

China and the Future International Order(s)

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The rise of China as part of the rise of the rest (or non-West) poses some profound questions for the future of the existing U.S./West-centric international order. In this essay, I focus on how China views its position and role in shaping the existing and future order. I then explore the possible implications of China's thinking and actions toward the existing order. I conclude with some thoughts on how the idea of the West and a post-Trump America pose a different set of questions to the future international order.

I begin by noting that much of the discussion on international order has not been conceptually rigorous. For instance, although Hedley Bull's definition of order as "a pattern of activity that sustains the elementary or primary goals of the society of states, or international society" enjoys wide acceptance in international relations, it is also seriously flawed.¹ Though order constrains and facilitates agents' behavior, agents can also disobey its rules. Consequently, a pattern of regular behavior merely indicates that an order may exist—it is not order itself. By the same logic, violation of an order's rules does not mean order does not exist, because order alone does not dictate agents' behavior. The behavior of agents is determined by a combination of order, their calculations, plus psychological and physical constraints that can come from either the order or the physical environment.² Moreover, when order is defined as a pattern of activity, it becomes tautological to explain behavior by reference to order or lack thereof. In short, order is different from behavior, as Max Weber noted long ago.³

I therefore introduce a more rigorous definition of order based on a conceptual analysis of (international) order.⁴ Briefly, at the ontological level, order is the

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degree of predictability (or regularity) of what is going on within a social system, presumably because agents' behavior, social interactions, and social outcomes within the social system have all come under some kind of regulation. At the operational or measurement level, order is measured along four dimensions: scope, the relative concentration or distribution of power, the degree of institutionalization along two sub-dimensions (density and depth), and the degree of internalization.

With this more rigorous definition of order, it becomes clear that the current "liberal" international order is "liberal" only in the open-trading (or economic) sense, but not in the political sense.⁵ A political order can be called liberal only when all subjects willingly submit to it. As such, only a liberal democracy can claim to be a genuinely liberal political order, and only in terms of domestic politics. In contrast, even under the present "liberal" international order, countries do not get to willingly submit to an order: this order was imposed by victors of World War II and the cold war. As such, a genuinely liberal order governing international politics is impossible even if all the countries on the planet were to become liberal democracies.⁶

Of course, even though the existing international order is liberal only in the economic sense, it may well be the case that if all major countries behind the international order are liberal democracies, the international order will become a bit more liberal in the political sense, perhaps because liberal democracies are more willing to listen to the concerns of small to medium states, developing countries, and perhaps rising powers. But because the international order is liberal only in the economic sense, there is nothing within it that should prevent the order from integrating and accommodating an illiberal rising power such as China, as long as the rising power relies on peaceful means for shaping specific rules within the international order. Moreover, if China does become a liberal democracy, its relationship with the existing international order may well change dramatically. On this front, however, no fundamental transformation of China's domestic political order is within sight in the next five years or so, at the very least. The following discussion starts with this premise.

CHINA DEBATING THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

China's experiences with the post-World War II international order in particular, and its overall historical experience with international relations since 1840 more generally, continue to shape its position toward the existing order.⁷ Between 1840 and 1941, China's interaction with the great powers can be summarized

aply as a century of humiliation at the hands of the West, Russia, and then Japan, during which a once proud civilization attempted to defend and then reinvent itself. This experience left a deep scar on the Chinese psyche.

The years from 1941 to 1945 were nearly a turning point. As World War II drew to a close, the United States invited the Republic of China to serve as one of the “Four Policemen” for the post-World War II international order. After the Communist takeover in 1949, however, the “New China” (that is, the People’s Republic of China) decided to join the Soviet camp and oppose the leading Western states. From 1949 to 1971, therefore, China was a bitter outsider of the Western-centric order. To some extent, during this period China’s attitude toward the existing order was not much different from its earlier attitude between 1840 and 1941—though now it had a revolutionary zeal.

The rapprochement between the United States and China in 1971–1972 brought China into the fold. After Deng Xiaoping launched “reform and opening-up” in 1978, China formally joined the Western-centric order, both economically and politically. Yet, since then China has shown no serious intention to adopt political liberalism, even under Deng Xiaoping. For a time, with the Soviet threat looming large, the West looked the other way, accepting China’s domestic arrangement of an uneasy combination of economic liberalism and political authoritarianism. However, that uneasy yet tranquil period was shattered in June 1989 at Tiananmen Square. By 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the primary strategic rationale for the West to include China in the international order also disappeared. Thus, just as the liberal order was becoming truly global with the conclusion of the cold war, China was left sitting uneasily on the outside. Not until 1993, when then U.S. president Bill Clinton invited China to participate in the first Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, did China formally restart its process of integrating into the existing order. This process culminated in China’s decision to join the World Trade Organization in 1999. Since then, China has come to firmly embrace the logic of economic liberalization within the Western-centric order. At the same time, however, it has remained steadfast against political liberalization.

This uneasy experience has molded perceptions within China of the existing order into three basic positions.

The first position is that of the revolutionary state: the existing order is mostly unjust, and it needs fundamental restructuring. Proponents of this position almost inevitably believe that China should lead the way in shaping the future order, due

to its (self-imagined) history, moral superiority, and, of course, size. This was the position held by Mao and his comrades. Although it holds sway among some policymakers even today, it is a marginalized position. After Mao's death and at least since 1978, China ceased to be a revolutionary state.⁸

The second position is that the existing order is for the most part acceptable, but that it needs to be fine-tuned (for example, by giving developing countries, including China, more say). This position further holds that China, as the strongest rising power, should take the lead on pressing for these reforms. We can call this position "modifying by leading."

The third position begins from the same premise as the second: the existing order is mostly satisfactory and needs only fine-tuning. The difference is that the third position holds that China should not lead, or even seek leadership, for a variety of reasons. Instead, this position calls for working with other countries (including the West and other non-Western countries) to improve the order. We can call this position "modifying by working together with others."

Overall, very few, if any, elites inside China believe that the present order is entirely just. The key debate is about how much needs to be changed, and how to change it. For now, the matter is unresolved, and the present leadership is torn between the second and third positions. For instance, in June 2015, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi stated explicitly that "China has been and will continue to be a defender, builder, and contributor to international and regional order."⁹ Then, in September 2015, when visiting the United States and meeting with President Obama, Chinese President Xi Jinping also proclaimed that "China has been a participant, builder, contributor, but also beneficiary of the existing international order." Xi went on to emphasize that "China merely seeks to reform and perfect the existing international system, and this does not mean fashioning a new order but only moving toward a more just direction."¹⁰ And at the 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos, Xi explicitly defended globalization, again essentially proclaiming China as a defender of the existing order.¹¹ All of these comments fit squarely into position three, situating China as a participant and defender, but not as a leader.

In the time since Brexit and especially the election of U.S. President Donald Trump, however, it seems that Chinese leaders have started to sense that some international leadership from China may be desirable both to them and others, especially when it comes to pushing for more globalization. In a 2017 internal session of China's National Security Committee, Xi stated that China is ready

to “guide the international society toward a more just international order.”¹² Thus, one could argue that the mindset of Xi himself is a mixture of the second and third positions, leaning slightly toward the second as he matures as a leader and as world events may necessitate. My own interpretation is that these inconsistencies reflect the lingering influence of a rosy assessment of China’s relative rise and the West’s inevitable and irreversible (relative) decline after the 2008 financial crisis. After 2008 there was a strong sense of “triumphalism” among many Chinese elites and perhaps some of its leaders because China seemed to have weathered the crisis better than others. Only since 2012, when Obama was reelected and the U.S. economy was well on its way to recovery, has this triumphalism been somewhat dampened. Today, though some still cling to this view, most Chinese elites and leaders have come to admit that their anticipation of the West’s inevitable decline has been premature at best, if not dangerous and delusional.¹³

A CHINESE MODEL OF INTERNATIONAL ORDER?

If China were to embrace the “modify by leading” position, on what basis would it do so? The Great Recession prompted a heightened awareness of international order and sparked much debate among China’s foreign policy pundits. According to data from China’s academic journals database (CNKI), before 2008 the average number of articles with the phrase “international order” or “world order” in the title was 14.3 per year. Since 2009, however, that number has nearly doubled—to 27.8 per year.¹⁴ From these articles, four major themes stand out: U.S. hegemony and its (possibly) inevitable decline, China’s rise and China’s status, the “China Model,” and China’s more righteous claim to leadership from its tradition or culture (especially its Confucian culture and the “Chinese World Order”). The latter two deserve further discussion.

The notion of a China Model is subject to debate, to put it mildly. Most political economists will contend that the China Model is merely a variant of the East Asian Developmental State (EADS) model pioneered by fellow East Asian states (primarily Japan and South Korea). Thus, it is a bit tenuous to argue that China has found a new model. The best that the proponents of the China Model can do is to claim that China has developed under the wise and able leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), while conveniently forgetting that the CCP has committed numerous blunders since coming to power in 1949.

Much of the discussion of China's righteous claim to leadership based on its tradition and culture has been inspired by a Neo-Confucian rebranding of the notion of "all-under-heaven" (*tianxia*).¹⁵ *Tianxia*, however, has generated little interest in China's foreign policy circles. After all, proponents of *tianxia* have never offered any concrete policy proposals or engaged with the voluminous literature on international order.

There is also some discussion about the Chinese World Order, a hierarchical order centered upon China as the "Middle Kingdom" in historical East Asia.¹⁶ Yet one must question whether this (re-)discovering of the Chinese World Order has any positive meaning for China's stated goals of constructing a more just international order that emphasizes *de jure* equality in the Westphalian sense.

In terms of specific issue domains, two have received the most attention as potential areas for Chinese leadership: international finance, which covers issues ranging from China's voting share in the International Monetary Fund and the international status and possible internationalization of China's currency to the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB); and economic integration, particularly the One Belt and One Road (OBOR) initiative.

In terms of geographic focus, East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region have unsurprisingly been the primary focus for many Chinese analysts examining where China might wield its influence. Yet even here the bilateral relationship between China and the United States (sometimes Japan) has received the most attention, with only reduced weight for the role of ASEAN in the context of ASEAN + 3 and the East Asian Summit.¹⁷

Overall, much of China's internal discussion within academic and policymaking circles on international order has been fairly traditional, focusing on (hard) power and money (that is, trade and finance), the two domains in which China's ascendancy has been the most profound over the past four decades. Chinese academics and policymakers have been largely silent not only on issues such as human rights and refugee flows but also on issues such as environmental protection, antiterrorism, and global inequality—despite their immense relevance for China. The only exception may be the Responsibility to Protect doctrine.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE INTERNATIONAL ORDER(S)

So what implications does China's discourse on international order hold for its future? This is worth examining at two levels: global/interregional and regional.

Global and Interregional

A number of things can be deduced from the above analysis. First, at the foundational level China remains a staunch defender of the Westphalian order in the sense that states' sovereignty comes first and everything else comes second. Thus, in his 2017 speech at Davos, while President Xi Jinping defended globalization and expressed support for the United Nations, he squarely blamed the refugee crisis (and the rise of ethno-nationalism in developed countries) on forced or attempted regime changes led by the United States and the European Union in Iraq, Libya, and Syria.¹⁸ China thus defends the post-1945 Westphalian order while rejecting the post-cold war order that supports interventionism and regime change. There is no doubt that this defense of the Westphalian order was partly driven by the CCP's determination to fend off foreign interference in China's domestic politics. Yet, an equally critical, if not deeper, driver might have been a general resentment against, if not a total rejection of, foreign intervention in any country's domestic politics. This resentment at both levels has been mostly shaped by China's bitter historical experience of foreign powers (first the West and then Japan) imposing their wills upon the country. After all, foreign occupations both in China and in other countries have brought regime changes and often "puppet regimes" with them.¹⁹

Second, and building on the first observation, China's ideal international order can be understood as a durable post-1945 Westphalian order with economic and financial globalization. This fits well with the CCP's principle of embracing economic liberalism without political liberalism.

Third, China is very conscious of its limited global reach outside the economic and financial domains: globally, China has been a reluctant power.²⁰ Moreover, China understands that it needs to partner with other actors in pushing for any global reforms. Thus, when initiating the AIIB, China lobbied for participation by the United States, its allies, and many other regional powers. And, to China's surprise, the AIIB has been rather well received, even by some key U.S. allies.

Fourth, China grasps that the world is becoming both more globalized and more regionalized, and overlapping regional orders will become a key component of any future international order.²¹ As a result, most Chinese leaders and elites understand that without extra-regional partners, there is very little China can achieve. Indeed, China's OBOR initiative is a conscious response to the increasingly regionalized world. China has also paid special attention to the China-EU partnership, though this linkage has always been more rhetoric than action, as

well as the China-Africa Summit. China will likely continue to pursue more extensive coordination and cooperation with extra-regional states and organizations in the coming years.

Fifth, the lack of attention to fellow BRICS countries in Chinese discourse on international order may reflect not only China's egocentrism but possibly China's realistic assessment of the association's prospects as a cohesive actor in reforming global governance. Despite the official rhetoric, most Chinese analysts are quite uncertain about cooperation and coordination within BRICS aside from that between Russia and China. Chinese analysts are also quite suspicious about whether leadership from BRICS, even if it can project a single voice, will be welcomed by the West, or even by other developing countries. Needless to say, Chinese analysts are also keenly aware that India and China have to resolve a host of issues (including their recent border standoff) before a partnership becomes a true possibility.

Finally, the lack of sustained attention to key issues of global governance may also indicate that most Chinese analysts see only a rather discouraging picture on this front. Most of them certainly admit that global rules and organizations are critical for reforming global governance. Yet, witnessing the slow pace of change for global multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, and IMF, most Chinese analysts are deeply aware of the difficulties of reforming global governance with so many (veto) players.

Regional

By many accounts, we are moving toward a more regionalized world. Unsurprisingly, at least since the 1997 Asian financial crisis, China has paid close attention to the two key regions that it straddles, namely, East Asia and Central Asia. Moreover, China's strategic vision toward these two regions and beyond has been profoundly shaped by its understanding of regionalism *within* the two regions.

The end of the cold war propelled East Asia into a kind of regionalism with two competing visions. The first, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) project, proposed by Australia and supported by the United States, has been *interregional* and the more ambitious of the two in terms of scope. The second, in contrast, is the vision offered by ASEAN states, which has been more *intraregional* and often more cautious. For almost a decade, these two competing visions sat alongside each other rather uneasily, with neither making much progress.

This period of ambivalence ended with the 1997 Asian financial crisis, during which crisis many East Asian states felt that they were not promptly and properly supported by the U.S.-led IMF. Indeed, the differences between the IMF's response to the East Asian states in the wake of the 1997 crisis versus its response to Mexico in 1994 are stark. Thus, East Asian states realized that they needed to build institutions that could promptly and properly respond to the needs of regional actors when the lone extra-regional superpower was unable or unwilling to do so. As a result, the more intraregional brand of regionalism cultivated by ASEAN came to the forefront. Building upon the ASEAN Regional Forum and resurrecting the East Asia Economic Caucus, the ASEAN countries as well as China, Japan, and South Korea began to have ASEAN + 1 and then ASEAN + 3 dialogues. Eventually, the ASEAN + 3-denominated East Asian Summit (EAS) came to dominate the conversation.

After the Great Recession a fundamental rethinking within the United States brought about two initiatives: the "Pivot to Asia" and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). These two things are really two sides of the same coin: both were intended to balance the growing influence of China in East Asia and end the sidelining of the United States by ASEAN + 3. However, by the time ASEAN + 3 became ASEAN + 6 and even ASEAN + 8, the original EAS vision had all but died. Therefore, for the first time since the end of the cold war, East Asia today is a region without a concrete regional project. To some extent, East Asia is now a region in danger of going adrift. Yet East Asian states cannot afford to sit idly as the United States under Trump refuses to push for more regional and global economic integration. Among the potential venues for cooperation, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Project (RCEP), which is based on free trade among the ASEAN + 6, may be East Asia's best bet.

Encouragingly, RCEP has been what China and a few other East Asian countries have been pushing over the last two or three years. Of course, RCEP should be about open rather than closed regionalism. In particular, it should be open to the inclusion of the United States, which has been extremely anxious about being excluded from East Asia. Indeed, the ASEAN + 3-based EAS was torpedoed partially because it did not include the United States in its original vision. Therefore, although the United States may or may not go back to its trade-promoting agenda after Trump, RCEP should be ready to welcome it in any case. After all, RCEP could easily expand to become the free-trade area of the Asia Pacific, a reincarnation of APEC, which the United States had originally preferred.

In Central Asia, China has mostly relied on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and more recently the OBOR initiative, to strengthen regional integration. To date, despite reluctance and ambivalence from Russia and some Central Asian states, SCO has proven to be a resilient regional organization, and economic integration within SCO has moved steadily forward. Yet, with Russia's economy stuck in slow motion and key Central Asian states facing the prospect of leadership transition, much uncertainty lingers over both the SCO and OBOR.

Finally, it is useful to note that to a great extent, China's OBOR initiative is a strategic reaction to stalled East Asian regionalism. Through OBOR, China wishes to link together East Asia, Central Asia, the Eurasia continent (most critically, the EU and Russia), and even Africa. The ambitious vision of OBOR is apparent. So far, China seems determined to push OBOR forward despite resistance (or at least ambivalence) from other countries and lingering domestic doubt. However, how much and how long China can commit itself to the initiative are open questions if not much progress can be made in the next few years.

Overall, China sees no need for and hence does not seek fundamental transformation, but only piecemeal modification of the existing order. In fact, China has been quite content with the existing order that supports globalization, despite occasional rhetoric indicating otherwise. In the near future, China will likely invest heavily in two key issue areas: (1) regionalism in East Asia and Central Asia; and (2) interregional cooperation and coordination. Perhaps unsurprisingly, China's ambitious One Belt and One Road initiative seeks to integrate these two issue areas.

CONCLUSION

Despite the rise of the rest, the United States and the West remain the most influential players in the existing international order. Thus, one of the most critical unknowns may be what kind of damages President Trump can inflict upon the existing order. The Trump administration will inevitably come to an end, but Trumpism will likely remain as an undercurrent within American domestic politics for the foreseeable future. What does this mean for the international order? At the very least, two sets of questions should be considered.

First, will Trump and Trumpism have some lasting impact on (or do lasting harm to) the U.S. role, its power, its image of leadership, or even its subjective

legitimacy to lead? Or, because of the resilience of U.S. power, will Trump and Trumpism be simply a fleeting moment without lasting impact, to the relief of many countries (and many in the United States)? Second, even if the United States reverts to its pre-Trump approach toward the international order, will the world have changed so much that the United States will need to adjust its own role and find new ways for exercising its leadership in a new world order? Will the United States forge a new mindset? If so, what does this hold for the future international order?

Another critical unknown is whether the idea of a more or less coherent West will persist, albeit with some modifications. For those within the West, the idea of a unified West certainly provides a sense of security, solidarity, and perhaps superiority. But that idea may also have been a key obstacle for coming to terms with the rise of the rest. If this is true, will the West become less Western-centric? Or will the rising powers remain so fragmented that the West will still remain a linchpin of any future international order?

Since World War II, the United States and Europe (often together) have been the leaders of the international order by default. For both sides of the Atlantic, the other side is always the preferred partner for almost all the key issues. Yet, if the West really seeks to integrate the whole world into the existing order, then some partnership between the EU and other key states and regional organizations must be a key component of the future international order. This is especially true while Trump occupies the White House and while the European Union struggles through Brexit.

Can the EU successfully undertake such partnerships? For instance, can the African Union and EU work together in reducing poverty? Can the EU and East Asia (ASEAN + 3) work together in promoting trade? Similarly, can the EU and China forge a stable partnership in combating climate change? All these possibilities cannot become realities unless the EU (and other regional organizations and states) look beyond the United States as the only possibility. It may be high time for the EU (and other countries) to rethink whether their U.S.-centrism is still warranted, at least until Trump is out of office. This (temporary) rejection of U.S.-centrism may be a critical variable in shaping the future of global governance in the near to medium term.

Despite its possible post-American and post-Western nature, any future international order will still be a rule-based order.²² The key difference may be that non-Western countries, including rising powers, will have more input into writing

the rules of the future order. In this sense, the future order will be an enterprise contested by multiple actors and ideas, with overlapping regional, subregional, and global governance. In short, we are entering a period of “contested multilateralism,” and this is a welcome development.²³

NOTES

- ¹ Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 4, 8, 16–21, 51. Many authors have adopted Bull’s definition either verbatim or with some modification. One flaw is that Bull never clearly defined what he meant by “activity.” To give him the benefit of the doubt, I assume that his definition is a broad one that includes both behavior and interactions.
- ² Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 37–8. See also Shiping Tang, “Order: A Conceptual Analysis,” *Chinese Political Science Review* 1, no. 1 (2016), pp. 30–46.
- ³ Weber, *Economy and Society*, pp. 29–36.
- ⁴ Tang, “Order: A Conceptual Analysis.” A conceptual analysis of order is not the same as assigning the proper label for the emerging order.
- ⁵ For details, see Tang, “Order: A Conceptual Analysis.”
- ⁶ With Trump now in the White House, we have even less reason to call the existing order a liberal one.
- ⁷ Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China’s Struggle with the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- ⁸ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980–2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).
- ⁹ Wang Yi, “China as Defender, Builder, and Contributor to the International and Regional Order” (Speech at the fourth “World Peace Forum,” Beijing, June 27, 2015), news.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-06/27/c_127958149.htm.
- ¹⁰ Xi Jinping, “China Has Been a Participant, Builder, Contributor, but also Beneficiary of the Existing International Order,” September 25, 2015, *Xinhua News Agency*, china.huanqiu.com/hot/2015-09/7647903.html.
- ¹¹ Xi Jinping, “President Xi’s Speech in Davos in Full,” World Economic Forum, January 17, 2017, www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum.
- ¹² “Xin Jinping Chairs Sessions of National Security Committee,” February 17, 2017, *Xinhua News Agency*, news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-02/17/c_1120486809.htm. The exact word in Chinese is “yin-dao,” which can be translated into “guide” and “channel,” but not exactly “lead.” One must wonder whether this word has been carefully chosen to test the waters.
- ¹³ Yinhong Shi, “‘Triumphalism’ and Decision Making in China’s Asia Policy,” *China Daily Blog*, March 14, 2013, blog.chinadaily.com.cn/home.php?mod=space&tuid=1040969&do=blog&id=8446.
- ¹⁴ Needless to say, this increase is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). A more detailed “content analysis” of these discussions will be provided elsewhere. Here, I merely provide some snapshots.
- ¹⁵ “Tianxia/all-under-heaven” is a central notion within the traditional Chinese philosophy of governance and order. For our discussion here, its key implication is that the world (as a planet under the empyrean or within the cosmos) should live in more-or-less perfect harmony.
- ¹⁶ For the original notion of the “Chinese World Order,” see John K. Fairbank, “A Preliminary Framework,” in John K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese World Order* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 1–23. It is important to point out that the “Chinese World Order” should not be misleadingly simplified as the tributary system. See Peter C. Perdue, “The Tenacious Tributary System,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96 (2015), pp. 1002–1014.
- ¹⁷ Interestingly, the number of papers on East Asian order has not witnessed any significant change before and after 2008, unlike the number of papers on international world order.
- ¹⁸ Xi, “President Xi’s Speech in Davos in Full.”
- ¹⁹ Proponents of forced regime change, if not most IR scholars, tend to conveniently ignore this fact.
- ²⁰ Evan A. Feigenbaum, “China and the World: Dealing with a Reluctant Power,” *Foreign Affairs* 96, no. 1 (2017), pp. 33–40.
- ²¹ Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (Cambridge, U.K.: Polity Press, 2014); and Barry Buzan, “A World Order without Superpowers,” *International Relations* 25, no. 1 (2011), pp. 3–25.

- ²² Acharya, *The End of American World Order*; G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); and Shijing Tang, *The Social Evolution of International Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- ²³ The term comes from Julia C. Morse and Robert O. Keohane, "Contested Multilateralism," *Review of International Organizations* 9 (2014), pp. 385–412.
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Abstract: In this essay I survey the key themes within China's discourse on international order, especially how China views its position and role in shaping the existing and future order. I go on to explore the possible implications of China's thinking and actions toward the existing international order. I conclude that overall, China sees no need for and hence does not seek fundamental transformation, but rather piecemeal modification of the existing order. In fact, China has been quite content with the existing order that supports globalization, despite occasional rhetoric indicating otherwise. In the near future, China will likely invest heavily in two key issue areas: (1) regionalism in East Asia and Central Asia; and (2) interregional cooperation and coordination. Perhaps unsurprisingly, China's ambitious "One Belt and One Road" initiative seeks to integrate these two issue areas.

Keywords: international order, China, regionalism, regionalized world, East Asia, global governance, Trumpism, the West, rising powers, One Belt and One Road