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Does China offer a new narrative and an alternative voice in International Relations?

Olivier Sempiga

Abstract

For some scholars, International Relations (IR) theories possess universal explanatory power whereas for others Western (European-Atlantic) IR theories have hijacked other truths as if Western regimes of truths were universal. This led Western nations to embark on process of promoting liberal values in various parts of the world. Liberalism has ruled the world for many decades and has become the status quo. But with the rise of China –dubbed peaceful rise – there has been a kind of an “End to the End of History”. This paper seeks to answer the question: Does China offer a new narrative and an alternative voice in International Relations? Schools within IR have been calling for recognition of voices other than Western ones. Africa is one of those areas that are embracing the Chinese mode of proceeding and where the peaceful rise is beginning to have a great impact. Having suffered from colonialism and the consequent dire poverty and economic decline for so many decades and failing to fully embrace Western liberal principles, many African countries have turned East mainly to China since it conforms to their authoritarian nature and at the same time indicates that it is possible to have economic growth without democratizing. This paper will show how China although not yet ready to uproot the liberal order with another kind of order draws on those liberal values that benefits China but at the same time turning away those elements of liberalism that do not serve it. In the era of multiculturalism, it seems adequate to accommodate non-Western voices into IR discourse. China may not challenge the existing order through violent ways like other would-be hegemonies did. But through its peaceful rise/development and soft power, China is set not only to become a new hegemony but it will provide a new narrative and alternative voice in IR. I will first of all give a sketch of the emerging Chinese IR theory. I will then show how the Beijing Consensus challenged the Washington Consensus. With clear cut examples from African nations, I will present China’s model as a worthy alternative for African nations. The paper draws from my contact with Chinese workers in Africa and exposure to Chinese companies’ activities.

Key words: China, International Relations, West, Peaceful Rise, alternative voices.

Introduction

One school argues that International Relations (IR) theories possess universal explanatory power and that there is no need to pursue alternative theoretical formulations (Ikenberry and Mastanduno 2003, 19). Another school argues that Western (European-Atlantic) IR theories have dominated and even hijacked other truths as if Western regimes of truths were universal. In the era of multiculturalism, it seems adequate to accommodate non-Western voices into IR discourse. To do this is to acknowledge that the Chinese or African debate does not necessarily emulate the Western definition of IR theory and that there may be different perspectives other than Western. Although it is difficult to point to a Chinese IR per se, it is argued that there are more than one ways in which Chinese IR is perceived. Dominant approaches to studying Chinese IR place an emphasis on the nation-state as the level of analysis, and are built on statist and realist notions of IR. Another key dynamic in China's IR is the relationship between local state actors, and international non-state actors (Breslin2002, 3-4). This paper aims at showing that although it is still at an early state China has started providing a new narrative in International Relations. There is no doubt whatsoever that IR has been dominated by Western IR theories. A kind of liberal order has become the status quo. Indeed, the post-Cold War has witnessed a triumph of liberal democracy as the best form of governing human kind and liberalism as the best way to advance economic growth of nations. One after the other, nations from the four corners of the world have embraced liberal democracy. Fukuyama even proclaimed the "End of History" after the collapse of the Soviet Union. But with the rise of China –dubbed peaceful rise – there has been a kind of an "End to the End of History". Schools within IR have been calling for recognition of voices other than Western ones. Post-colonialism proposes the integration of non-western voices into the process of IR theory formulation. To justify this endeavor, post- colonial scholars stress the incompatibility between "Western" theory and non- "Western" political and philosophical foundations. Heavily influenced by the Gramscian concept of hegemony, post- colonial studies in IR condemn the predominance of concepts defined from the perspectives of the leading powers in world affairs and demand a more pluralist, integrative IR framework (Noesselt2012, 8). The word "West" is often used in antithesis to the East, the Orient, and Islam. It is often invoked to refer to Europe and the United States.

Africa is one of those areas that are embracing the Chinese mode of proceeding and where the peaceful rise is beginning to have a great impact. Having suffered from colonialism and the consequent dire poverty and economic decline for so many decades and failing to fully embrace Western liberal principles many African countries have turned East mainly to China since it conforms to their authoritarian nature and at the same time indicates that it is possible to have economic growth without democratizing. This U-turn taken by many African nations is due to a feeling of betrayal that was experienced under the infamous "Structural Adjustment Programs" imposed on African countries by the IMF and the World Bank in the 1980s under the umbrella of the Washington Consensus. Although the "Structural Adjustment Programs" were meant to revive economies of African countries, they resulted in failure. This economic failure that took place in other regions of the world like Latin America and Asia led people to question the Washington Consensus with its one-size-fit-all policies. Recently, Rodrik2006, I argued that: "Nobody really believes in the Washington Consensus anymore. The question now is not whether the Washington Consensus is dead or alive; it is what will replace it." China's Beijing Consensus seemingly has provided an alternative to the Washington Consensus. Despite this peaceful rise of China it is not clear yet whether China will uproot the liberal order with another kind of order or try to fit into the liberal order.

I. Towards a Chinese IR theory

For a long time, it was claimed that there was no systematic “Chinese” IR theory or “theory with Chinese characteristics” (Qin 2008, 1). The absence of a Chinese IR theory was mainly due to three factors: the unconsciousness of ‘international-ness’ in the traditional Chinese worldview, the dominance of the Western IR discourse in the Chinese academic community, and the absence of a consistent theoretical core in the Chinese IR research. A Chinese IR theory is likely and even inevitable to emerge along with the great economic and social transformation that China has been experiencing and by exploring the essence of the Chinese intellectual tradition (1). Even though IR debates in China are currently influenced by Western IR studies, the establishment of a theory with Chinese characteristics or Chinese school of IR is underway. For instance, scholars in favor of the formation of a Chinese school have exactly started to explore the Chinese intellectual tradition. They maintain that Chinese IR can be traced back to the Zhou dynasty, during which several small Chinese kingdoms contended for leadership and hegemony. During the autumn and spring period (770– 476 B.C.) and the Warring States period (475–221 B.C.), multiple philosophical schools developed their readings on the state, the ruler and ways of governing. Instead of learning from the “Western” history of IR and memorizing the outcomes of the Eurocentric theory debates, scholars in favor of the formation of a “Chinese” school propose studying the constellations inside the *tianxia*, the Chinese concept of the “world” as “all under heaven,” during the Zhou dynasty (Noesselt 2012, 17).

The world is interpreted in such a way as to find suitable national responses. In China the word theory has a predominantly practical orientation. The “official” Chinese understanding of the meaning and function of (IR) theory is as follows: A theory is a system of concepts and principles, a scientific theory is established on the basis of social practice and has been proved and verified by social practice, and is a correct reflection of the essence and laws of objective things. The significance of a scientific theory lies in its ability to guide human behavior (Wang 1994, 482). This definition has its roots in the Maoist era. In his writings “On Practice” and “On Contradiction,” Mao (2007) proposed a recursive interrelation between theory and practice:

Discover the truth through practice, and again through practice verify and develop the truth. Start from perceptual knowledge and actively develop it into rational knowledge; then start from rational knowledge and actively guide revolutionary practice to change both the subjective and the objective world. Practice, knowledge, again practice, and again knowledge. This form repeats itself in endless cycles, and with each cycle the content of practice and knowledge rises to a higher level. such is the dialectical- materialist theory of the unity of knowing and doing (Mao 2007, 66).

In the post- Maoist period, IR studies in China underwent an all- encompassing reorganization. Most institutes had been shut down during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). After 1978, they were reopened and Maoist ideas and Marxist- Leninist ideology were replaced with “Western” IR approaches. These approaches were regarded as universally valid analytical frameworks that would allow China to enact pragmatic and efficient foreign policy (Noesselt 2012, 13).

The field of IR in China continues to be shaped by the cleavages that are manifested in the controversy regarding the internationalization/Westernization versus the indigenization/Sinization of IR theory (Geeraerts and Men 2001, 266). Since the late 1990s Chinese publications have started to use the expression “Chinese school” instead of stressing the particularity of China’s IR approach. The members of this school of (Chinese) thought do not negate the general ideas of “Western” IR, but,

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inspired by the “English school,” try to enrich the existing frameworks and to add a new perspective to general IR. The “Chinese school” paradigm has, however, not replaced the search for IR “with Chinese characteristics” (Noesselt 2012, 16). Furthermore, Chinese scholars still disagree over the question of whether the focus of IR research and IR theory formulation in China should be Chinese foreign relations or international relations. In the recent past, most research has dealt with China’s foreign relations and China’s image in the world. As an element of foreign policy, the theory debate has to answer the “core question” of Chinese IR: it has to define the circumstances and conditions under which China’s reemergence, the “peaceful rise,” can be realized without encountering containment and balancing acts by other states (16). Chinese IR theory is definitely underway. This is also shown by the way China’s economic and cultural boom challenge the liberal order established by Western nations as the following section shows.

II. The Washington Consensus and The Beijing Consensus: Liberal order versus “non-liberal” order

Liberalism has shaped the contemporary international system. Two different strands of liberalism, in particular, are relevant: one dating back to the early modern period emphasizing sovereignty and the equality of states. The 1648 Peace of Westphalia gave rise to the idea that states are the sole legitimate actors of the international political arena. Moreover, states are free and equal therein, meaning that each country is at liberty to choose its own social, political and economic system and that it has the right of non-interference by foreign states on domestic matters. The second strand of liberalism-led by the US - introduced norms of moral universalism, based on the liberal values of democracy and human rights. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the aim of promoting democracy abroad had been a core element in how the US exercises its international power. As the geographical reach of the US’ political influence expanded, democracy promotion became a major and eventually an integral part of US foreign policy. From the late 1970s, human rights promotion was added as an important twin objective to democracy promotion in US foreign policy. In the post-Cold War era, many other state actors, in particular the European Union (EU) and its member states have also fostered democracy and human rights internationally (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 8).

The Washington Consensus is one of the methods the West adopted to promote liberal values abroad. Moreover, it was a reaction to the economic statism that dominated development economics in many developing countries for much of the post-war, post-colonial period and was developed initially as a reaction to the Latin American and African debt crisis in the early 1980s (Han 2016 2). It is characterized by the World Bank, IMF and western donor community conditionality, including restrictions on macro-economic policy, a reduction in public spending, commitments to transparency and accountability, and the holding of democratic elections (3). Although the term ‘Washington Consensus’ is no longer widely used and has been severely criticized, the US and other Western governments continue to promote openness of economic systems internationally and other liberal values like democracy (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 10). China and the West have different views on the role of liberal values in international relations. Although liberal values and related norms play a significant role in the contemporary international system, China’s leaders have found ways for their country to exist and even thrive in such an environment, while at the same time keeping political and economic liberties highly constrained at the domestic level (5).

Basing on survey data and archival sources, Huang argues that there exist two China models. One China model emphasized financial liberalization, support for private entrepreneurship, and some political liberalism. The other China model is more statist in orientation, putting the emphasis on

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financial and political controls and favoring the state-owned enterprises at the expense of private entrepreneurship. Roughly speaking, the first China model, which prevailed in the 1980s, was quite close to many of the prescriptions embodied in the Washington Consensus. The second China model which is called the Beijing Consensus has prevailed since the early 1990s (Huang 2010, 33). According to the Beijing Consensus, China's rapid growth was enabled by its authoritarian political system (Huang 2010, 40). China is not a liberal democracy and its economy remains firmly controlled by the state. China's approach to liberalism in international relations is not one of wholehearted acceptance, but of pragmatism. This pragmatism has so far resulted in a certain degree of adaptation (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 15).

The phrase "Beijing Consensus" is used as an alternative to the Washington Consensus for nations that were trying to see how best to develop their economies. The Beijing Consensus consists of three theorems involving innovation; measures that focus on quality of life where sustainability and equality become first considerations; and self-determination. Self-determination would allow developing nations to develop relations on equal footing with big powers (Han 2016, 3). The theorem of self-determination gives an idea of the Beijing Consensus as a model of development based on a strictly classic notion of sovereignty (Abad 2010, 49). As we will see in the following section on how China relates with Africa, sovereignty forms a cornerstone of China's relationship with other nations. The Beijing Consensus is predicated on non-interference in domestic affairs. Unlike the Washington Consensus which claim to have a universal template of reforms and conditions that have to be met regardless of the country-specific conditions, the Beijing Consensus proponents put emphasis on trial-and-error experimentation. As we will see in the following section with the African situation, countries experiment and adopt those policies that succeed and abandon those policies that fail. There is no need for a general theory of reform (Huang 2010, 38).

The model of development described in the Beijing consensus, especially in the light of its self-determination theorem and its base on a strictly classical concept of sovereignty, may be of particular interest for other developing countries. Interestingly, it does not consider any concrete degree of political liberalisation, let alone democratisation, as a necessary link to economic growth and development. Furthermore, the Chinese case proves that economic reform and liberalization do not necessarily result in democratic reform. In fact, China is an example of an authoritarian political regime with a technocratic approach to governance which incorporates interventionist economic policies and places strong emphasis not only on the achievement of economic growth but also on the maintenance of social stability (Abad 2010, 49). The Beijing Consensus' focus on autonomy and self-determination is not just a reaction to Western hegemony of international liberalism; it is fundamentally different in an epistemological sense. It is both pragmatic and ideological in nature, as it contains many ideas about politics, quality of life and the global balance of power, but it does not deduce a universally applicable model from those ideas, leaving room for localization of globalization practices. The Beijing Consensus cannot be interpreted as a coherent ideology, a set model of values and institutions, like international liberalism (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 17). After seeing how China's economy grew despite the country not having liberalized people asked a number of questions. Why should China or any other country adopt the recommendations of the Washington Consensus? If state ownership of firms promotes economic growth, why privatize? If the one-party system works well in generating growth in gross domestic product (GDP), why democratize? If state financial controls are effective in resource mobilization, why liberalize? (Huang 2010, 31). Below, we will see how the China's model has inspired many African nations.

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III. China is regarded as a worthy alternative order by some African nations

Unlike Western donors, China's official policy statement on its trade and aid relationship with African countries states that as a first principle, China "respects African countries' choice in political system and development path suited to their own national conditions; China does not interfere in internal affairs of African countries, and supports them in their just struggles for safeguarding their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity." (Condon 2012, 17). Chinese leaders argue that since China does not accept any country imposing its values, social systems and ideology upon China, neither will China allow itself to do so to others (Bosshard 2008, 1). Guijin Liu said: "We [China] have never, and will never in the future, attach any kind of political conditions to [...] aid and development projects, because we think that providing assistance is just for the benefit of the people, it is not for political purposes." (Power and Mohan 2010, 18). China simultaneously wants to avoid Western donors' failures that led to impoverishment in some African countries.

The Chinese model is an attractive alternative for those authoritarian leaders who may want to improve the growth and development rates of their countries without challenging their single party rule, making economic development a priority over political reform. At the same time, judging by the Chinese case, these authoritarian leaders will enjoy some legitimacy as long as they achieve certain economic development and welfare for a greater number, regardless of the political line they may follow (Abad 2010, 50). Due to the attractiveness of China's model in Africa, Chinese investment in Africa has been growing profitably in an unprecedented manner. Chinese investors are interested in physical infrastructure, industry and agriculture. China's infrastructural development has been supported by African politicians who are desperate to show their successes (Shelton and Kabemba 2012, 235). Afrodad 2010 maintains that there has rarely been as rapid and intense investment in African infrastructure as is going on today with Chinese investors. In fact, China is dispelling the myth that Africa cannot develop (Shelton and Kabemba 2012, 235). To some African leaders, China's model is simply more beneficial than what was on offer from the West. Former Senegalese president A. Wade 2008, 2 said:

With direct aid, credit lines and reasonable contracts, China has helped African nations build infrastructure projects in record time - bridges, roads, schools, hospitals, dams, legislative buildings, stadiums and airports... I have found that a contract that would take five years to discuss, negotiate and sign with the World Bank and the IMF, takes three months when we have dealt with Chinese authorities. I am a firm believer in good governance and the rule of law. But when bureaucracy and senseless red tape impede our ability to act - and when poverty persists while international functionaries drag their feet - African leaders have an obligation to opt for swifter solutions.

To facilitate and evaluate the effectiveness of China-Africa relations, a Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) has been established. It serves as a means by which China can advance a position of moral relativism regarding human rights to a mostly sympathetic audience, consolidating its standing within African elite circles. A communique released after 2000 FOCAC asserted that "countries, that vary from one another in social system, stages of development, historical and cultural background and values, have the right to choose their own approaches and models in promoting and protecting human rights in their own countries" (FMPRC 2000, 104). Going further, the declaration made the claim that 'the politicization of human rights and the imposition of human rights conditionalities' themselves 'constitute a violation of human rights' and that conditionalities for development assistance which are based on good governance and respect for human rights 'should be

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vigorously opposed'. All this was music to the ears of many African leaders seated in the hall in Beijing, no doubt, and all arguably crafted as a means to promote an 'alternative' global order (Taylor 2010, 191).

China now gives more loans to Africa than the World Bank. During a FOCAC summit in Johannesburg, President Xi Jinping revealed that USD 60 billion China loaned Africa in 2015 would be zero-interest. China is now Africa's largest trading partner, deepening their trade relations impressively. Nowadays, if a country is not happy with conditions it can easily turn the offer away because there are other available options to consider. In 2004, the IMF required Angola to reduce its corruption before it could award any financial assistance. Unexpectedly then, China's Exim Bank also came forward with an offer to provide USD 2 billion worth of loans, without any conditionality regarding corruption or transparency attached. Angola finally turned down the IMF assistance and agreed to provide China with 40,000 barrels of oil per day (Condon 2012, 8). This loan led the Angolan government to repair infrastructure damaged by civil war spanning 27-years that had formally ended in 2002. Critics commented that this money allowed the Angolan government to escape transparency (27). Condon argues that these large, unconditional, and very cheap Chinese loans disbursed without concern for transparency or accountability, are certainly problematic, especially when they are given to autocratic governments lording over oil and mines (9).

There are a number of advantages associated with Chinese model of development in Africa. When financial guarantees are largely unavailable, natural resource supplies are exchanged for infrastructure in a manner called the "Angola Mode of investment." (Hsueh and Nelson 2015, 9). Chinese intervention, which is built upon direct responsibility for infrastructure development, is proving to be far more effective than western intervention. Much of the funding that the West sends to some African nations (whether through multilateral or bilateral cooperation) is misappropriated by corrupt local leaders and ends up in European banks. Following the Chinese approach, money, which would have been paid as taxes, is put straight into infrastructure development. This has prevented money from going into the pockets of corrupt officials (Shelton and Kabemba 2012, 139). In the past, the people of Africa were excluded from benefiting from mineral resources mostly because of elite corruption. Today, each country engaged with China is in a tangible progress for the new mode of development.

However, some leaders from developing countries are already wondering whether China is truly committed to its non-interference policy. The Chinese ambassador to Zambia in 2006 warned that Beijing might cut off diplomatic ties if Zambians voted Sata as their president because he openly criticized Chinese exploitative activities in Zambia. Similarly, while many might agree that good governance cannot be externally imposed, some African scholars argue that Chinese leaders keep repeating the misleading statement that China does not interfere in the internal affairs of the countries it deals with. These scholars maintain that this non-interference statement is untrue. It is indeed provocative and insulting to many Africans who are aspiring for further democratic values. China interferes deeply in the domestic affairs of its partners, but always to the benefit of the ruling group. Even if China were to maintain exclusive economic relations with African countries, this would still inevitably have an effect on internal politics (Askouri and Campell 2007, 73). Chinese themselves are well aware that their non-interference stance is untenable in Africa. Non-interference is a principle that is breaking down as evidenced by the emerging strategy of "proactive non-interference" that China adopts in some countries. As Chinese interests are changing, China's support of sovereignty may be changing too. In June 2007, as a member of the UNSC, China persuaded the Sudanese government to

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accept UN Resolution 1769, which empowered UN troops to use ‘all necessary means’ to protect themselves, defend civilians and secure the safe passage of aid (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 17).

China has been also blamed for its relationships with shaky governments. Western critics contend that China’s African agenda are driven by its narrow self-interests and thus often undermine their efforts to promote regional peace, economic growth and democratization (Shelton and Kabemba 2012, 34). Hsueh and Nelson 2015 maintain that China’s deals help support some of the worst regimes on the continent, thereby undermining the ability of the West to reform governance in Africa, and instead represent a new attempt to colonize Africa (2). This leads to backsliding on democratic consolidation. Given the linkage between weak governance and conflict (Collier 2008), China’s political aid and commercial relations with corrupt or patronage-based regimes inadvertently consolidate or exacerbate cycles of underdevelopment, insecurity and conflict (Saferworld 2011, 29). However, this does not necessarily mean that if it were a democratic nation it would act differently. In reality, some Western democratic nations did worse simply because of their double standards. The West, which conditions its loans on initiatives like democracy promotion and corruption reduction, has labeled China a ‘rogue donor,’ whose actions will damage Africa in the long run (Condon 2012, 8). Although Condon criticizes China’s support of unaccountability, he suggests that the West needs some humility in admitting that it has not been getting development in Africa right, either (19).

China’s leaders have until now found ways for their country to exist and even to thrive in a world where liberal values play a significant role. Yet as China becomes a global power, the question should be asked as to whether China might use its influence to diminish the role of liberal values at the international level. Indeed, as China’s influence in Africa shows, China’s rise –in the words of Edward Friedman – has enabled it ‘to contribute to a roll-back of democracy globally’. Western liberal democracy is already in crisis; the West needs to respond to the challenge posed by the authoritarian state models of China (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 6). China sees an underlying ideological interest in Africa, as the success of the ‘China model’ in non-democratic African countries offers indirect support for its own political ideology. The more countries identify with and adopt Beijing’s approach, the less isolated China feels. Beijing would like to see non-Western, non-democratic governments grow and prosper in Africa, simply because they help validate China’s political system and mitigate its international isolation by showing that Western democracy is neither a universal value, nor fit for every country. Therefore, any success of authoritarian governments in Africa may be seen as constituting support for the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. The rate at which China is growing economically and its model being embraced in different parts of the world makes one wonder whether China is headed at providing a new narrative and alternative in IR.

IV. China’s peaceful rise/development: A new narrative and alternative in IR?

The conventional theoretical approaches used to understand IR, especially hegemonic stability theory, have been witnessing consistent problems arising both from the experiences of the current hegemon - the US- and the challenge posed by the rise of China, a power which is increasingly willing and able to project and promote its historical and cultural position in the East Asian region through community building and soft power or simply ‘peaceful rise (*hepingjueqi*)’ (Cheung 2008, 6). In China, the use of soft power to facilitate the peaceful rise of China has gained momentum. China’s patience, confidence, and rising economic power translate into a growing pool of “soft” power, giving China increasing influence in East Asia, in Africa and the global economic system. The Chinese language, along with globally established Confucian values, is gradually being accepted as symbols of Chinese soft power.

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China's proclamation regarding a "harmonious world" and its commitment to a "peaceful rise," are identified as the conceptual pillars of an alternative model of the international system that could serve as a blueprint for other state actors (Yan 2008, 159). The peaceful rise is manifested via business and trade deals, Confucianism, soft power and East Asian education cooperation rather than more traditional mechanisms of war and military alliances (Cheung 2008, 6). Kurlantzick 2008 argued: "China's soft power indeed has proven successful in many cities [in East Asia and far beyond], allowing China in some cases to supplant the United States as the major external cultural and economic influence" (107). China is perceived by many to be destined for hegemonic status, at—and possibly beyond—the regional level (Buzan 2014). Gries 2005 maintain that there is a general feeling that "China's sun will rise as America's sets" (406). China's peaceful rise will further open its economy so that its population can serve as a growing market for the rest of the world, thus providing increased opportunities for – rather than posing a threat to – the international community (Zheng 2005, 24).

China seeks to build positive relationships with current and potential great powers to facilitate the emergence of a multipolar world order and to deny the US the opportunity to construct a coalition to contain China and prevent its continued rise. By properly managing relations with the US, other great powers, and developing countries, Chinese leaders hope to take advantage of the period of strategic opportunity to build China's comprehensive national power and improve China's international position (Saunders 2008, 128). The Chinese government has often expressed concern about the rise of an unchallenged hegemon, maintaining the opinion that in the current international system it is imperative that China and the developing world support each other and work together to prevent the over-domination by this US hegemony. Asserting that respect for each other's affairs and non-interference should be the basis of any new international order is fundamental to this stance, as is a policy of accommodating, and hedging risks with, the USA when deemed appropriate (Taylor 2010, 189). As we also saw above China put its own economic development as top priority, and deduced from that the need for stability in its international relations both regionally and globally (Buzan 2010, 12). Moreover, China is not merely trying to use its new economic power to transform its political status from that of a third world country to that of a Great Power. In addition to catching up to the West economically, China now aims to narrow the "normative gap" in international relations theory' (Callahan 2004, 570). Buzan 2014 thinks that peaceful rise/development is a unique idea for China's grand strategy. Peaceful rise could mark the end of the Western dominated era of warlike rise, and the move to a new model of IR (40).

Despite China's peaceful rise, Ikenberry 2011 thinks that a fundamental alternative to liberalism is nowhere to be found. Those who follow a liberal perspective argue that liberalism will prove to be the end of history. In this view, although China certainly comes from a different past, its future is liberal, in which it will accept economic and political norms based on liberalism, and institutions as universally true and applicable, by the virtue of reason. Within this liberal framework, it might be expected that China will change the international order in practice, while adopting liberalism in theoretical essence. China's rise would thus be part of the evolution of the system, rather than the end of it (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 11). Ikenberry goes on to argue that China will continue to accommodate what he calls the 'liberal international order', because ultimately this provides it with greater benefits than if it tries to change this order (Ikenberry 2011, 57-8). It may be possible for China to overtake the United States alone, but it is much less likely that China will ever manage to overtake the Western order. The US may be weakened, but China has to comply with the established world order created by the US and its partners. China is a follower after all (Ikenberry 2008, 37).

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According to Ikenberry, China and other emerging great powers do not want to contest the basic rules and principles of the liberal international order; they wish to gain more authority and leadership within it. Indeed, today's power transition represents not the defeat of the post-1945 world order, in which liberalism plays a major role, but its ultimate ascendance (Ikenberry 2011, 57). There are several reasons for this liberal international order to persist. First, the period since 1945 is the longest period of 'great power peace' in modern history. This is because of the dominance of democracy, assuming that democratic countries are less likely to wage war in general and especially on one another, and because of nuclear deterrence, which raises the cost of war. It would not be in any party's interest to disrupt such a peaceful order. Second, the liberal international order is 'easy to join and hard to overturn'. Multilateral institutions bear a relatively low threshold for entry and provide great economic and political gains. Finally, like other emerging powers, China does not pose a fundamentally different alternative to the existing international order. Indeed, China is becoming increasingly more compatible with norms based on liberalism and is becoming integrated into the existing world order (Ikenberry 2010, 514-515).

There are a number of counter-arguments that have been made against Ikenberry and those in his camp. China seems to have little sense of duty to promote liberalism; rather, China feels that it is, at the moment, to its benefit to partake in it. To argue that China integrates into the international order for the sake of liberalism would be to reason the wrong way around: China will be compatible with norms based on liberalism as long as such norms are compatible with Chinese interests. China is not integrating into the liberal international order because it shares the liberal ideology, but because it serves China's needs (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 13). Ginsburg seems to challenge Ikenberry's argument by arguing that "Only if Asia's political preferences and infant regional institutions magically transformed into mirrors of Europe would we expect an Asia-centred economic order to converge with the European model of politics and law. This outcome seems highly unlikely" (Ginsburg 2010, 28).

Consequently, China will turn out to be a radically different kind of superpower than any that we have seen so far, with its rise bringing a fundamentally different ideological system to the table. Such a theory rejects the assumption of the universality of liberal values and puts forward a communitarian approach to the theory and practice of international political order, relying on notions of Chinese essentialism (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 11). In *The End of the End of History*, Kagan argues that the re-emergence of the great autocratic powers like China has weakened liberal order, and threatens to weaken it further in the years and decades to come. The world's democracies need to begin thinking about how they can protect their interests and advance their principles in a world in which they are, once again, powerfully contested. A new international order based on illiberal values might replace the current liberal order, leading to a paradigmatic shift in international politics.

Although China does not confront liberalism with a counter-ideology, it does approach the actual or potential norm of promoting liberal values with the counter-norm of international diversity. The central idea in the latter concept is that respect for differences between countries in terms of their political and economic systems is a fundamental precondition for a stable and morally just international system (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 18). Chinese policy in this regard has been consistently to cast talk of liberal democracy and liberal conceptions of human rights as a tool of neo-imperialism being practiced towards both China and the developing world. The Chinese approach of reforming the economy while limiting political freedom represents a new development model with considerable appeal to authoritarian leaders in developing countries (Saunders 2008, 139). Ayodele

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and Sotola²⁰¹⁴ are convinced that China's economic rise is shaping the international order by introducing a new development paradigm in international relations which demonstrates that economic growth could be brought about by any type of government, democratic or nondemocratic (3). China is forging a path for other developing countries across the world that wish to develop their economies following the international order as a way to be truly independent and protect their political choices. China clearly shows that economic development and finance can in fact be led by the State. Tom Friedman, "One-party non-democracy certainly has its drawbacks. But when it is led by a reasonably enlightened group of people, as China is today, it can also have great advantages. That one party can just impose the politically difficult but critically important policies needed to move a society forward in the 21st century." The discussion on Africa proves that a Chinese model has become a legitimate challenger to the Western status-quo providing an alternative to the unhealthy economic dependency which has grown between Africa and its former colonial masters. Tull²⁰¹⁶ suggests that China is not just an alternative, but is arguably a better choice for Africa.

It is noteworthy that domestic problems, social inequality, environmental degradation, and periodic political clampdowns could also limit China's attractiveness as a model for others to emulate (Saunders 2008, 139). Despite the dramatic economic growth achieved, China has the highest inequality in the world. The issue of inequality in China is alarming. It is one of the highest in the world today. Gini coefficient is normally calculated between zero – which means there is no inequality – to 1 – where inequality is high. China's Gini coefficient was 0.465 in 2016. The World Bank estimates that a country with a Gini Coefficient of 0.40 has a severe form of inequality. (Griffin and Renwei 2016, 6) Since 1990s China's Gini coefficient has been high. The richer are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. A number of these rich people are from the ruling party. Around 35% of the 500 richest people in China– all of them multi-millionaires or even billionaires – are members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Li 2009, 8).

Despite the fact that China has been an autocratic state, some scholars think that it will democratize at some point. According to modernization theory, China with its economic development today should democratize or is on the way to democratizing. There is no way it will avoid this natural process through which other developed and democratic nations have passed. According to the modernization theory, democracy is a product of economic development. Democracies are more likely to emerge as countries become economically developed. In other words, development comes first and democracy follows suit. Chen argues that "development first, democracy later" theorists believe that if we consider that democracy should be supported by some preconditions, economic growth just creates these necessary for democracy—industrialization, urbanization, widespread of education and literacy, wealth, and a strong middle class who concern with the protection of their rights (16). Martin Jacques argues in his famous book *When China Rules the World* that "Chinese democracy will share certain universal characteristics with democracies elsewhere, but will also of necessity be highly distinctive, expressive of its roots in Chinese society and traditions" (Jacques 2009, 220).

China has started a very slow process of democratization. In September 2009, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) called for promoting democracy within the Party and intensifying the anticorruption drive within the leadership. The dominant theme of 2009 CCP meeting was "intra-Party democracy *"dangneiminzhu."* China's top leaders characterized intra-Party democracy as the "lifeblood" of the Party (Li 2009, 2). While there was no breakthrough decision in 2009, there was a wide-ranging plan for improvements to CCP governing. The directives explicitly called for political reforms in five major areas: 1) more competitive inner-Party elections to choose CCP officials; 2) a more consensus based

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decision-making process called “decision by votes” (*piaojuezh*); 3) more restrictive rules to regulate the tenure, transfer, and regional allocation of high-ranking leaders; 4) a multi-dimensional supervision system to restrain official corruption and other forms of power abuses; and 5) a new emphasis on the transparency of Party affairs (7). Li 2009 believes that inner-Party democracy is not true democracy, but it may pave the way for Chinese democracy in a broader sense (6).

The rise of China will put forward a fundamentally different set of norms in global governance, but it will not challenge liberalism in the sense that communism did in the Cold War. The opposite is the case: although China rejects any ideological universalism in an epistemological sense, and acts from this belief, it accepts that norms based on liberalism are a part of the pluralist international order, albeit with its national interests in mind. Rather than countering liberalism with an alternative, homological grand narrative, China’s ideological strategy is pragmatic and based on seeking legitimization of its actions through specific and localized rhetoric (Dams and van der Putten 2015, 17).

Conclusion

For now there may be no clear and distinct Chinese IR theory. But the progress that China has made economically and the influence it has had during the past 30 years on the rest of the world shows that China is set for challenging the current liberal order which has stood for decades. China’s approach is pragmatic and has thus accommodated liberal ideas and worldview each time it benefits from doing so. Consequently, China may not disrupt the liberal order but it will draw from it what serves its interest and keep challenging what contradicts its grand strategy of peaceful rise. China’s model shows that it is possible to achieve dramatic economic growth without necessarily embracing liberal democracy and other conditionalities that were embedded in the Washington Consensus and that are imposed by Western states to developing world. The Beijing Consensus, China’s peaceful rise/development may not be fully-fledged alternative to the Washington Consensus but certainly it sets a new tone and a new narrative in IR and seriously challenges the status quo. In many developing countries, China has found followers of its development and political model. China will not challenge the existing order through violent ways like other would-be hegemonies did. Through a peaceful rise/development China will become a new hegemony and with its soft power it will regulate and rule the world. China’s grand strategy challenges from all angles the idea of viewing the world from a realist perspective of conflict and the use of force. The way China’s model has gained momentum proves that it will be a mistake to silence voices beyond the European-Atlantic hemisphere. Once that is done it will be to adopt an intellectual colonization of non-Western people. IR is richer when it is diverse and does not ignore other voices no matter how small and weak they may be. As we wait for the Kuhnian paradigm shift in IR theories, it is high time Western voices accommodate new voices not just from China but from beyond to engage them in a discourse.

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