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# The Distribution of Identity and the Future of International Order: China's Hegemonic Prospects

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**Abstract** Existing theories predict that the rise of China will trigger a hegemonic transition and the current debate centers on whether or not the transition will be violent or peaceful. This debate largely sidesteps two questions that are central to understanding the future of international order: how strong is the current Western hegemonic order and what is the likelihood that China can or will lead a successful counterhegemonic challenge? We argue that the future of international order is shaped not only by material power but also by the distribution of identity across the great powers. We develop a constructivist account of hegemonic transition and stability that theorizes the role of the distribution of identity in international order. In our account, hegemonic orders depend on a legitimating ideology that must be consistent with the distribution of identity at the level of both elites and masses. We map the distribution of identity across nine great powers and assess how this distribution supports the current Western neoliberal democratic hegemony. We conclude that China is unlikely to become the hegemon in the near term.

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The rise of China has generated renewed interest in theories of hegemonic stability and transition. However, existing studies do not adequately address the central questions at the heart of the contemporary debate about the future of hegemony: how strong is the US-led Western hegemonic order and what is the likelihood that China can or will lead a successful counterhegemonic challenge? Existing work focuses either on military-economic power or the beliefs of policymaking elites. Taken together, these studies offer a thin conception of hegemony that reduces hegemonic transition to material variables conditioned by elite perceptions of threat or calculation of interest. A thin conception of hegemony overstates the likelihood of a Chinese hegemony because it ignores a set of structural, ideational obstacles. That is, the strength and stability of hegemonic orders also depends on the distribution of ideas and identities among the great powers. In order to assess the prospects of

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hegemony, we must look at the support for the reigning hegemonic ideology in the domestic discourses of other great-power states.

Thirty years ago, Robert Cox introduced a thick conception of hegemony as economic, military, and political dominance backed by an ideology that secures a “measure of consent” from other states and publics.<sup>1</sup> But Cox, like other theorists of hegemony, gave ideas little autonomy to constrain or shape hegemonic stability and transition. Moreover, he did not develop the Gramscian idea that hegemony depends not just on elite beliefs but on mass common sense.<sup>2</sup> We build on Cox’s insights to build a constructivist theory of hegemonic stability and transition. Our theory contends that the distribution of identity among the great powers constrains and shapes the dynamics of hegemonic stability and transition. When the reigning hegemonic ideology is supported by the distribution of identity, then the hegemonic order is likely to remain stable even if the leading state is declining. A hegemonic order is stronger to the extent that its ideology appeals to *both* elite *and* mass understandings of national identity among great powers. Conversely, when there is a disjuncture between the hegemonic ideology and the distribution of identity, then a hegemonic transition is more likely. However, a counterhegemonic coalition is likely to be successful only if it can draw ideological strength from the distribution of identity itself. Otherwise, other states will not find the alternative order appealing or desirable and the challenger will be unable to build support for it.

Our empirical analysis is based on an original mapping of the distribution of identity across nine great powers in the year 2010—Brazil, China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>3</sup> The data are drawn from the project *Making Identity Count: A National Identity Database*, which is in development.<sup>4</sup> The data are built on discourse analyses by analysts we trained and supervised, all of whom had prior linguistic competence in the relevant national languages. Each analyst studied a standardized sample of texts including political speeches, newspapers, high-school history textbooks, novels, and movies. They used simple, inductive coding rules to recover the categories used to define and understand national identity in each country.<sup>5</sup> The analysts then produced reports that included both quantitative counts of the central identity categories and interpretivist accounts of their contextual meanings. This mapping helps reveal the elite beliefs and mass common-sense understandings that underlie the Western hegemonic order.

1. Cox 1987, 7.

2. See Hopf 2013.

3. There are a variety of ways to define “great power.” We aimed to account for both military-economic and institutional factors. The nine powers we included are all in the top ten states ranked in terms of the Correlates of War composite index of national capability score (CINC) for the most recent year available, 2007. The Republic of Korea is ranked eighth (0.23), ahead of the UK (0.21) and France (0.18), but the latter have permanent seats on the Security Council, justifying their inclusion (NMC v. 4.0, Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972).

4. For an explanation of the project, see Hopf and Allan 2016.

5. On discourses of national identity, see Allan 2016; Hopf 2002.

Our main finding is that the distribution of identity presents a system-level barrier to a Chinese hegemonic succession. First, we find strong support for the democratic and neoliberal hegemonic ideology among elites and masses across the great powers. Notably, there is strong ideational support for the order outside the core states of the Western alliance. As a result, the US-led order might remain stable in the face of a Chinese challenge or American decline.<sup>6</sup> Second, the democratic and neoliberal hegemonic ideology effectively excludes China with its authoritarian national identity from full membership in the present order. Thus, it is unlikely to join and transform the order from within. Third, we contend that China is unlikely to be able to attract powerful followers into a counterhegemonic coalition. Its national identity discourse is insular and propagandistic and so is unlikely to form the basis of an ideology or vision that could find support in the distribution of identity. While China may seek to cultivate a favorable distribution of identity among other great powers, this process is likely to take decades and proceed with difficulty. In short, for the foreseeable future, the distribution of identity will serve as a powerful constraint on China's hegemonic prospects. Our data show that there is mass-level discontent with neoliberal markets that could be harnessed to a social democratic, populist, and democratic counterhegemonic coalition in a number of countries. However, there is no alternative ideology to support and legitimate a hegemonic order based on those premises. In the absence of a coherent alternative, the rise of anti-neoliberal populism is more likely to lead to the dissolution of hegemonic order than a transition or succession.

## Hegemony and Change in International Order

According to the conventional view, hegemonic transition is the transfer of leadership from one dominant military-economic power to the next and the central question is whether the transfer will be violent or peaceful.<sup>7</sup> This implies that the rise of China or any other behemoth should trigger a hegemonic transition on military-economic grounds alone. Elite perceptions and beliefs may alter how violent the transition is, when it occurs, or what rules will emerge, but transition itself is thought to be a function of material power dynamics alone. While some theorists recognize the importance of ideas in theory, in practice ideas are reduced to functional or secondary roles.<sup>8</sup>

Cox, for example, intended to avoid the materialist determinism of classical Marxism by affording an important role to the institutional and ideational structures

6. Here our argument revives and supports hegemonic stability theory. See Keohane 1984; Ruggie 1982; Snidal 1985.

7. See Allison 2016; Cox 1987; Gilpin 1981; Kennedy 1987; Kugler and Lemke 1996; Organski and Kugler 1980; and Saull 2012.

8. This point was made over twenty years ago by Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990, 288–89. For examples see Gilpin 1981, 34; Keohane 1984, 45; Organski and Kugler 1980, 39–40.

of world order.<sup>9</sup> However, Cox's empirical studies do not demonstrate how ideas affect hegemonic stability or transition. Cox's explanations for the stability of the liberal order between 1848 and 1873 and the subsequent transition to the welfare-nationalist order that dominated from 1870s through 1945 are primarily economic. He explains stability as a function of states' ability to moderate class conflict and change by "an innovation of capital."<sup>10</sup> Ideas emerge later in the story as a justification for the social order of production. As such, they serve as a functional response to changes in capital and neither shape the content of orders nor constrain the dynamics of hegemony.

Other approaches allow ideas to have some autonomous influence, but they focus only on elite perceptions and beliefs. Organski and Kugler argue that "the outbreak of major war is a result both of changes in the power structure of the international system *and* of the willingness of elites to fight ... wars occur only when a dissatisfied great power catches up with the dominant nation."<sup>11</sup> Here, ideas can shape willingness and satisfaction, but they are conceptualized narrowly as "elite perceptions."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Keohane recognizes the importance of ideas but reduces them to elite beliefs about whether or not support for the hegemon is in their interest: "hegemony rests on the subjective awareness by elites in secondary states that they are benefiting."<sup>13</sup> Ikenberry and Kupchan broaden the understanding of ideas to include norms, values, interests, and preferences, but still focus on when and why "foreign elites buy into the hegemon's vision of international order."<sup>14</sup>

The literature on the rise of China tends also to focus on elite Chinese beliefs and political calculations.<sup>15</sup> Schweller and Pu contend that to mount a true revisionist challenge to US hegemony, China will have to challenge the reigning ideology.<sup>16</sup> This is an important point, but their empirical analysis looks only at Chinese beliefs and it cannot speak to the likelihood that Chinese delegitimation will succeed at the system level. After all, the prospects of delegitimation or counterhegemonic mobilization depend on the extent to which discourses in other great-power states reflect and accept the beliefs and purposes embedded in the reigning hegemonic ideology.

Similarly, while Ikenberry seeks to give ideas a prominent role, he nonetheless understates their importance. Ikenberry analyzes the ideational character of the liberal order to assess the likelihood that China will join the present order or challenge it.<sup>17</sup> He concludes that since the liberal order is "open" and loosely based on "fair"

9. Cox 1987, 159.

10. Ibid., 147, 161.

11. Organski and Kugler 1980, 39.

12. Ibid., 40.

13. Keohane 1984, 45, 137.

14. Ikenberry and Kupchan 1990, 285.

15. Breslin 2013; Callahan 2008; Foot 2006; Legro 2007; Schweller and Pu 2011. For material-power-centric treatments of the rise of China, see Christensen 2006; Friedberg 2011; Mearsheimer 2010. For exceptions complementary to this approach, see Tsai and Liu 2017; F. Zhang 2015; Y. Zhang 2015.

16. Schweller and Pu 2011.

17. Ikenberry 2011, 343–44.

rules, it has the capacity to accommodate China and other rising powers.<sup>18</sup> The future of international order, he concludes, “hinges” on Chinese decisions.<sup>19</sup> This reduces the role of ideas in hegemonic transition to determining whether or not Chinese elites choose to join the order or not. But the deeper problem is that Ikenberry’s thin conception of hegemony leads him to miss the possibility that the ideological element of order can serve as a constraint on the process of transition.

If hegemony is simply leadership of a rule-based order conditioned by elite beliefs, then in the abstract it can incorporate any rising power. But if hegemony is a thick phenomenon encompassing elite and mass beliefs, then the substantive ideational content of the order, rather than its abstract form, is crucial. From this vantage point, Ikenberry’s analysis fails to account for a major ideational barrier to China’s entry into the US-led order: the democratic core of Western ideology delegitimizes China’s authoritarian government. China cannot be expected to integrate into an order that challenges the ideological foundations of its own domestic rule. Even if the liberal states wanted to change this ideological requirement, it is not clear they could, given mass support for democratic ideals in most liberal states. The actions of both China and members of the US-led hegemonic coalition are constrained by the reigning ideology and its deep roots in mass domestic discourses.

Kupchan argues that “understanding and managing international change requires examining not just shifts in material power, but also the associated contest among competing norms of order.”<sup>20</sup> For him, the process of hegemonic transition begins when a rising power “seeks to push outward to its expanding sphere of influence a set of ordering norms unique to its own cultural, socioeconomic, and political orientations.”<sup>21</sup> This brings the rising power into normative conflict with the hegemon.<sup>22</sup> Kupchan is right that theories of hegemony need to account for both the economic-military and normative or ideational elements of order. However, he does not specify when we would expect economic and military power to translate into the development of a successful normative order. After all, there is no guarantee that just because a state possesses economic and military power other states will find the vision of order it offers compelling. In short, the success of China’s efforts to cultivate ideological support for its hegemonic project depends on the distribution of ideas among the other great powers.

Moreover, Kupchan does not provide a systematic analysis of either Chinese beliefs or the beliefs of other powers.<sup>23</sup> To understand if or how conflict over

18. *Ibid.*, 345–46.

19. *Ibid.*, 343.

20. Kupchan 2014, 220.

21. *Ibid.*, 226.

22. *Ibid.*, 252.

23. Kupchan draws on the secondary literature to argue that China is likely to operate only within a “Sinicized sphere of influence.” This claim would be strengthened by a more systematic analysis of elite and mass beliefs in China. See *ibid.*, 253–55.

normative orders is going to play out, we need to know the distribution of ideas. How broadly shared and deeply held are the core normative elements of the order? Is there a constituency among other elites and publics for the rising power's vision? These are central questions if we want to understand the stability of the current order and the prospects for the creation of an alternative order led by the rising state. After all, Kupchan merely stipulates that the rising great powers will come into conflict with US order.<sup>24</sup> However, this is an empirical question that depends on who and what will be deemed a threat, which in turn depends on the distribution of ideas.

In sum, while many theories recognize the role of ideas, accounts of hegemonic stability and transition tend to restrict ideas to elite beliefs in the leading countries. These approaches underestimate the power of mass beliefs and the importance of ideas in the other great powers. What these studies miss is that hegemony is a structural phenomenon that rests on the distribution of power and the distribution of ideas at elite and mass levels. The result is that the dynamics of hegemonic stability and transition are poorly understood and the prospects for American or Chinese hegemony cannot be adequately assessed.

## Identity, Ideology, and the Constitution of Hegemonic Order

In contrast to the thin conceptions of hegemony common in the literature on the rise of China, our account builds on the thick understanding of hegemony advanced by Cox, Ruggie, and others.<sup>25</sup> Cox defines hegemony as “dominance of a particular kind where the dominant state creates an order based ideologically on a broad measure of consent.”<sup>26</sup> For him, a hegemonic order is a worldwide system of production supported by “the mutual interests and ideological perspectives of social classes in different countries.”<sup>27</sup> As such, orders depend on a set of general ideological principles that convince “the less powerful” that their interests are aligned with leading states and social classes.<sup>28</sup> Thus, hegemonic orders have three elements: a dominant state (or coalition of states), a legitimizing ideology, and a network of institutions that act as transmission belts and socialization mechanisms to disseminate the ideology globally. These interlocking elements unite the social classes of diverse countries in a coherent system of production that underwrites what Cox called a “world order.”

Cox's conception of hegemony, as in the Marxist literature more generally, is centered on the construction of a single mode of production.<sup>29</sup> So Cox distinguishes

24. *Ibid.*, 252.

25. Cox 1987; Ruggie 1982. See also Clark 2011; Finnemore 2009; Nexon and Neumann 2017; Worth 2011; and Y. Zhang 2015.

26. Cox 1987, 7.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. Recent Gramscian variants distinguish between varieties of capitalism within order. See Rupert 2006; Saull 2012.

hegemonic order from non-order by investigating whether or not transnational social forces generate convergence on a politico-economic system. For the purposes of this analysis, we follow the current literature in focusing more broadly on “international order.” An international order is a regular, lasting pattern of state behaviors (foreign policies and transaction flows).<sup>30</sup> An order might rest on a worldwide mode of production, but need not. International orders are constituted by an underlying structure of institutions, rules, norms, and discourses that structure and shape state practices.<sup>31</sup> That underlying structure is carried and reproduced by all associations (states, organizations, civil-society groups, corporations) whose actions shape state behaviors. The patterns of behavior can pertain to the conduct of war and diplomacy, financial systems, trade regimes, development strategies, humanitarian action, and so on. So an order is a configuration of different practices across domains. In coherent, lasting orders, practices across domains are tied together by overlapping values and norms, such as the prominent role of liberal norms in international orders since the 1860s. But values and norms themselves do not constitute an order. Instead, we know there is an international order when the patterns of behavior and practice across domains are stable or regular over an extended period of time.

A hegemonic order is a particular kind of international order in which a leading state or coalition can establish and impose rules on other great and secondary powers. With Cox, we maintain that a hegemon cannot impose rules without securing a broad measure of consent through the production and reproduction of a legitimating ideology. The legitimating ideology serves to promote and protect the taken-for-granted rules and ideas that structure international order.<sup>32</sup> The principal difference between hegemony and empire or pure domination is that hegemons rule without using coercion at every turn.<sup>33</sup> Instead, other great-power states accept the hegemon’s leadership because they can see a place for themselves in the order. Moreover, a hegemon backed by a legitimate ideology will also face less resistance when its interventions violate domestic preferences or commonly held standards of behavior. When the supporting ideology lacks legitimacy, the hegemon will find it difficult to lead and attract followers.

However, Cox, like others before him, privileged conscious, elite beliefs and in so doing ignored a powerful source of legitimacy: the taken-for-granted and common-sense beliefs of the masses. This is surprising because Cox himself argued that hegemony rests on the consent of “the less powerful” in societies, who nonetheless have to participate in the worldwide system of production. Given this, consent must rest on the beliefs that structure understandings of what is good and desirable in everyday

30. See, for example, Bull 1977, 7–8. Some thinkers define order according to the institutions or rules that constitute it. Ikenberry 2001, 23. See Schweller 2001 on why a behavioral definition is preferred.

31. See Allan 2018, 31–46.

32. Bially Mattern 2005; Bull 1977, 24–27; Finnemore 2009, 62; Goh 2013, 8–9; Wendt 1999, 206, 310; and Y. Zhang 2015, 322.

33. Cox 1987; Finnemore 2009, 62; Goh 2013, 4–6.



political and social life at both the elite and mass levels. This was one of Gramsci's most important insights but one that Cox did not incorporate into his own Gramscian theory of international hegemony. A conception of hegemony that includes both elite and mass beliefs implies a unique theory of hegemonic transition in which these common-sense ideas play a central role.<sup>34</sup>

### *Ideology, Common Sense, and Institutions*

For Gramsci, ruling elites fashion a hegemonic ideology to depict their own self-interest as a universal interest of the masses. In that sense it is a collection of ideas deliberately assembled to advance the interests of those in power. It is designed to both attract other members of the ruling elites and co-opt subordinate classes. Gramsci argued that it is impossible to establish ideological hegemony without taking into account the *senso comune*, or common sense, of the masses.<sup>35</sup> Gramsci defined common sense as “the philosophy of non-philosophers,” the conceptualization of the world that is uncritically absorbed.”<sup>36</sup> It is a collection of ideas about how to go on in the world in a good and just way. It is a folk philosophy, necessarily incoherent and multifarious.

Common sense is the very opposite of a deliberately organized coherent ideology designed to appeal to an audience. But no ideological hegemony can be established among the masses unless it resonates with their lived daily common sense. For example, a peasant's sense that her labor should result in physical security for her family is not part of any ideology. But if one seeks to construct a capitalist ideology, one must find a way to integrate and accommodate such expectations. One must go from “knowing, to understanding, to feeling” this common sense if one is to take it into account as well as shape it, or render it more coherent, so it can become an integral part of the hegemonic project.<sup>37</sup> Of course, over the long run, the state apparatus can shape common sense. Power and common sense exist in a dialectical, pedagogical relationship. Nonetheless, common sense cannot be easily or completely manipulated. Thus, Gramsci argued that both hegemonic and counterhegemonic movements need to begin with an ideology that “already enjoys, or could enjoy, a certain diffusion, because it is connected to, and implicit in, practical life, and elaborating it so that it becomes a renewed *senso comune* possessing the coherence and sinew of individual philosophies.”<sup>38</sup> The more deeply an elite ideology connects with mass common sense, the stronger and more robust it will be.

Our theory of hegemonic stability and transition begins with the basic Gramscian insight that an ideology must be made hegemonic among the masses. That is, an international order must be supported by an ideology that appeals to the common sense of

34. Hopf 2013.

35. Gramsci 1971, 425

36. Ibid., 419, 198–99.

37. Ibid., 418.

38. Ibid., 330.



the masses throughout the great-power states. We posit that the present order is supported by an ideology that valorizes *democracy* and *neoliberalism*. This ideology represents the interest of the American hegemon in a world full of democracies enacting neoliberal policies. Certainly there is more to the dominant ideology than that. However, for the purposes of this study, we follow the literature in focusing on these two aspects.<sup>39</sup>

The more deeply the hegemonic ideology of neoliberal democracy penetrates beyond elites into civil society and the masses, the stronger that hegemony will be. At the international level, a thin ideological hegemony would be one that appeals to elites in other great powers. A thick, and so more enduring and comprehensive, ideological hegemony would be accepted as commonsensical by mass publics as well. To the extent masses in great-power countries understand democracy as the commonsensical way to go about organizing one's political system and markets as the taken-for-granted way to run an economy, we can say that Western neoliberal democratic ideology is hegemonic.

Gramsci did not devote much attention to explaining how common sense could be known, understood, and felt, or what institutions would be necessary to produce and reproduce it. According to Althusser, one of the most important Marxist interpreters of Gramsci's writings, it was Gramsci alone who "had the 'remarkable' idea that the State could not be reduced to the (Repressive) State Apparatus, but included, as he put it, a certain number of institutions from 'civil society': the Church, the Schools, the trade unions, etc."<sup>40</sup> For Gramsci it was the "complexes of associations in civil society" that served as the "trenches and permanent fortifications" in the war of ideological position.<sup>41</sup> Unfortunately, Althusser lamented, "Gramsci did not systematize his intuitions."<sup>42</sup> Yet, the key to understanding the strength of hegemonic ideology is understanding the institutional sites where common sense and ideology meet.

Robert Cox, in his application of Gramsci to International Relations (IR), theorized the role of international institutions in the production and reproduction of ideological hegemony in only the Pax Britannica and Americana.<sup>43</sup> Cox concentrated on only those elite institutions used by the UK and the US to manage the world capitalist economy: the city of London, the International Monetary Fund, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade/World Trade Organization, and the World Bank. He did not try to analyze a broader set of institutions that would reveal the relationship between ideology and Gramscian common sense. Thus, if we want to know how strong or robust a hegemonic ideology is, the question remains—how can we operationalize and measure common sense?

39. Acharya 2014; Ikenberry 2011; Rupert 2006; Saull 2012.

40. Althusser 1971, 142.

41. Gramsci 1971, 243.

42. Althusser 1971, 142.

43. Cox 1987.

*National Identity and Hegemonic Order*

There are a variety of ways to operationalize and measure common sense at the international level. We argue that common sense plays a necessary role in constituting discourses of national identity. We define national identity as a constellation of social categories about what constitutes the national self or what it means to be a member of a nation.<sup>44</sup> By this definition, there is no single national identity in a country. Rather, there is a discourse of national identity categories and concepts that actors draw upon to constitute action, construct meanings, and make claims in social and political life. In our view, understandings of the national self are embedded in the taken-for-granted desires and understandings in elite and mass common sense.<sup>45</sup> They both draw on and reproduce these understandings in everyday life. Thus, national identity categories can be found in “everything that is said or written in a given state of society, everything that is printed or talked about and represented today through electronic media.”<sup>46</sup> It follows that we can examine common sense by analyzing the identity categories that circulate in modern states. Moreover, recovering national identity discourses allows us to assess the degree to which hegemonic ideology is supported or rejected in the everyday common sense of a country. In short, we contend that a hegemonic ideology is robust when it resonates with discourses of national identity.

How do national identity discourses in great-power states affect the strength and content of hegemonic orders? Our account highlights two mechanisms that link domestic identity discourses and support for the hegemonic order. First, a large body of scholarship shows that identity discourses shape foreign policy decision making at the domestic level.<sup>47</sup> Identity discourses, as part of domestic common sense, contain heuristic categories and concepts that *constitute* foreign policy dispositions.<sup>48</sup> That is, identity discourses help shape what policies are taken for granted or acceptable for both elites and masses. They help determine which countries are likely to be deemed threats and which are likely to be considered friends or allies.<sup>49</sup> At the elite level, foreign policy decision makers are citizens and thus are likely to deploy common-sense identity in constructing their own beliefs about international politics.<sup>50</sup> At the mass level, widely shared domestic identities constrain and enable policymakers by making some policies more natural or easier to justify in public than others.<sup>51</sup> Decision makers cannot consistently make decisions that make no sense or cannot be justified to members of the political community as a

44. On definitions of identity in general, see Abdelal et al. 2009, 19.

45. See Hopf 2002.

46. Angenot 2004, 200. See also Sarup 1996, 25.

47. For a recent literature review, see Vucetic 2017.

48. Hopf 2002; Neumann and Pouliot 2011.

49. Wendt 1999, 106. Also see Herman 1996; Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995; Telhami and Barnett 2002.

50. Herman 1996; Hopf 2002; Vucetic 2011.

51. Hayes 2013; Hopf 2002, 2013; Vucetic 2011.

whole. While the institutional mechanisms for holding elites accountable are stronger in democratic states, these constraints apply in authoritarian regimes as well. Nondemocratic leaders are still socialized at home and they are unlikely to adopt policies that do not appeal to their selectorates and publics. As Gries argues, Chinese nationalism among the masses constrains the elite because mass nationalism is held by more individuals and is therefore likely to be more stable than elite views.<sup>52</sup>

This general relationship between national identity and foreign policy decision making implies that national identities influence the extent to which a state will support or contest a hegemonic order. Policymakers will find it easier to marshal domestic support for international order when that order's ideological vision is consistent with domestic identity. Conversely, if the hegemonic ideology is inconsistent with a country's identity discourse, foreign policy elites will have to struggle to articulate and defend policies that support the international order. For example, in the early twentieth century, the US public was more likely to reject the ideology of international order rooted in balance-of-power doctrine because they associated it with Europe and the Old World powers.<sup>53</sup> Wilson marshaled American nationalism to articulate an exceptionalist, evangelical foreign policy befitting of a New World power.<sup>54</sup>

Second, hegemonic ideologies may operate as a structural factor at the international level that *includes or excludes* certain states from full membership or participation in the order. In such cases, hegemonic ideologies draw on collective identities rooted in self—other distinctions that delegitimize certain practices and identities.<sup>55</sup> If the rules and ideologies of an order reject a state's identity (e.g., as “communist” or “theocratic”), then that state will be under pressure to contest the hegemonic ideology and the associated order. Leaders from outsider states will find it hard to ask their publics to make sacrifices for hegemonic orders that do not accept the country or offer it full recognition within an order. Likewise, insider states will find it easier to support an order that rejects and delegitimizes its perceived enemies. In addition, this mechanism entails that rising powers with identity profiles that conflict with the distribution of identity will find it difficult to fashion a hegemonic ideology that appeals to both its publics and the publics of the other great powers.

Importantly, domestic identity discourses and mass-level constraints are unlikely to change in the short run because they are rooted in the categories of everyday life. The discursive structures of everyday life change slowly, if at all, over time. They exist in complex relationships to daily practices and local cultural traditions. Because they are distributed across so many individuals, mass discourses are also

52. Gries 2004. Researchers who view Chinese nationalism as state-directed agree that nationalism constrains foreign policy. Weiss 2014; Zhao 2004.

53. Ambrosius 1990, 9, 212.

54. Ibid., 10, 53–54.

55. Wendt 1999, 224–30.

fragmented. Thus, any changes to the discursive structures of everyday life will be difficult and gradual.

The connections between domestic identity, ideology, and foreign policy mean that the legitimacy of an international order depends on the relationship between its supporting ideology and the distribution of identities across states.<sup>56</sup> When we say that the distribution of identity is consistent or resonant with the hegemonic ideology, we mean only that these mechanisms—foreign policy constitution and ideological inclusion or exclusion—are likely to operate in one direction or another. In short, a legitimating ideology is likely to succeed in unifying and supporting an international order to the extent that it makes sense to and is accepted by both elites and masses in other great-power states. In this way, the strongest, most robust hegemony would be consistent with elite and mass identities across the great powers. In Gramscian terms, this would reflect the grounding of hegemony in the everyday common sense of domestic societies. Conversely, we would say that a legitimating ideology is likely to fail when policymakers in many states will struggle to marshal domestic support for the order or when the ideology excludes too many key states from full participation.

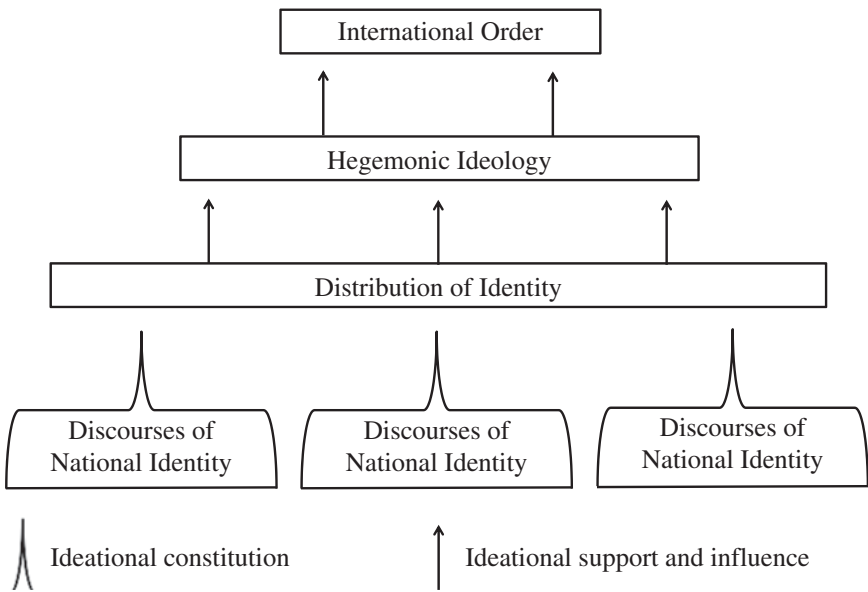


FIGURE 1. *Identity, hegemony, and international order*

Figure 1 summarizes the theoretical framework. Discourses of national identity in great-power states constitute the distribution of identity. The distribution of identity

56. On the distribution of identity see Wendt 1999, 224–33.

contains identity categories that are shared by multiple states (e.g., Western states' self-understanding as democratic), as well as some categories that are idiosyncratic (e.g., China's self-understanding as socialist). The distribution of identity supports and shapes the hegemonic ideology which in turn legitimates the hegemon's leadership as well as the institutions and rules that influence international order.

The history of hegemony since 1800 demonstrates that the mechanisms linking identity and hegemony have had a powerful influence on international politics. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Britain built a global hegemonic order supported by liberal institutions and ideology in Europe and mercantilist colonial imperialism in the global south.<sup>57</sup> This order drew sustenance from the increasingly liberal self-understandings of European states and the construction of a common European civilizational standard.<sup>58</sup> However, as the case of Russia demonstrates, the liberal and civilizational ideology excluded states perceived as illiberal or backwards. While Russia had the material power to serve an important role in the European balance of power, and so was part of the European international political system, it never became a member of European great-power society.<sup>59</sup> Thus, it was unthinkable that Russia could become the hegemon of a Eurasian or world order because its identity was inconsistent with the distribution of power.

Neumann has shown that Russia was marginalized as a European power in part because the Europeans perceived Russia as foreign, illiberal, and backward.<sup>60</sup> Historian Hans Bagger writes that the 1721 Treaty of Nystad marked Russia's entry into European great-power politics only because "the courts of Europe could no longer ignore Russia as a semibarbarian state."<sup>61</sup> Russia's continued identity as a despotic power clashed with the growing liberal forms of governance that increasingly characterized other European great powers.<sup>62</sup> By 1875, Russia was the only great power still ruled by an absolute monarchy.<sup>63</sup> Russia was an "abnormal" great power at odds with the identities and ideologies of the European great powers.

European resistance toward Russia grew over the course of the nineteenth century: "by 1856, the political ideologies of the West stood in unflinching hostile array against ... the precepts and institutions of autocracy that Alexander II was sworn to defend ... Europeans ... saw in Russian autocracy the personification of that tyranny they had fought to destroy in the revolutions of 1789, 1830, and 1848."<sup>64</sup> As a result, many Europeans were strengthened in their opposition to "Russia's claims for recognition as a European power."<sup>65</sup> While West European middle

57. Bartlett 1969; Gamble 2002; Kupchan 2010; and Vucetic 2011.

58. Bowden 2009, 142–50; Watson 1969, 120–25.

59. Around 1870, Russia had the largest military force in the world and the second largest economy. Ikenberry 2011, 42.

60. Neumann 2008a, 2008b; Neumann and Pouliot 2011.

61. Bagger 1993, 36.

62. Neumann 2008b, 26.

63. Watson 1969, 120.

64. Lincoln 1982 quoted in Neumann and Pouliot 2011, 129.

65. Ibid.

classes in the nineteenth century were challenging absolutism, Russian absolutism was only getting stronger. So despite being a major material power in the nineteenth century, Britain never faced a serious hegemonic challenge from Russia.

Similarly, despite the rapid rise of the US, the British never had to fight back an American counterhegemonic project. Instead, the peaceful rise and integration of the US into the British order suggests that identity discourses shape the dynamics of hegemonic stability and transition.<sup>66</sup> Britain and the US oscillated between rivalry and outright enmity from the American Wars of Independence (1793–1814) until the 1870s. After the final outstanding issues from the American Civil War were settled in 1872, London and Washington found fewer and fewer reasons to fight. After the 1859 publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, existing racial attitudes were bolstered and Anglo-Saxonism rose in prominence.<sup>67</sup> Anglo-Saxonism was a racialized identity discourse that held Britain and the US were “kinsmen” with common sentiments, customs, and values.<sup>68</sup> The rise of Anglo-Saxonism and the improvement of diplomatic relations displaced the American anglophobia that had dominated both elite and mass views since the revolution.<sup>69</sup>

While an alliance was not formally considered, relations improved through the 1890s into the new century. During the main colonial wars in the period—the Spanish-American War and the Boer War—the two countries acted as each other's cheerleaders. Instead of taking the opportunity to weaken their rival, Britain and the US supported one another through what they called “benevolent neutrality.” This fellow feeling and support was offered at both elite and mass levels. When the Spanish-American war began, “all London burst out into the rainbow hues of the American national colours.”<sup>70</sup> While reciprocal displays would not be forthcoming for some time, American public opinion slowly shifted in Britain's favor. This paved the way for further cooperation and collaboration that forged the “special relationship.”

Alternative explanations for the peaceful transition that focus on democracy and transnational capitalism alone are incomplete. In the absence of a shared Anglo-Saxon identity, democracy and profit would have had different meanings and thus different implications for foreign policy.<sup>71</sup> The hand-off was made possible by “cultural and ideological affinities” that compelled British elites to embrace the United States as Britain's “natural successor to the leading role in the world system.”<sup>72</sup> Kupchan concludes that “the sense of solidarity arising from compatible identities in turn helped Americans and Britons embrace the notion that war between them was unthinkable.”<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the US was ready and able to take up leadership of

66. Allison 2016 codes this as the only peaceful transition before the advent of nuclear weapons.

67. Perkins 1968, 8.

68. Ibid., 59; Kupchan 2010, 110–12; Vucetic 2011, 25–28.

69. Perkins 1968, 8–10, 23; Vucetic 2011, 35, 133–39.

70. Henry Thurston Peck quoted in Perkins 1968, 42.

71. Kupchan 2010, 73–111; Vucetic 2011, 22–49.

72. Gamble 2002, 128.

73. Kupchan 2010, 111.

a hegemonic order built largely upon the same liberal principles that British liberal ideology had mobilized. In short, the British did not challenge the rise of the US in part because the US was not seen as a threat to Britain or the British order. The US was able to ascend to a position of leadership because its identity profile was consistent with liberal publics in core great-power states and arrayed against the illiberal enemies in Germany and Russia.<sup>74</sup>

These cases demonstrate the importance of identity relations to hegemonic dynamics throughout European history. While each hegemonic transition has its own characteristics, we can expect that the distribution of identity will play an important role in the prospects for hegemonic stability or transition. Thus, if we want to assess the likelihood of a Chinese hegemonic transition we need to compare China's own identity profile to the overall distribution of identity across the great powers.

### *The Distribution of Identity and the Dynamics of Hegemonic Orders*

In this final theoretical section we outline the implications of our framework for a theory of hegemonic prospects. Our theory builds on Ruggie's seminal argument about hegemonic stability: "as long as purpose is held constant, there is no reason to suppose that the normative framework of regimes must change as well."<sup>75</sup> For Ruggie, as for Keohane and Snidal, the decline of the hegemon or the rise of other states is not a sufficient condition for change in the rules and institutions of international order.<sup>76</sup> As Snidal puts it, the provision of public goods can be maintained so long as the rising powers form a "*k*-group" of states interested in maintaining the order. Certainly, shifts in the distribution of economic and military power generate pressures for change.<sup>77</sup> However, our theory of hegemony expects hegemonic transition only when specific conditions obtain between the distribution of identities, the reigning hegemonic ideology, and challenger ideologies.

First, returning to Ruggie, if there is strong support for the hegemonic ideology among the great powers, then the hegemonic order is likely to be stable even if the relative economic and military power of the hegemon declines. If, in turn, the distribution of identity supports the existing hegemonic ideology, then hegemonic leadership is likely to be bolstered by the foreign policies of other great powers and there will be ample ideological resources to resist challenges. The hegemon may have to accommodate allied rising powers, but the basic character of economic, military, political, and

74. This also likely shaped the alliance patterns of World War II. We would hypothesize that the Soviet Union was an unavailable ally to Britain and France because of the identity relations that prevailed among them.

75. Ruggie 1982, 384.

76. Keohane 1984; Snidal 1985.

77. Cox 1987; Gilpin 1981.



social arrangements are likely to remain constant. Thus, *when the distribution of identity and the hegemonic ideology are consistent or resonant with one another, hegemony is likely to be stable.*

Second, the ability to adapt a hegemonic order is constrained by the distribution of identities because not all ideologies will be able to draw support from underlying common sense. As we saw earlier, power transition theory argues that conflict between the hegemon and the rising state is likely only if the rising state is dissatisfied.<sup>78</sup> The distribution of identity influences when a state is likely to be satisfied or dissatisfied. We argue that conflict between the hegemon and the rising state is likely if the hegemonic ideology and the underlying identities excludes or delegitimizes the rising power's role in the international order. If the hegemonic ideology and distribution of identity includes a place for the rising power, then the rising power can be accommodated and satisfied easily. Moreover, if the order is premised upon an ideology that the rising power cannot accept, the hegemon may find itself unable, for both domestic and international reasons, to accommodate the rising power. If an ideology is consensually shared among elites and masses across the great powers, it will not be easily altered. To the extent that accommodating the rising power requires alterations in the ideology, the hegemon risks reducing both domestic and international support for international order. Thus, *when the identity of the rising state is consistent or resonant with the ideologies and identities underlying the order, hegemony is likely to be stable. When there is a clash between the identity of the rising state and the distribution of identities, the hegemon faces high costs of ideological accommodation.* As a result, conflict between the hegemon and the rising state is more likely. However, this may or may not lead to war, depending on other factors.<sup>79</sup>

Third, hegemonic transition is likely only when the rising state is able to form a counterhegemonic coalition of revisionist great powers. The formation of a counterhegemonic coalition depends on both the delegitimation of the existing ideology and the formation of a new ideology that can attract followers. In Gramscian terms, a war of position precedes any hegemonic change. The processes of both delegitimation and ideological construction are shaped by the distribution of identity. First, attempts to delegitimize the existing hegemonic order are likely to be successful only if there is a disjuncture between the dominant ideology and the distribution of identities. That is, arguments against the present order need to find support in discourses across the great powers. Second, the construction of a challenger ideology is likely only if the ideology offered by the rising state can find support in the distribution of identities among the other great powers. The distribution of identities can then provide the ideological basis for the rising state to attract followers willing to obey and contribute to an alternative set of institutions. However, if the rising state's own domestic identity discourse is in conflict with the distribution of identities, other states are unlikely to support its ideology. Moreover, the rising state may find it difficult to fashion an

78. Organski and Kugler 1980, 39–40.

79. For realist accounts see Levy 1987; Schweller 1999.

ideology that will be simultaneously acceptable to its own public and the masses in the other great powers. Since domestic common sense changes only slowly over time, there are strong limits on any efforts to obviate this constraint by engineering discursive change at home or abroad. Thus, *if the rising state has a national identity discourse that is idiosyncratic to or discordant with the prevailing distribution of identities, it is unlikely to be able to construct a successful counterhegemonic bloc or an alternate international order.* Hegemonic transitions are likely only when the rising state can build on ideological resources in the distribution of identities.

## Mapping the Distribution of Great-Power Identity

Constructivists have yet to test theories about the distribution of identity in part because data collection and analysis at the system level presents considerable barriers. Recovering the national identity of a single country is an onerous undertaking, let alone recovering the distribution of identities among the great powers. The challenge of mapping the distribution of identity is compounded by the fact that to operationalize our conception of hegemony we need to recover identity categories at both elite and mass levels. On the one hand, we need a method that will capture the meanings that constitute discourses of national identity. This requires an interpretivist method that can recover meanings inductively from a variety of everyday contexts and institutional centers. On the other hand, the method must be general and replicable enough to produce comparable results in all the great-power countries. Balancing these requirements, our data are produced using a method of discourse analysis that combines the inductive ethos of interpretivism with a positivist emphasis on transparency and reliability.<sup>80</sup> While rooted in the recovery of intersubjective webs of meaning, our method is built on transparent principles of text sampling, quantitative counting procedures, and the standardized presentation of evidence. We trained analysts with requisite language abilities to apply this method to a sample of texts in each of the great-power countries for the year 2010.

The core of the method is the inductive coding of a range of texts to recover the central identity categories used to understand the “national self” in each country. An identity category is any concept that a text uses to explain what it means to be a member of the nation or what embodies the nation. That is, a category is a descriptor that serves to tell us “what does it mean to be American?” or “what is America?” We instructed analysts to proceed inductively, set aside their preconceived notions, and record only those categories that appeared in the texts.

80. For more information on our methodology see Allan 2016. We chose discourse analysis rather than content analysis because we wanted a method that would be both inductive and able to recover not just a list of categories but the meanings attached to those categories.

Each analyst coded a standardized sample of texts guided by four principles. First, we aimed to sample texts that would be read by the largest number of people and so focused on best-selling or popular texts. Second, we chose texts from a variety of genres and media to capture both elite and mass everyday, common-sense beliefs. Finally, the sample needed to be comparable across states, so we chose genres that would be popular and available in all states.<sup>81</sup> In short, our goal was to sample texts from the “innumerable centres of culture, ideological state apparatus and practices: parents, family, schools, the workplace, the media, the political parties, the state.”<sup>82</sup> Following these principles, we constructed a standardized text sample drawn from five genres:

*Leadership speeches:* Two leadership speeches by the head of government or ruling party on significant occasions. These might be the national holiday address or a programmatic or budgetary speech.

*Newspapers:* The two newspapers with the highest national circulation. From these, all opinion-editorials and letters to the editor for the fifteenth day of each month were coded.

*History textbooks:* Two widely read high-school history textbooks on the country’s national history. Analysis began with the chapters on the twentieth century.

*Novels:* The top two best-selling novels in the country, by the country’s authors, in an official language.

*Movies:* The top two most-attended movies in the country, by the country’s directors/producers, in an official language.

The sample aims to capture documents that are widely read and that reflect both elite and mass discourse. A text is more reflective of “elite” discourse if it is produced and consumed by political and social elites that dominate powerful institutions of a society. A text is more reflective of “mass” discourse if it is produced for and consumed by a large, multiclass, multi-ethnic, etc. collection of people in the country. As a rule of thumb, we considered speeches and newspaper editorials to represent elite political discourse, while letters to the editor, novels, and movies captured mass discourse. History textbooks occupied an intermediary position since they are likely to reflect elites’ self-understanding of the country, but are also taught to every person receiving secondary education.

We trained analysts to recover identity categories and their associated meanings by applying simple coding rules to the texts: what does it mean to be country X or a

81. We also had to forgo some potentially useful genres, such as television and social media sites, that could not be easily or reliably sampled.

82. Sarup 1996, 25.

citizen of country X? Analysts were instructed to both recover meanings and provide a count of how many times a given category appeared in the text. Coders were explicitly asked to distinguish between “themes” and identity categories. Themes are just recurring ideas in the discourse, such as “it is good to be hard working.” Identity categories must be explicitly linked to the nation or what it means to be a member of the nation. It counts as an identity category only if hard working is mentioned as an attribute of the Japanese people.

Identity categories were to be coded according to valence (positive +, negative -, neutral /, or ambiguous ~). Analysts were also asked to attend to whether the identity is one that the country aspires to or is trying to avoid (aspirational or aversive) or if it serves as a significant other with which the country compares itself. Consider this example drawn from a speech by the French President to *la Francophonie*: “To our compatriots overseas, I want to convey my determination to that which the Republic holds to, with regards to their promises of equality and dignity that was not sufficiently held in to in the past.” This was coded as: EQUALITY+, DIGNITY+, HISTORICAL OTHER-. The quote explicitly hails the French nation as “the Republic” and defines what it means to be French as striving to achieve equality and dignity. The negative historical coding notes that France has not always succeeded in maintaining the dignity and equality of people. This marks present France as distinct from that past other. When coding was completed, analysts prepared summary tables and wrote up their findings in standardized reports.

After their inductive analysis was completed, we asked each analyst to summarize whether the predominant identity discourses in their countries supported Western democratic neoliberal hegemonic ideology.<sup>83</sup> Identities were deemed consistent with the democratic elements of ideology if they accepted and valorized electoral government, the rule of law, and human rights. They were considered supportive of neoliberalism if they identified with market-based policies and a restricted role for state intervention in the economy.

## China and the Distribution of Identity

The main findings appear in Table 1. There is strong, but not unanimous, elite support for both the democratic and neoliberal elements of Western hegemony. With

83. These are highly contested terms. Here are the definitions we gave the analysts: “In the context of Western hegemony, democracy refers to political system in which: (i) the people rule via elections; (ii) a parliamentary or other elected legislative body of representatives makes the laws; (iii) there are institutional checks and balances (rule of law; functioning courts). Neoliberalism is an economic doctrine that promotes: (i) faith in markets to solve problems; (ii) a negative view of state intervention in the economy; (iii) a positive attitude toward liberal economic policies and liberalizing reforms (free trade, deregulation, privatization, openness). Cultural theorists have extended the concept to include corollary beliefs that support and bolster those economic doctrines: (iv) strong individualism (Thatcher’s “there is no such thing as society”), as expressed in values like individual self-help or individual responsibility; and (v) competitiveness mentioned as a positive value.” On support for democracy and neoliberalism in the US national identity discourse, see Hur 2016.

exceptions, there is a mass-elite consensus that being democratic is a positive aspect of one's identity. Elites also understand some aspects of neoliberalism to be a positive part of their country's national identity. Notably, elites in Japan, India, Brazil, and China identify positively with both liberalizing policies (openness and free trade) and statist or socialist identities. These countries do not share the neoliberal view that the state is an ineffective or illegitimate economic actor, but they still identify with economic liberalism. While the mass texts exhibit strong support for democratic identities, they display largely negative or ambivalent attitudes toward neoliberal ones. This might provide the basis for a counterhegemonic ideology, but there is no coherent alternative economic identity to rival neoliberalism in the discourse. Thus, there is strong support for the democratic elements of Western hegemony, and only ambivalent support for the neoliberal elements.

TABLE 1. *Democracy and neoliberalism in national identity discourses, 2010*

Country	Democracy		Neoliberalism	
	Elites	Mass	Elites	Mass
Brazil	+–	+	+–	
China	–	+	++	–+
France	+	+	+–	–+
Germany	+	+	–+	+–
India (E)	+	+	+–	–+
India (H)	+	+	++	+–
Japan			–+	–
Russia	+	+	+	–
UK	+	+	+	+–
US	+	+	–+	–+

Notes: Symbols represent valence: (+) refers to a positive evaluation, (–) to a negative one, and (+–) to a mixed evaluation, with the more prominent valence appearing first. India-H and India-E refers to findings of the Hindi and English language reports, respectively.

Support for democratic, neoliberal hegemony is especially strong in the core states of the Western alliance.<sup>84</sup> In the United Kingdom there is an elite and mass consensus on the understanding that “modern Britain” is democratic, lawful, and free.<sup>85</sup> British texts ranging from political speeches to letters to the editor identify being British with enjoying or defending individual freedoms and basic rights.<sup>86</sup> The prevalence of these themes in British identity discourses means that Britain's support for the democratic elements of Western hegemony is taken for granted and uncontested. The economic side is more complex.

On the one hand, the importance of freedom in British discourse supports a neoliberal “globalist” identity that represents the nation as an economically open

84. For data on the national identity discourse of the American hegemon, see Hur 2016.

85. Vucetic 2016, 174.

86. Ibid.

country that benefits from trade, the pursuit of prosperity, and competitive individualism.<sup>87</sup> But globalism is not uncontested. In one editorial in *The Times* on the whether or not the government should prevent Kraft from buying British chocolatier Cadbury, globalism confronts an economic-cultural nationalist challenge:

Saving this one company from a foreign predator is not worth setting a precedent: one that allows a business secretary to interfere in the business of take-overs, based on a whim; one that overturns all notions of free trade; one that could damage our international reputation as a place that values fair business practices and minimum state intervention. These are more important British principles, alas, than a decent bar of chocolate.<sup>88</sup>

For *The Times* editorial board, at least, liberalism is a more important component of British identity than historical cultural artifacts. Elsewhere in the British texts, a welfarist and nationalist understanding of Britain is counterposed to this liberal identity. The welfarist understanding lauds the achievements of the postwar Labour party such as the National Health Service and rejects the self-help values of neoliberal discourse.<sup>89</sup> So while support for neoliberalism is not taken for granted, elements of British discourse and society do bolster the neoliberal elements of Western hegemony.

French national identity discourse depicts the country as a “republican” nation built on the values of liberty, fraternity, equality, secularism, the rule of law, and democracy. As one letter writer puts it, children are “raised in the admiration of France, its Republican values, of its democracy that respects diversity without harming the unitary whole.”<sup>90</sup> In the textbooks, novels, and movies France is defined as a social democracy that rejects *laissez-faire* capitalism and values its historical struggles for political and economic rights.<sup>91</sup> Work and competition are derided as exploitative and socially corrosive.<sup>92</sup> Profit is portrayed as vulgar.<sup>93</sup> In the novels and movies, these themes come together in the figure of the neurotic, overworked urbanite who can only be saved by the pastoral, bucolic experiences of the properly French countryside.<sup>94</sup> But there is no sense that France is or should be socialist or communist. So, in France there is mass resistance to the neoliberal elements of Western hegemony but strong support for the democratic aspects.

German national identity discourse defines Germany as a free, democratic, and liberal country that has a responsibility to defend its values internationally.<sup>95</sup> The

87. Ibid.

88. Quoted in *ibid.*

89. Vucetic 2016, 176–77.

90. Chan, Ming, and Oh 2016, 85.

91. Ibid., 94.

92. Ibid., 73.

93. Ibid., 73.

94. Ibid., 88–89.

95. Heng 2016, 100.

commitment to Western ideals is consensual, spanning elite and mass texts. Thematically, Germany's identity as a democratic, liberal state is structured by a strong rejection of its fascist and communist past.<sup>96</sup> The rejection of the communist past carries over into a rejection of China. In textbooks and opinion letters China is depicted negatively because it is not liberal or democratic.<sup>97</sup> On the economic side, Germany's identity as a social democracy tempers its commitment to neoliberal principles. While capitalism is mentioned mostly positively in speeches and textbooks, neoliberalism is criticized in letters to the editor.<sup>98</sup> This divide may reflect some differences between elite and mass views, but both groups agree that the government is socially and economically responsible for its people and so they reject neoliberalism in that sense. Nonetheless, Germany identifies strongly with Western values and depicts China as a negative external Other.

Japan's place in the Western alliance is more ambivalent, but Japanese identity discourse still supports Western hegemony and rejects Chinese influence. There is an elite-mass consensus that Japan is an economically strong, capitalist country that prizes familial orientation and communal values.<sup>99</sup> As in France and Germany, neoliberal policies are criticized and citizens identify with the welfare state. Politically, Japan itself is not represented as a democracy and there is no strong identification with liberal values.<sup>100</sup> Nonetheless, elite texts depict the United States as a close and important ally.<sup>101</sup> Thus, Japan does not strongly support Western hegemony, but nor are its values in tension with or likely to challenge Western hegemony.

Outside the core states of the Western alliance, rising powers Brazil and India identify with key elements of the reigning hegemonic order. Both countries identify as democracies and aspire to be full members of the American-led order. India's identity as the "world's largest democracy" anchors the dominant discourse. Identification with democracy is evident in speeches, newspapers, textbooks, and novels in both English and Hindi.<sup>102</sup> For example, Indian Prime Minister Singh touts India's status as the "world's largest democracy" and makes it an "example for many other countries to emulate."<sup>103</sup> India's democratic identity is part of a broader "modern" orientation that aspires to be a country with capitalist growth, economic competition, and western political ideals. Many elite and mass texts express strong support for the rule of law and legal rights even while worrying that endemic

96. *Ibid.*, 105.

97. *Ibid.*, 106.

98. *Ibid.*, 104.

99. Hanada 2016, 151–55.

100. We might hypothesize here that the Japanese texts are silent because it is already a taken-for-granted aspect of Japanese national identity. One way to test this would be to assess Japanese discourses of national identity beginning in 1950 to see if democratic identity was explicitly present before it dropped out. This would imply it has been internalized as so commonsensical as not to bear mention. If, however, democracy was never a significant category, we would conclude it just is not part of Japanese self-understanding.

101. Hanada 2016, 160.

102. *Ibid.* 118; Kumar 2016, 135.

103. Quoted in Hayes 2016, 121.



corruption threatens these values.<sup>104</sup> Indian texts express ambivalence toward neoliberalism. On the one hand, free trade and business competition are credited with producing India's economic successes.<sup>105</sup> On the other hand, many texts still see India as a socialist country that should strive for equitable growth and directly alleviate poverty.<sup>106</sup> Nonetheless, India's democratic identity and modernist aspirations align it strongly with the American order.

Brazilian national identity discourse also represents itself as a democracy under threat by corruption and incompetence.<sup>107</sup> One novel notes that journalists "were mistaken to believe that the slum belonged to the nation ... [or] was regulated by the Federal Constitution and the democratic rule of law."<sup>108</sup> But mass and elite texts alike represent democracy as an aspirational identity. So while Brazil sees itself as a "limited democracy" it nevertheless aspires to great-power status as a regional leader within the Western order.<sup>109</sup> The United States is portrayed in textbooks as the model for Brazilian democracy and European-American influences are on balance characterized positively.<sup>110</sup> However, the United States is also criticized as consumerist, militarist, and neoliberal.<sup>111</sup> Thus, while Brazil rejects certain elements of American leadership, its dominant identity categories position it as an aspirational power within the existing order.

Russian national identity discourse presents a more complex picture. On the one hand, there is elite support for neoliberal democratic hegemony. Medvedev and Putin's speeches articulate support for neoliberal policies and even use the language of democratic governance. On the other hand, mass texts reject democratic neoliberalism or are at least ambivalent. While there are no negative understandings of democracy, Russian mass ambivalence toward democracy is directed precisely at Western conceptualizations of democracy. So while there is little support for Western ideology, there is no elite rejection of it and certainly no ideological alternative proffered in political speeches or newspapers.

China's identity discourses are markedly different from those of the other great powers. The key themes are insular, nationalist, and propagandistic. Communist Party phrases such as "socialism with Chinese characteristics," "bureaucracy-oriented consciousness," "the Chinese dream," and "reciprocal courtesy" play a central role in defining what it means to be Chinese.<sup>112</sup> These phrases serve important ideological functions domestically but they are inward looking and particularistic. For example, "the Chinese dream" is not a universalizable vision of economic

104. Hayes 2016, 117–119; Kumar 2016, 134–37.

105. Hayes 2016, 117; Kumar 2016, 138.

106. Hayes 2016, 117.

107. Duque 2016, 48.

108. Quoted in Duque 2016, 42.

109. Duque 2016, 55.

110. *Ibid.*, 54.

111. *Ibid.*, 54.

112. Ce and Zeng Rui 2016, 68–71.

prosperity but a nationalist call for the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”<sup>113</sup> The economic doctrine of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” is linked to a specific story about how Chinese society has and will develop.<sup>114</sup> These dominant elements of Chinese identity are unlikely to form the basis of a compelling alternative international vision or hegemonic order that will appeal to other great powers.

### *Assessing Hegemonic Prospects*

What are the prospects for the Western hegemonic order in the face of China’s rise? Broadly speaking, there are three possibilities. The order could remain stable under the leadership of either the US or a coalition of great powers. The order could dissolve without being replaced. Or, China could lead a hegemonic transition, either by joining and transforming the current order or by constructing an alternative order from the outside. To assess which of these is most likely, we return to the three theoretical expectations about the dynamics of hegemonic order we outlined earlier. We conclude that the first two possibilities are more likely than a Chinese-led transition, given the distribution of identity.

First, does the distribution of identity bolster Western hegemony? The evidence shows that while some aspects of Western democratic neoliberal hegemony are contested, the distribution of identity among the great powers provides strong support for Western hegemony. Masses and elites in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Japan, Brazil, and India clearly identify with democracy. While the masses in some of these countries reject neoliberalism, elites identify with liberal policies. This suggests that the hegemonic order is likely to remain stable even in the face of a relative decline in American power. Other states would likely be willing to support the order and either bolster American leadership or form a coalition akin to Snidal’s *k*-group that could maintain most existing rules without a hegemon.

Second, what does the distribution of identity imply for China’s ability to join and transform the existing order? Among the great powers, Chinese elites are alone in openly opposing the democratic element of Western hegemony. This poses an important obstacle to any Chinese global hegemonic project because Chinese elites would have to abandon a fundamental aspect of their own self-understanding to become full members of the current order. There is unlikely to be an American-Chinese hand-off similar to the shift from British to American hegemony because China is not likely to join the existing order as a junior partner. Thus, China is unlikely to lead a transition within the dominant norms of the existing order.

Third, what is the likelihood that China will be able to form an alternative counter-hegemonic bloc that would challenge or displace the current order? Again, since all the other great powers save Russia identify as democracies, it is unlikely China can build an ideology that would simultaneously satisfy its domestic needs and appeal to others.

113. Ibid., 69.

114. Ibid., 68.

So elites and masses in the other great powers would have to reject their democratic identities in favor of a Chinese alternative. This seems unlikely given the strong support for democracy in India and Brazil. To make a nondemocratic hegemony possible, China would have to delegitimize or displace the democratic elements that dominate identity discourses in the other great powers. While this is a possibility, the mass-level support for democracy means any effort to cultivate an alternative, non-democratic distribution of identity is likely to take a long time. Moreover, China is portrayed negatively in other great-power discourses on this point. In Germany, Chinese authoritarian socialism is linked to a rejected Nazi and Soviet past.<sup>115</sup> Some Indian texts worry that India's democratic identity will bring it into conflict with a Chinese power hostile to democracy.<sup>116</sup> Elsewhere, China is viewed ambivalently as an economic marvel or competitor, but is never represented positively as a leader or model.

China's identity discourse contains little else that could be extrapolated into a compelling vision or ideology in support of an alternative international order. Because its national identity discourse is insular, it is hard to imagine how Chinese identity categories could be universalized so they would appeal to others. Given that the masses in all countries except for the UK have ambivalent or negative attitudes toward capitalism, markets, and neoliberalism, one possibility is that China could lead an anti-neoliberal, nationalist, counterhegemonic coalition. There is a latent alternative "historic bloc," to borrow Gramsci's terminology, in search of an ideology backed by sufficient global material power to make it hegemonic. But it is difficult to see how China would offer a compelling alternative to neoliberalism. Europeans and others seem ready for social democracy, but China is unlikely to offer that alternative.

If anything, the resurgence of populism in the US, Britain, and elsewhere suggests that dissatisfaction with neoliberalism could be mobilized in a coalition aimed against unfettered markets, but in favor of democratic governance.<sup>117</sup> As Nigel Farage put it, "voters across the Western world want nation state democracy."<sup>118</sup> A global populist counterhegemonic ideology would contest the neoliberal content of the reigning ideology, while embracing an ethno-nationalist understanding of the democratic self. The election of President Donald Trump raises the possibility that the US could lead an antiglobalist movement. However, Trump's foreign policy seems more likely to dismantle the Western hegemonic order from within.<sup>119</sup> This would constitute not a counterhegemonic coalition, but a transformation and perhaps dissolution of American order led by its author and guarantor. From there, it will be difficult for emerging powers to exploit Trump's shock to the international system to seize power in the present system.<sup>120</sup> That said, it is conceivable that some powers, emerging and established alike, could withdraw support. This would move international

115. Heng 2016, 110–11.

116. Hayes 2016, 122.

117. See Inglehart and Norris 2016.

118. Quoted in Witte, Rauhala, and Phillips 2016.

119. See Nexon 2017.

120. Acharya 2017.

order in the direction laid out in Gilpin's model of a fragmented order fashioned around a handful of neomercantilist centers or Acharya's "multiplex" of crosscutting and overlapping orders.<sup>121</sup> Here, the system would enter an age without hegemonic leadership marked by confusion and vigorous contestation over the rules of the order.

The robust support for elements of Western hegemony outside the US raises another possibility: hegemonic stability underwritten by Europe, China, India, and Brazil. At the 2017 G20 summit, states demonstrated their willingness to forge ahead on climate change and further economic integration without American participation.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, judging from Chinese President Xi Jinping's defense of free trade and liberalization at the 2017 World Economic Forum, China is willing to uphold the liberal elements of the order amid growing populism and protectionist rhetoric.<sup>123</sup> Continuous support from other great powers could facilitate a partial transition in which leadership would shift to a coalition, but the rules of the order would remain more or less intact. In the absence of US leadership, one could imagine a shift from democratic neoliberalism to democratic nationalism or democratic socialism, given that there is far less support for the economic side of the order than the political side in the distribution of identity. This would be a shift akin to the shift from embedded liberalism to democratic neoliberalism in the 1970s and 1980s.

## Conclusion

This study contributes to the constructivist research program on how national identities affect international relations by theorizing three effects of the distribution of identities on hegemonic ideology. First, if the distribution of identity supports the hegemonic ideology, the order is likely to be stable. Second, if the identities of rising states and the hegemonic ideology are inconsistent, rising states are unlikely to enter the order as full members. Third, if there is a disjuncture between the identity of a challenging state and the distribution of identity among the other great powers, they are unlikely to be able form a counterhegemonic bloc. Our main empirical claim is that China's rise is unlikely to spur a hegemonic transition because the distribution of identities largely supports Western democratic neoliberalism. Moreover, China has not yet begun the difficult work of constructing an alternative ideology that might resonate with Brazil, India, and others.<sup>124</sup>

In outlining and theorizing hegemonic stability underwritten by the distribution of identity, our argument raises the question of when we would expect a hegemonic transition.<sup>125</sup> To count as a transition, an aspiring hegemon would have to obtain

121. Gilpin 1975. In Gilpin's classic argument, multipolar systems are symbiotic with economic nationalism and protectionism. See also Acharya 2014, especially chapter 5; Laïdi 2014.

122. Herszenhorn 2017.

123. Xi 2017.

124. On the importance of an alternative vision, see Breslin 2013; Callahan 2008; and Kupchan 2014.

125. We are grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pressing this line of inquiry.

control over the rules and institutions that structure the predominant patterns of state behavior among the great powers. In our theory, there are two pathways to hegemony. First, an aspiring hegemon who has an identity profile that is already consistent with established great powers would be in a good position to yoke together a hegemonic order. Such a rising power would still need to delegitimize the existing ideology and articulate an alternative in order to mobilize a counterhegemonic bloc. We have argued that this pathway would be difficult for China. Second, an aspiring hegemon might cultivate a coalition of great-power states with aligned identity discourses in one of two ways. It could lead a group of rising great powers with aligned identities into the rank of great powers, building an alternative order around their cooperative endeavors along the way. Or it might coerce and cajole elites and masses in other countries into changing their identities so that they can adopt the new ideology. This second pathway still requires that the aspiring hegemon is able to produce an appealing ideology. But as we have argued, even if China is militarily, economically, and culturally capable of cultivating favorable change in the distribution of identity, it is not clear what universalizable elements of its identity could gain a foothold. Nonetheless, China could try to propagate an authoritarian capitalist hegemonic ideology. However, as Gramsci argues, this would have to take the form of a “war of attrition, trench warfare” against democratic common sense in other states. This is likely to take decades and require considerable economic and cultural resources.

This all raises important questions for future research. What are the mechanisms and processes by which an aspiring hegemon might yoke together established powers into a counterhegemonic bloc? How might an aspiring hegemon cultivate a favorable distribution of identity? How long do these processes take? These questions are important to understanding the degree to which the distribution of identity serves as an exogenous, structural constraint on the dynamics of hegemonic orders. But they are fundamentally empirical questions that require a more careful examination of the history of hegemony than we are able to offer here.

The data used in this paper are drawn from a broader project that aims to build a great-power national identity database including qualitative and quantitative data on national identity from 1810 to the present.<sup>126</sup> Such a database could be used to improve our understanding of the dynamics of hegemony, alliance formation, institutional legitimacy, treaty ratification, and so on. In particular, by mapping change in national identity discourses we will be able to empirically assess how resistant national identities are to internal and external efforts to manipulate them. These historical data will also allow for a more fine-grained analysis of the role of the distribution of identity in the last hegemonic transition from *Pax Britannica* to *Pax Americana*. This will allow us to refine the theory introduced here and more carefully specify the mechanisms linking hegemony and identity. We actually know very little about the dynamics and processes of hegemonic stability and transition. In part, this follows from the fact that since the construction of a truly worldwide international

126. See Hopf and Allan 2016.

order in the mid-nineteenth century there has only been one hegemonic transition. But being able to think through these dynamics in historical context is precisely what we will need in the coming century. Rather than referring only to abstract, generalizable laws that privilege economic and military factors, we need accounts of hegemony that can also map its institutional and ideological complexity in real time.

## Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000267>.

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