated institutions; the upsurge of right-wing populism across Europe and the United States poses a new challenge for democratic practice and accountability. With this, our 2024 issue contains six articles that each aim to discuss the changing global order and its future implications.

As a brief overview of the themes considered, Josef Braeutigam utilises power transition theory to show why - in spite of China's emergence as a key competitor, liberal norms and their dominance remain central in *'Between Order and Ambition: China's Dilemma in a Liberal World'*. Alternatively, Hugh Cuppage discusses how liberalism may survive, but the liberal order and its primary backers now face hegemonic competition and this remains a key challenge in *'Shipwrecked by History: Is the Liberal World Order Dead?'*. Zathia's article - *'The making of the global liberal order, and the need to move past it'* provides a historical overview on the emergence of the liberal system, and the fundamental issue of inequality - urging us to move beyond the liberal order and towards a more equitable system of international governance. These are a few of the articles included in our issue; each offering a unique perspective on the changing global order.

Thus, as the global order and its underpinning norms have reached a juncture, it is important to reflect on this change. The articles in this issue serve as a starting point for this reflection; questioning both the viability and quality of the liberal global order.

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Between Order and Ambition: China's Dilemma in a Liberal World

- By J.Braeutigam - Final Year BA Politics, Philosophy and Economics Student -

After the Cold War ended, a silent consensus about “the end of history” in a perpetual state of liberal freedom and democracy arose (Fukuyama, 1992). Capitalism overruled communism and open trade was ensured. When China’s economic output began to rise, realists started a new discussion: ‘Could China overturn the international liberal order?’ This essay argues the pillars of the liberal world order will stand strong. I will discuss this regarding China - the economically strongest state - and its purchasing power parity. In the first part, I will define those liberal pillars, the second section will discuss power transition theory. The third part will counter realist arguments by introducing US-led institutionalism as a securing factor of the liberal world order. The final section will analyse whether accepting and perpetuating liberal trade and openness proves to be the only feasible option for China to ensure security and prosperity.

Setting the scene: the pillars of liberal world order

Burchill and Linklater (1996): the pillars of the liberal world order as “institutionalism”, “open markets”, “collective security” and “promotion of liberal democracy”. “Institutions” are understood as sets of norms, rules and certain standards that states use as binding guidelines for their behaviour (ibid). Those institutions work through assemblies like the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). “Open markets” are an umbrella term for free trade, liberal markets and commercial exchanges (ibid). However, according to Polanyi (1944), states can, and should, intervene if necessary to decrease the destructive power of unregulated markets — as they did after the financial crash in 2008 and throughout the COV-19 pandemic (Kollewe, 2008; Wessel & Millstein, 2022).

“Collective security” describes collectively providing security, often through assemblies. Throughout the Covid pandemic, the International Health Regulations (IHR)

were bindingly used to collectively govern states through a medical crisis. Similarly, the United States Security Council (UNSC) should enable collective security relations between states (Habibi et al., 2020; Dorr, 1986).

“Promotion of liberal democracy” works as a standard norm of collectively rewarding states following this norm and punishing states that do not share this standard (Burchill & Linklater, 1997).



Realist competitors of the liberal world order and power transition theory

Realists stress the importance of state power in the international anarchic system. According to them, a change in relative gains or relative power compared to competitor states could only lead to war (Wohlforth, 2016). Power transition theory focuses on the relationships between the Great Powers War would lead to a structural change in the international system (Lemke, 1997). The two factors necessary for “power transition” are power parity i.e. a competitor reaching comparable power levels with the hegemon and dissatisfaction with the current international system (ibid).

China has increased their military expenditure significantly throughout the last years and will, in all likelihood, reach similar levels of military spending as the US (Legro, 2007). Realist thinkers like Mearsheimer (2010) find a dangerous threat to US hegemony from this behaviour. He argues that the US presence in the Asia-Pacific region will not suffice to keep power there, even if they amplified their regional spending (ibid). Great competitors of the US cannot accept “US troops on their doorstep” (ibid). The increase of regional hegemons all over the world could be the start of a bigger movement.

After having established that China is gearing up and will likely achieve power parity with the US, the significant question for power transition theorists remains whether those countries are dissatisfied with the liberal world order.

Recent trade conflicts and imposed tariffs between the hegemon of the liberal world order, the US, onto China with the leading liberal powers and their resorting to “hedging” suggest a dissatisfaction with the status quo.

US-centred institutionalism as powerful principle

The initial vision behind a liberal world order was to pursue economic gains for the US. However, the security and stability of the 5

liberal international order are still built on institutionalism (UN; GATT; IMF; ...) (Ikenberry, 1996). Economic cooperation did not break down as many realists expected. After the Cold War, the liberal world order was too profitable for every participating state (ibid). This liberal world order could be treated as the Grand Strategy of the US, establishing liberal values around the world, while providing greater prosperity and trade to other countries, however, first and foremost themselves. Those values had to be accepted by China to benefit from the liberal world order. China has developed an economic model in which they keep their consumption of their products relatively low, while their exports are still rising significantly (Ho-Fung, 2009). China has already become Asia’s biggest supplier for the European Union (EU) and the US (ibid). A shift in China’s open trade policy would cause a dramatic decrease in their GDP. China’s long-term US public debt has been rising every year for the last two decades. Moreover, the Chinese government has purchased US debt for two reasons. Firstly, the hope for stable returns, secondly however through those policies they can secure an increase in the US’ demand for Chinese exports through financing the US current-account deficit. Therefore, a US-led crisis would lead to incredible turbulence in the Chinese economy. A deviation from embracing the pillars of liberal world order could lead to tariffs and trade restrictions from the US, an economic catastrophe for China.



Liberal world order as persisting status quo

The nature of power transition theory has changed significantly since the beginning of nuclear warhead ownership. A power-transitioning war would most likely lead to a nuclear world war and absolute self-destruction (Lemke, 1997). Following this thesis, a change to the liberal world order had to come through systemic interventions and the creation of alternative institutions.

China has found their place in the international system by opening its markets and integrating into the liberal world order which made their rapid rise possible. However, their leader Xi Jinping showed dissatisfaction with the liberal international order. When power parity is reached, power transition theory would expect an aspiration to challenge the hegemon — however, nowadays through alternative ways.

One could argue that China tries to find ways through institutionalism to challenge those pillars. By introducing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), an infrastructural programme improving trade and infrastructure, the Chinese government has started the biggest financial development in the world (Damuri et al, 2019). China could expect heightened dependencies between their government and the supported states and use this new influence to change international political goals through financial boosts. Nevertheless, this program works through the means of open trade and institutionalism. It might not actively promote liberal

democracies, however, it does not hesitate to financially support states with liberal democratic systems. Moreover, the BRI does not have the power to actively break down the pillars of the liberal world order.

Power transition theory only expects change in the right circumstances. Following current projections, China will reach levels of power parity with the US. China shows signs of being dissatisfied with the liberal order, nevertheless (as shown in iii), they are highly reliant on the US economic system and would suffer economically if they were to bring around a change in the liberal world order. China is too reliant on the liberal world order to attack its most foundational pillars.

Conclusion

This essay has shown with the help of a modern interpretation of power transition theory that we have not moved beyond a liberal world order and will not do so within the foreseeable future. It has provided a realist argument, which suggests a possibility of economic international change, but provided a liberal counter-argument suggesting that both states are too embedded in liberal US-led institutions and too dependent on the United States to introduce an alternative international system. War would in all likelihood lead to ultimate destruction. The BRI might create new dependencies, however, it does this through the pillars of international world order. China cannot break loose from the US. The liberal world order will maintain and power transition theory will be in desperate need of refinement.

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Shipwrecked by History: Is the Liberal World Order Dead?

-By H.Cuppige - First year Msc Computer Science Student -

We are living through a transition in global affairs. In 1991, the United States was the most powerful country in world history; it was believed that we were living in the 'end of history' (Fukuyama, 1992), as liberal, capitalist democracy had won the battle of ideas against the 20th century totalitarianisms and the reactionary systems that preceded. Globalisation would make the whole world wealthy and liberalism would make the whole world free. In 2021, almost 30 years since the resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev, the United States (US) conceded Afghanistan, where it had fought its longest engagement. As such, the US left many of their allies behind to die, as well as \$80 billion of military equipment to a jihadist group whose ideology is opposed to liberalism in every way. Less than six months later, Vladimir Putin, having declared the 'liberal idea' ((Barber, et al., 2019) to be 'obsolete' launched an invasion of Ukraine, violating every norm of the postwar order, and bringing the two largest nuclear powers in the world to the brink of direct confrontation. Everywhere, the victorious ideology of the 20th century is in crisis, its order under unprecedented strain.

The principal direct challenge to the liberal order at present is the increasingly cohesive alignment between the authoritarian revisionist states of Russia, Iran and China. These form a new Eurasian Axis whose main objective is the withdrawal of American military positions from the Eurasian landmass and the carving out of spheres of influence in their respective regions. Of these, two are armed with nuclear weapons, and the third, Iran, may soon acquire them. In addition, all three are increasingly promulgating a form of authoritarian developmental capitalism, with China's unprecedented economic growth as the proof of concept, alongside a kind of "civilizationist" (O'Callaghan, 2021) nationalism and social conservatism. Effective capitalism does not need democracy, and it may even be a hindrance, as China's rise and America's stagnation allegedly show. In addition, China has concluded that, as per the Wolfowitz Doctrine, America will actively attempt to sabotage China as it comes close to becoming a possible peer competitor (Mearsheimer, 2020). This creates a realist case for insulation from the liberal order, especially economically, and the creation of an alternative world system. China's

overseas institutions, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), as well as its shaping of the fast-growing African continent in its image (Aikans, 2022), provide the basis for this new order. How much of a threat to the current American led order this new order presents will depend on the outcome of the conflicts in Ukraine, the Middle East and potentially in Taiwan. Should the Eurasian Bloc prove victorious in these struggles, the liberal order will lose its claim to universality, and become a regional order centred on the US, with uncommitted regions such as Latin America, India, and the Arab world, each with their own claim of historic uniqueness (The New Indian Express, 2022), willing to oscillate between the two major blocs.

Outside of the region in which liberal values, the liberal order, and the liberal theory of history have been explicitly rejected, the current global order continues to be buffeted with a multitude of crises, most notably the problem of governing weak and failed states. The future fate of these regions is dependent on whether the liberal order can successfully transfer the institutions that have produced wealth and stability in the advanced world (Roberts, 2011). But the liberal order has persistently failed to solve the problem of state failure, and even exacerbated it. First in Iraq, and then in Libya under a revised framework, then Afghanistan, liberal intervention bred Hobbesian nightmares (Ignatieff, 2021) instead of successful modernisation. Persistent failure in these regions will have dire consequences in the form of revived Islamist extremism, terrorism and destabilising mass migration. Liberal state-building will need to be reformed to produce tangible benefits to the population in the form of physical security and prosperity, as well as accommodate local popular demands (Roberts, 2011). It will also have to deal with large proportions of the world where liberal values, and even modernity itself, are rejected outright. If it does not do so, these regions will fall into the Russo-Chinese orbit (Yabi, 2023), or even fall out of the world system altogether.

In addition, there are a series of major challenges to the current structure of the globalised economic system. Whilst the past 30 years have seen the largest number of people lifted out of extreme poverty in history, the unqualified faith placed in unregulated free markets through 'structural adjustment' is unjustifiable. The most prominent economic success stories of the past few decades, such as Poland and Malaysia, have made use of industrial policy rather than deregulation (Smith, 2024). The current structure of the global economy has created substantial inequalities between the rich and the poor, as well as between different regions of the world (Sorensen, 2011). Moreover, the present system has produced a number of transnational externalities, most notably rampant environmental destruction,

pollution outsourcing, an unaccountable multinational elite, and continued labour abuse. In short, the main problem with globalisation is that the social, economic and environmental protections rich countries were permitted to use during their development process have been forbidden to poor countries (Sorensen, 2011). In response, there have been proposals for "globalised social democracy" (Sorensen, 2011), including reforms to financial markets and allowing developing countries more control and direction over investments made in their regions, as well as rebuilding state capacity. Western investment flowing out of China may benefit these regions still further, giving India, Africa and Latin America the chance to industrialise and stabilise the distribution of wealth and productive capacity.



Despite these issues, there is a strong possibility that the current liberal order will survive and revive. The present crisis is largely a result of liberalism's failure to deliver on its own post-Cold War promises, rather than a desire to return to the pre-liberal world that preceded it. It has a strong incumbency advantage and the majority of the world's nations, who are either liberal democracies or hybrid states, depend on it for wealth and security (Ikenberry, 2018). Its breakdown would lead to a more anarchic, insecure and impoverished international environment (Brzezinski, 1997). The challenge of the revisionist states is undermined by the very fact that they reject universalism and embrace old-fashioned spheres of influence and realpolitik, and therefore their arrangements are less likely to

The value of these norms has been demonstrated by the widespread condemnation of Russian aggression in Ukraine. Liberal nations across the world have cooperated effectively to freeze Russia from the international financial system, and set up independent war crimes investigations to enforce international humanitarian law (Sloss and Dickinson, 2022). These developments point the way to a more plurilateral liberal order, where liberal polities regulate international norms through regional organisations, spreading the burden of the world system rather than being wholly reliant on the disposition of the United States (Zeihan, 2022). However, as new areas of the world industrialise, a return to the unipolarity of the 1990s is now impossible (Foreign Policy, 2023).



Liberalism may revive, and still has great reserve strength, but its partisans will have to accept that its teleology is no longer unquestioningly hegemonic, either in politics, values or economics. There is a general trend towards an increasingly qualified openness to the global market, a preference for national cohesion and self-reliance, and a scepticism of democracy in favour of state capacity and foreign policy realism. This is backed up by the desire for the world to have more than one centre of power.

The future of the global order is thus likely to be increasingly a plurality of regional orders with different systems of governance, determined by local conditions, rather than a universal liberal order that directs all societies towards a similar future.

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Democracy in decline

- By M.Harris - First Year BA Politics Student -

In 1991, the global landscape underwent a seismic shift due to the collapse of the USSR and the eventual end of the Cold War. These events signified the defeat of communism against the Western liberal order. This victory for democracy and the liberal ideology brought about a new era: the era of unchallenged American and Western control.

The Development of The Global Order Post-Cold War

The aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse proved pivotal for the development of the global order. The United States of America became economically and militarily dominant on the international arena, enabling them to become the sole superpower. The power the United States now holds over the global order has developed a period of change. The President at the time, George H.W. Bush stated it was time for the United States to forge "a new world order". A world order which promoted values akin to those of the United States, values according to George H.W. Bush that amount to freedom from the threat of terror, a greater pursuit of justice and global security and peace.

The Bush administration acted swiftly in achieving a new global order; the liberal global order. Bush's vision was clear, he centred around the idea of using the United States' undeniable influence within global institutions to promote and attract change. A prominent sign of this approach was carried out by George H.W. Bush's successor Bill Clinton, who remained on the same course, by deciding to try and bring democracy and its value to former Soviet nations. This strategy was used to represent Clinton's administration's view of the need to expand democracy to new territories.

This movement happened in two waves, the first being in 1999 and the second in 2004, whereby ten nations from Eastern Europe advanced into becoming full members of



NATO. This was a major expansion of the global liberal order, as all ten nations had to meet certain criteria, created in 1997, to be considered for membership. The criteria followed a very precise list of liberal demands, such as: the state must be democratic, member states must be minimal, the creation of a market economy and many more, all of which aligned to liberal ideologies.

The expansion of NATO and many more efforts made by the West have seen the modern world transform from a rivalrous battle of two ideologies to the dominance of just one: democracy. Enabling the West to expand the idea of the 'Liberal Global Order' internationally.

The Makings Of A Decline

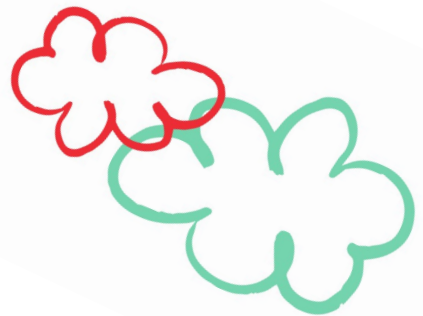
During the cold war era, the American alliance with nations such as West Germany and Japan held significant relevance in their ideological battle against communism. The relationship enabled multiple exchanges. The United States would offer protection and allow for open market trade and their allies would play an essential role in stabilising the US economy by anchoring the US dollar, therefore allowing the United States to run balance of payment deficits without damaging their economy. This relationship underpinned the liberal nations coming together, forming a pact that had significant implications for the West's victory during the Cold War and geopolitical history.

However, the Soviet Union collapsed over three decades ago and the alliances formed by those nations along with other democracies have become significantly less important for these nations to maintain. Democracies now look less engaged with one another, leading to cracks in the perspective of the Liberal Global order.

The United States of America, the leaders of the 'democratic movement', have been seen to step back their responsibilities on the international landscape in recent years, with presidencies such as Donald Trump's. Trump's administration positioned themselves as an inward, 'isolated' America. At the start of the American push towards a more democratic world the United States were seen to promote and encourage nations to follow suit and become a part of their liberal global order - Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush tried through means such as their expansion of NATO. However, Trump's policies adopted a polarising position; in talks with Ursula Von Der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, Trump reportedly told her that the US would "never come help" if Europe was attacked and also said "NATO is dead" (Pengelly, 2024).

The fractional divisions between the democratic nations have brought about a time of decline in the liberal order. After the collapse of the USSR, the world was made of 26.8 percent democracies, in 2017 the percentage was 53.93. However, since Trump and the vast adoption of the US' retreat away from being the frontrunner of democracies in the world, the percentage of democracies has fallen to 51.12 in 2022. (Bastian Herre et al., N/A)

Despite the fact that this percentage fall is small, it signals the fractures emerging within the current international system. If the US adopts their isolated position again within the coming years, especially with the Presidential election scheduled for 2024, the damage towards a Western global liberal order will be irreversible and the threat of a 'New Way', which is currently emerging, could become serious.



A New Way

The fundamental obstacle to the Liberal order is the matter of Russia and China. During the 1990s, both nations signalled to the world their future progression and opportunities. Bold strategies and discussions took place with them and the West to try and implement these nations into the order, however slowly over time, limitations and issues arised.

After the collapse of the USSR, no transition towards democracy took place in Russia. The country, to this day, is a Soviet Union masked under the illusion of some potential democratic features. For example, the market economy within Russia should have been free and accessible for all Russians, in truth it was not. The old elites swarmed into the market and seized all the valuable and worthy assets within the nation, creating an economy ruled by a select few, not democratic at all (Snegovaya, 2023).

On the other hand, China in recent years has seen expansionary growth; in 2000 China had accumulated 7.23 percent of the total worldwide GDP and in 2022 this figure increased to 18.44 percent (Textor, 2023). Through the development of the economy, China has seen to compete with the United States for the developing world.

In the Autumn of 2023, China reached a significant turning point; for the first time since opening their economy up to the world they traded more with developing nations than with the US, Europe and Japan (Jason

Douglas et al., 2023). This pattern demonstrates how the world is moving away from a single worldwide economy into a divided global economy. As a result, China has put serious strain on the United States' liberal global order as China can offer a competitive stance.

Furthermore, serious concerns are mounting from both parties in Congress and Senate over the threat of China's military capacity. Former Republican senator Ted Koro stated in 2020, the United States and their allies need to "stand up to" the threat of China in the South China sea (China's Expanding Influence in Europe and Eurasia, 2019).

Conclusion: The Beginning of a New Way

Amidst the dynamic shifts reshaping the contemporary global order, two distinct possibilities are emerging. The first, a world characterised by competing global orders and ideologies, trying to control power. Conversely, a second alternative arises, which is the maintenance of the current global order. However, the involvement of China and Russia is far more outreached. At this current point, the 2024 Presidential election will be between Trump and Biden and the winner could be the deciding factor between the two alternatives.

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The making of the global liberal order, and the need to move past it.

-By Z.Jacquesson-Ahmad - First year Bsc Politics, Philosophy and Economics Student -

We live in a world of sovereign states, but despite many having formal legal equality, historic hierarchies and disparities persist. Regardless of international law and the creation of organisations that are intended to prevent war and promote world peace, violence is increasing globally in countries such as Ukraine, Palestine and Yemen. Right-wing authoritarianism has been on the rise in both the Global North and South, leading some to claim that liberalism — the sole dominant global ideology since at least the collapse of the USSR — is in decline. We find ourselves in an ever-more interdependent world in which old hierarchies have proven surprisingly adaptable and resilient. To understand where international order is headed, perhaps it would be helpful to know how global liberalism came about. We will attempt to trace back key features and institutions of this contemporary status quo. First, this essay will explain the regime of "special rights and responsibilities", first articulated in the Concert of Europe system (1815-1914); then, it will examine the creation and forceful expansion of "global modernity" during the late 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries; finally, it will look at links to present-day liberalism. It will conclude that, to address the challenges of our time, we need to move beyond the liberal international order.

The late 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries saw intense colonisation by Europeans across the globe. At the same time, the Concert of Europe system emerged as a conscious attempt by great powers to maintain a conservative peace in Europe. The Concert was founded at the Vienna Congress of 1815, where leaders of the "great powers" (France, Britain, Austria, Prussia, Russia) decided how to organise post-Napoleonic Europe. Contemporary theorists saw a need to move past "balance-of-power" politics, which had posited that powerful states would neutralise each other under "anarchy", in the absence of any international organisations. For example, John Capodistrias, the advisor to Alexander I of Russia, railed against the 'divide et impera' [divide and rule] of old diplomacy'. (Elrod, 1976, p.162) The institution of "special rights and responsibilities" was its replacement, and concert diplomacy was its arena. Great powers attempted to maintain their control and prevent European revolutions by restoring, creating and splitting lesser states. Statespeople did 'sometimes [explore] other possibilities' before convening a congress, but were very sensitive to avoiding the humiliation of the great powers (which could lead to war), and never threatened their sovereignty. (Elrod,

1976, p.165) In this way, the Concert was fundamentally conservative. Since states - people still conceptualised the behaviour of states as rational and self-interested, they believed some higher authority was needed to maintain international order. However, an entirely top-down authority would simply be another empire, so there needed to be bottom-up elements. These leaders wanted to maintain their grip on hierarchical power, thus the Concert was a compromise for all great powers. They took decisions bottom-up but had considerable top-down leeway in interactions with lesser European states, and complete leeway over their colonies. Thus, the Concert did not eliminate balance-of-power politics; instead, great powers pursued an active approach to "balancing", rather than assuming it would happen automatically.

As the Concert was ensuring peace in Europe, great (and lesser) powers colonised the globe. While "decolonisation" of the Americas had occurred in the latter half of the 18th century, Black and Indigenous peoples were excluded from citizenship (except for the Haitians, who were of Euro-African descent). Thus, while the independence of the Americas did prevent further colonisation by Europeans, it did not stop their descendants from perpetrating it. (Watson, 1992, p.266) This greater flexibility of the hegemonic identity caused its moniker to shift from "European" to "Western" (except Japan). Barred from intervening in the Americas, European powers focused on Asia, Africa and Oceania. Such intense colonisation was only possible due to the Industrial Revolution that kicked off in the late 18th century; and, synergistically, the Industrial Revolution could only be fed on cheap labour and exploitation of resources in the colonies. (Watson, 1992, p.267-8) Perhaps it was guilt, but Westerners were not simply content with the violent propagation of global modernity. They rationalised colonisation as a moral mission to spread their culture. They viewed their culture as superior because of both the lingering influence of Christianity, and its metamorphosis into the new universalising force of Enlightenment values.



The insistence on certain normative rules, and several symbolic (but materially significant) actions such as the abolition of the slave trade — whose implementation was regulated by the Concert — is an important example of these rules. (Watson, 1992, p.267-8) During the mid-19th century, the Great Powers began stipulating a "standard of civilisation" to nations that wanted to become part of the exclusive club of sovereign states. (Watson, 1992, p.273) This materialised as a set of legal, economic, and political conditions, such as the preferential treatment of Western foreigners. The standard was unfair because it imposed Western values onto non-Western societies with their own cultures and institutions. (Watson, 1992, p.273-4) Regardless, attaining it was impossible, due to the systematic exploitation of non-Western societies by Western ones. Non-Western societies became a "periphery" which supplied a Western "core"; their underdevelopment was purposeful, self-sustaining, and only led to a greater gulf between the West and the rest.

Liberalism is the dominant international order today not because of inherent advantages over any other system; on the contrary, it has been propagated by a predominantly Western core to Institutionalise its global hierarchy over a non-Western periphery. The mix today of great powers with special rights and responsibilities, and predominantly Western cultural imperialism, is strikingly similar to the Concert system during the 19th century. Relative peace in the West, compared to war abroad, has persisted as a design feature. Of the United Nations Security Council's five permanent members, four are former Western colonial powers.

Despite the experience of the two World Wars, statespeople still take as axiomatic an assumption that actors must be purely self-interested. They perpetuate this way of thinking in the form of international law, which limits the scope for an alternative. The system has changed somewhat, due to decolonisation struggles; essentially all landmass on the globe is now owned by a sovereign state, most non-Western. However, Lawson argues, even when Indigenous and non-White peoples gained nominal independence, intrastate core-periphery splits were created by the fostering of comprador elites. (2015, p.189) In the core too, this divide has strengthened, and inequality has worsened over the past few decades. Living standards have risen in the periphery (although for certain groups more than others). Arguably this has happened in spite of the institutions of Western colonisation, cultural imperialism, and markets, rather than because of them. Development is a contested process, still tied to Western values.

Liberalism today is an evolution of the system developed primarily in the 19th century, minus colonisation, plus a nod to equality. The standard of civilization today is adherence to the rule of law, markets, democracy, and human rights. The power dynamics of the former two are essentially unchanged from the 19th century. Liberalism's relationship with the latter two is more complex: civil rights movements have pointed out the contradiction of claiming benevolence while engaging in global exploitation. The concept of "discrimination" emerged as the fusion of

ideas from anticolonial activists in the periphery, and civil rights activists in the core. Anti-discrimination campaigners have challenged and shaped the institutions of human rights and democracy. However, this does not stop Western states from using these institutions in the same way they did before: as an excuse to sustain the underdevelopment of certain groups, peoples, nations and states. Thus, taken as a whole, global liberal consensus undermines the interests of marginalised groups. Simultaneously, far-right and fascist movements, based on racial conceptions of national identity, do not just harken back to the West's age of colonisation; they look back further, to the *universitas* of mediaeval Europe. Jackson argues this *universitas* was based on a supreme leader (the Pope), and an overarching purpose (promoting Christianity). (1999, p.436-7) However, racialsists will not find what they want in the past — it was precisely a shift away from Christian natural law to secular positive law, that sought to justify the colonisation they so desire. (Lawson, 2015, p.173-4) Today we require a shift analogous in magnitude. More palatable elements have been appended to liberalism, but it remains structurally unequal. When we hear a phrase such as "the international community", it is important to recognise that even though all sovereign states are nominally included in this, some are "more equal than others", and many groups are excluded. To tackle the challenges of our time, we need to move away from liberalism, towards a new international system.

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China's race for renewable energy amid the evermore need for energy security

- By Z. Mangerah - Final Year Politics, Philosophy and Economics -

The latter half of the 20th century marked the triumph of liberalism and the subsequent establishment of a liberal world order, championed primarily by the United States (US). Liberalism is not exclusively an economic affair based upon principles that drive a market economy; it is also synonymous with a political ideology that intends to protect and promote individual freedoms. International organisations such as the United Nations have been founded on such principles and established to promote cooperation globally. In recent years, the liberal global order has been increasingly threatened, with the rise of China as a global superpower and amongst the backdrop of more 'current' forms of transnational disorder such as climate change, that said institutions are struggling to adequately address.

In light of the climate crisis, there is an ever-growing drive for energy transitions away from fossil fuels and towards cleaner energy sources. Although this is frequently framed as a collective problem (Brechin, 2016) - states frequently exhibit self-serving motives. Nations have, and continue to, pursue their interests to secure energy resources and in turn, ensure energy security. Energy security is fundamental for governments to be self-sufficient, given the frequent politicisation and weaponization of energy, rendering it a crucial leveraging point in geopolitics. In light of these crises, countries are again reminded of the severe costs associated with energy dependence, thus further catalysing the need for alternatives. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and the weaponization of Europe's energy dependence marked the largest energy shock since the notorious 1970s oil crisis (Falkner, 2023, p.2). Unsurprisingly, in the aftermath of both of the events aforementioned, we have witnessed notable shifts in nations' energy policies.

Following the 1970s crisis, some countries scrambled to introduce policies that reduced reliance on oil imports, thus ensuring greater energy independence; Brazil developed a sugarcane-based biofuel (ethanol) as a substitute for imported petroleum for transportation fuels, France adopted a nuclear power programme for electricity production (Solomon and Krishna, 2011, p.7424-7425)

and Japan also attempted to drastically reduce their oil dependency via nuclear energy promotion (Vivoda, 2012, p.137). Such energy transitions were evident imminently after Russia's invasion, whereby Europe cut all Russian coal imports within months and the EU launched the REPowerEU plan in May 2022 which was aimed at eliminating European dependence on Russian gas, whilst simultaneously accelerating their climate policy objectives (Falkner, 2023, p.3/6). Although one might presume that the invasion of Ukraine would dampen green energy efforts in Europe, instead it meant that "the case for a rapid clean energy transition has never been stronger and cleaner" (European Commission, 2022). Arguably, there is a symbiotic relationship between energy independence and renewable energy policies. The Ukraine War highlights this, as it nudged European leaders to advance decarbonisation policies to drive down fossil fuel reliance. So, it should "be seen as the single most important tool of Europe's energy security strategy" (Falkner, 2023, p.6). Therefore, the pragmatic alignment of nations achieving a sufficient degree of autonomy in their energy policies by pursuing renewable energy sources offers a unique opportunity to be capitalised upon. This proposes the potential question of who is leading the renewable energy front and whether they can stay ahead of the game.



Currently, China is paving the way. It is important to acknowledge that China is the largest emitter of carbon dioxide, accounting for almost 31% of global emissions in 2022 (Tiseo, 2023). However, just as they achieved rapid economic growth via their manufacturing base in goods for export, they are now leading in the production and technology front associated with green energy sources. The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) conducted a report that found three factors that will allow nations to exercise influence within the emergence of the new energy system. These are the exportation of electricity or green fuels, controlling the raw materials utilised in clean energy (namely lithium and cobalt) and technology in electric vehicle batteries (Hook and Sanderson, 2021). China's acceleration in the adoption of clean technologies is highlighted by their production of electricity generation from solar energy, producing over 70% of all solar photovoltaic panels in the world (Hook and Sanderson, 2021; Financial Times, 2024). China produces half of the world's electric vehicles (ibid.) and also dominates in electric vehicle Lithium-ion battery manufacturing, producing around 79% of all batteries that entered the global market in

2021 (Statista, 2023). Furthermore, in 2023 China ranked third globally in lithium production via mining, following Australia and Chile (Statista, 2024). The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the world's largest cobalt producer, "accounting for roughly 70% of global production" (Pistilli, 2023). The DCR's vast reserves attract interest given that cobalt is used in the batteries for electric vehicles, which is continually increasing in demand globally and China exercises significant influence even in this domain (Byamungu, 2022). In 2006, China struck a deal with the DCR's president at the time, Joseph Kabila, which involved Chinese investment and development of infrastructure in the DCR in exchange for natural resources such as copper and cobalt (ibid., p.2). As of 2020, 15 out of the 19 cobalt-producing mines in the DCR were either owned or being financed by Chinese companies - China is winning in the DCR, "with both the Obama and Trump administrations having stood idly by as a company backed by the Chinese government bought two of the country's largest cobalt deposits over the past five years" (Searcey et al., 2021).

The US is lagging behind China concerning investment and subsequent influence over the renewable energy field. Perhaps the US is attempting to bridge this gap; the US has approved a tax treaty with Chile which is crucial in ensuring access to lithium, allowing the US to acquire a more secure lithium source given that China has been the predominant supplier of US lithium imports (Piedrahita, 2024). The question remains if the US will push far enough to catch up with China. This will fundamentally depend upon who wins the US 2024 presidential election, given that Trump and Biden take polarising positions concerning energy policy.

If Trump won the election, he would reverse much of the Biden administration's work to combat climate change (Volcovici, 2024). Progress in the renewable energy sector would undoubtedly face a disastrous setback. Trump will in fact pursue US energy independence that is based on increasing fossil fuel production, repeal Biden's electric vehicle mandate and approve new gas export terminals that are currently under pause due to the Biden administration (Milman and Noor, 2024).

Changes to energy politics will occur as energy systems transform - in the 20th century geopolitical power correlated to possession of fossil fuels whereas nowadays countries that can "master clean technology, export green energy or import less fossil fuel stand to gain from the new system" (Hook and Sanderson, 2021). The world order that was previously founded on oil is shifting to a world order where green energy will take precedence. China's ascent as the world's renewable energy leader has profound geopolitical implications, which challenges the established liberal world order led by the US. Their dominance in renewable technology reshapes global energy landscapes as nations transition from fossil fuels due to climate

imperatives and energy security concerns, thus giving China a strategic advantage. Their production of solar energy as well as their control over vital elements required for electric vehicle batteries means that they possess extensive economic influence through exports as countries are increasingly seeking to make renewable energy transitions. China's investment in what is the future of our energy needs is likely to foster diplomatic alliances, which could alter power balances in regions pursuing extensive renewable energy agendas. The outcome of the US 2024 presidential election is likely to determine the trajectory of the US' energy agenda and consequent ability to catch up with China. Failing to do so, could result in substantial shifts in the balance of power globally, and an alternative world order to that of the US-led liberal order.

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Commodified Thought in the Liberal World Order

- By F.Stocks - First year Philosophy Student -

Politics has become fused with mass culture. Not simply in being democratised, but in a commodified manner. We must ask how this has come to be and its implications for a world at the behest of the bourgeois-liberalism that itself ushered this in. The notion of a liberal world order entails the infusion of traditions, values, institutions, etc., into general life on a global scale. Anything otherwise would instead be a type of pluralism in which multiple systems dominate varying geographical spaces. This might appear on its face to be the world we live in now, with places like China and Russia essentially operating in stark contrast to the United States (the beacon of modern world-liberalism). Yet this is only a superficial difference: to define one thing through being a negation of the other is to elevate the other as necessary for one's existence; we see this rather plainly with China, as Xi Jinping's (2014) *modus operandi* is in essence one of anti-Westernism reified as an end in and of itself. For example, despite Mao's efforts, it was the recognition from Richard Nixon in their meeting of 1972 that was truly validating (Di, 1994).

It is evident therefore, that this liberalism of which we speak is globally pervasive. For Mao's China, the violence of the Cultural Revolution was, as Žižek (2007) explains, the forceful imposition of politics in a state of economic inadequacy; and yet historically the salience of any semblance of a liberal world order has been founded on pure economic supremacy. China is now a hub of global manufacturing and its labour force is outsourced to many Western corporations for its cheapness. Despite its leaders' poetic and anti-Western verbiage, China functionally serves the capitalistic world market.

It must first and foremost be said that at present the 'commodity' dominates all spheres of life. This is not just the products themselves, but the form they take: the reification of its elements; the magical commodity whereby an object is alienated from the human labour by which it is produced, and attains some mystifying characteristic within itself.

But to categorise blankly the present 'consumerism' or 'corporatism' as opposed and different to classical industrial capitalism is to mystify their ontological unity: the one becomes the other when dressed up and adorned with charms and distractions; mass culture presents itself as an 'escape' in the

form of leisure that is infested with the fall-out of work such that the subject is restricted from questioning the work that necessitates leisure in the first place. The language of a 'work-life-balance' already denotes that work is a state of non-life. The dread of work is a taste of death, and the elation felt after, the jubilation of the 'weekend,' at once radically accepts the structuring of life entirely around work.





It is precisely for this reason that popular music and film are mere ornamentation - 'life' attains a meaningless character, for otherwise would require labour already divested in work. Art becomes casual even where it is supposedly 'expressive', it is ruled by cliché and stereotype, and is often judged by its relative success at adhering to them. The entirety of a Marvel movie can be predicted from its start, as can the contents of a Taylor Swift song, and the lifeless arc it follows through pleases the consumer that has been met with a totality seemingly for free. There is no true engagement with the material, it is not so much enjoyed as it is passively consumed. Bourgeois society finds itself continually in a state of reproduction - centuries ago it may simply have been the reproduction of the labourer as a subject that upholds the system; presently, the rule is one of culture, where its being is in the pervasive standardisation of everything. The subject which is subordinate to the system is still here reproduced. It is for this reason that Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) termed it the 'culture industry'.

The shallowness of everyday life is shown where the general mode of being is one of self-alienation, and as the commodity is pervasive in this sense, we must not presume it is not the same in political life. Amongst the swathes of ideological logorrhea, it would seem overwhelming for the individual to assimilate each and every talking point, with which they are hit every moment, into a coherent system. The notion of a monoculture

is destroyed as the internet is ushered in; whilst a variety of sources is good, a preponderance of fragmentary knowledge doesn't by nature instil good discursive practices.

Like art, thoughts and ideologies, and the character of *owning them*, have become integrated into the mass culture of commodities. As such, it holds the character of a mere spectacle.

Political slogans and company mottos have converged into essentially the same substance, and the individual is likewise a consumer, categorised in a particular fashion by the object of consumption; the real suffering of the disenfranchised across the world becomes simply entertainment, and its reality is transmuted into the symbolic. That is, a representative of some ownership of a particular ideology rather than an objective situation. One can in the same breath purchase a new article of clothing and then immediately open social media and share a post that does nothing but represent some personal belief. These actions are one in the same; the objective facet of the 'political' action is dominated by the will to exert oneself as ideologically correct, or "on the right side of history," and the same drive to be 'up-to-date' is what thus drives the desire to purchase the new iPhone or some new fashion line.

In the present debate around Israel and Palestine we see similar currents: while there are legitimate arguments in favour of the Palestinian cause, the overwhelmingly pro-Palestinian youth seem reluctant to become properly educated, in favour of playing fast-and-loose with terms like ‘Zionism,’ ‘settler-colonialism,’ or ‘genocide.’ Rather than engaging with the substance of such terminology, it is invoked akin to tokens which bear all the burden of justification. The exchange of political belief is alike in nature to trading Pokemon cards. The human element is largely forgotten, for, like all commodities, the abstract ‘merit’ of a particular ideology is concretised as natural within it. When Aaron Bushnell self-immolated, people were quick to cheer for his needless martyrdom, overshadowing the lost lives of the Palestinians. It is also simply antithetical to productive action he could have taken more usefully whilst alive. But this self-sacrifice is configured as closer to entertainment for those sharing, for example, posts rendering it aesthetic in a shockingly fascist way: to die for the cause is glorious. Here I am reminded of Walter Benjamin’s (1935, p. 242) warning that humankind’s “self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.”

Yet, once again it is the appearance of extreme action which incites keen eyes to gaze upon the spectacle rather than initiate real change; even those sensitive to Bushnell’s case are sceptical of its material benefit (Donegan, 2024). From all this, it would appear that picking a side has the character of a person choosing between two K-pop groups: the essential difference is the appearance of difference itself, and its differentiation stratifies a particular consumer base more than substantial worldviews diverging. This is what commodification entails for ideology.

To summate, the increasing commodification of thought is not necessarily a threat to a liberal world order, as it is in fact downstream from it; the threat is to intellectual freedom as a result of this order, and the commodification of thought is its means. The situation calls for us to resist the stultification of our beliefs, to think radically, investigate everything - to meaningfully question the status quo, not just casually, but academically.

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