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Neo-Gramscian Theory and Xi Jinping's Countering of US Hegemony

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Abstract

Objectives: The paper aims to examine China's pursuit of global hegemony and its counter to US hegemony under Xi Jinping. It explores Neo-Gramscian theory as a strategy employed by China to assert global leadership and challenge the existing hegemonic order.

Methods: The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, in addition to the national interest approach, to address the research question and test the validity of its hypotheses.

Results: The findings support the hypothesis that Xi Jinping's preference for Neo-Gramscian hegemony is linked to securing a benign and sustainable leadership transition while avoiding a destructive military clash with the US. The paper argues that this transition is likely to be peaceful.

Conclusion: Hegemony, from a Neo-Gramscian perspective, is ideological in nature, achieved through consent by promoting civil and constructive norms. Countering existing hegemony involves forming historical blocs that advance universal norms and institutional power aligned with the interests of other states. Xi Jinping has successfully engaged the three Neo-Gramscian pillars—material, ideological, and institutional power—particularly through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). As such, China's approach has so far been effective in establishing an accepted form of hegemony and in countering US dominance.

Keywords: China, Hegemony, Consent, Xi Jinping, Neo-Gramscian, US, BRI, Counter-Hegemony.

نظرية الجرامشية الجديدة ومواجهة شي جين بينج للهيمنة الأمريكية

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ملخّص

الأهداف: الهدف الرئيس من هذه الورقة هو دراسة سعي الصين للهيمنة العالمية، ومواجهة الهيمنة الأمريكية في عهد الرئيس شي جين بينج. وتتناول نظرية الجرامشية الجديدة كاستراتيجية تنتهجها الصين في عهد شي جين بينج؛ لتحقيق الهيمنة العالمية، ومواجهة الهيمنة الأمريكية.

المنهجية: للإجابة عن السؤال الرئيس للدراسة، واختبار صحة فرضياتها، اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. بالإضافة إلى منهج المصلحة الوطنية.

الخلاصة: أثبتت الورقة صحة فرضيتها القائلة بوجود صلة بين تأمين هيمنة حميدة ومستدامة، وتجنب الصدام العسكري المدمر مع الولايات المتحدة، وتحيز شي جين بينج للهيمنة الجرامشية الجديدة. لذلك، تقترح الورقة أن انتقال القيادة العالمية إلى الصين سيكون سلميا.

النتائج: الهيمنة وفقا للنظرية للجرامشية الجديدة التي صاغها روبرت كوكس، هيمنة أيديولوجية حيث يسعى فيها القائد العالمي إلى الحصول على الموافقة أو الهيمنة المقبولة من خلال تعزيز المعايير والأفكار المدنية والبناءة. كما أن مواجهة الهيمنة القائمة، وفقًا للجرامشية الجديدة، تتمثل في التكتلات التاريخية، حيث يجب على القائد العالمي تطوير معايير عالمية وقوة مؤسسية تلبي مصالح الدول أو تجذبها. وبالتالي تتحدى معايير الهيمنة القائمة، ونفوذها ومصالحها. وفي هذا الصدد، طور شي جين بينج تفاعلًا ناجحا بين الركائز الثلاث للجرامشية الجديدة: القوة المادية، والقوة الإيديولوجية، والقوة المؤسسية لا سيما من خلال مبادرة الحزام والطريق التي يمكن من خلالها تحقيق الهيمنة المقبولة. ومن ثم تزعم الورقة أن ركائز الجرامشية الجديدة للصين ناجحة حتى الآن في تعزيز الهيمنة الصينية المقبولة. فضلاً عن مواجهة الهيمنة الأمريكية بصورة كبيرة.

الكلمات الدالة: الصين، الهيمنة، الموافقة، شي جين بينج، الجرامشية الجديدة، الولايات المتحدة، مبادرة الحزام والطريق الهيمنة المضادة.

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Introduction

Since assuming power in 2013, China under the leadership of President Xi Jinping has been making clear steps towards achieving global hegemony. China under the leadership of Xi Jinping adopts a proactive and decisive foreign policy and seeks to maximize its regional and international role via multiple methods. In addition, it reinforces its military power.

China's strategy for achieving global hegemony and undermining U.S. hegemony under the leadership of Xi Jinping is greatly contested; it appears unclear and ill-defined. While China has declared its commitment to a peaceful rise and to avoiding a Cold War or armed conflict with the U.S., it nevertheless pursues a harsh realist policy regarding its core and sovereign interests in Asia, particularly in the South China Sea and Taiwan. It has also developed significant military power, especially naval power, in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, while China has consistently declared its commitment to preserving the neoliberal global order, it simultaneously attempts to undermine it by founding international institutions under its leadership, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). This is a major reason to argue that China pursues a purely realist strategy for achieving global hegemony and undermining U.S. hegemony.

Nevertheless, China globally pursues constructive, peaceful policies and initiatives based on soft power, mutual economic cooperation, aid, plays an important role in international organizations, and takes the lead on vital issues such as climate change. Furthermore, it does not seek to expand its military presence globally, especially in strategically important areas like the Middle East, where it imports nearly 70% of its oil. This is very good reason to argue that China still adheres to the peaceful rise and seeks to convince the world that its hegemony is benign. Even more importantly, in doing so, it does not seek at all to undermine US hegemony and engage in an armed conflict with Washington through a traditional realistic hegemony strategy often pursued by rising or revisionist powers.

Indeed, the key to unlocking the mystery of China's hegemonic strategy lies in Neo-Gramscian theory. When President Xi Jinping's overall strategy for achieving global hegemony and countering the US hegemony is carefully examined, it is quite clear that it is a neo-Gramscian strategy.

Study Problem and Questions

President Xi Jinping pursues a Neo-Gramscian strategy to achieve global hegemony and to counter U.S. hegemony. By pursuing it, China under Xi Jinping adopts a unique and unusual path to global dominance. The key argument of Neo-Gramscian theory is that hegemony and counter-hegemony mainly rely on consent. In other words, global hegemony is achieved when other countries in the international system voluntarily accept this hegemony because they consider it beneficial to them. Neo-Gramscian advocates cite multiple pieces of evidence of China’s Neo-Gramscian strategy, such as President Xi Jinping’s adoption of a win-win policy in his foreign initiatives, especially within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China takes very positive positions on critical international issues such as climate change and global governance. These are just a few examples among many that demonstrate Xi Jinping’s strong effort to extract voluntary consent from international leadership and smoothly counter U.S. hegemony.

Based on that, the first and main question raised by the study is why the president adopts a Neo-Gramscian strategy for global hegemony and countering US hegemony? What are the pillars of the strategy? How did he employ them, and how effective were they?

A set of essential questions can further clarify the study problem, which are:

1. What is the perception of the Neo-Gramscian theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony?
2. How do Realism, Liberalism, and constructivism theories explain China's hegemony?
3. What are BRI and AIIB? To what extent are they effective in countering the US hegemony?
4. What is the "Beijing consensus"? And how is it very effective to undermine the neoliberal system led by the US?
5. Why is economic power very important in establishing the global hegemony?

Study objectives:

The study objectives focus on:

1. Determining the formation of hegemony according to neo-Gramscianism.
2. Investigating the reasons for President Xi Jinping's bias towards neo-Gramscianism.
3. Understanding and analyzing China's neo-Gramscian comprehensive strategy for global dominance and undermining US hegemony.
4. Assessing the effectiveness of neo-Gramscianism to enhance China's global hegemony and undermine US hegemony.

Study hypotheses:

The study seeks to test the validity of the following hypotheses:

1. There is a connection between securing a benign and sustainable hegemony and China's pursuit of Neo-Gramscian hegemony under Xi Jinping.
2. There is a connection between China's efforts to avoid a military confrontation with the US and adopting Neo-Gramscian hegemony.
3. There is a connection between the development of BRI and the US's global geopolitical influence decline.
4. There is a connection between the development of AIIB and the undermining of the neoliberal system.
5. There is a connection between China's neo-Gramscian strategy development and success and a peaceful transition of global leadership in the international system in favor of China.

Study significance:

The significance of this study stems from the importance of its topic, as it addresses China's quest for global hegemony and its efforts to undermine U.S. hegemony from a Neo-Gramscian perspective. This perspective has not received sufficient attention despite its great importance and objectivity, especially among Arab researchers.

Study limitations:

Spatial limits, include China and the whole world as China adopts a strategy for global hegemony, especially via BRI.

Temporal limits, starts from 2013, the year President Xi Jinping took over the leadership and began to implement a neo-Gramscian strategy for global hegemony.

Methodology:

Since the main objective of this study is to understand and analyze China's Neo-Gramscian strategy for achieving global hegemony and countering U.S. hegemony, it adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to carefully examine China's inclination toward the Neo-Gramscian framework, its main pillars, and its effectiveness. The study also employs the national interest approach due to its importance in clarifying the influence of power, decision-makers, and internal and external circumstances on defining national interests, their limits, and the orientations of foreign policy.

A- Literature Review: China's Hegemony Under Xi Jinping

Scholars agree that China, under President Xi Jinping, clearly and publicly aspires to international hegemony. Nevertheless, they vehemently dispute the nature of this hegemony and the means of achieving it. Since assuming office, Xi Jinping's foreign policy has been characterized by greater proactivity and confidence, as well as by his ambition to build a large and advanced military force backed by China's enormous economic power to catch up with U.S. military strength. This has led realists to argue firmly that China's hegemony under Xi Jinping follows a purely realist path. Indeed, the maximization of military power is a crucial realist indicator. Furthermore, realists support their argument with examples such as China's bold challenges to the U.S. and its allies in their strategic interests, particularly in the South China Sea and Taiwan.

However, Zufle (2023) argues that the realists' perspective has overlooked or omitted other clear dimensions of the path of Chinese hegemony under Xi Jinping, which clearly affirms that it is not purely realist. According to Zufle, besides military power, China develops and adopts institutional power globally, such as through the BRI and AIIB, to secure a peaceful or benign hegemony—or, more specifically, to avoid a devastating military confrontation with the U.S. over leadership of the international system (Zufle, 2023).

It is evident that Zufle views China's hegemony as either liberal or constructivist; that is, it will be achieved peacefully within the existing liberal order led by the U.S., as neo-institutionalists contend, or through consolidating new ideational norms presented by China, as constructivists argue. In this regard, Rodríguez and Rüland (2022) agree with Zufle that military power is not the main pillar of China's hegemony under Xi Jinping. They contend that China follows a specific mode of hegemony that can be called "cooperative counter-hegemony," which is based on amplifying global influence through soft power and the promotion of ideal values and norms. In this way, China does not seek to challenge or counter U.S. policies directly or provocatively; rather, it challenges the core values and foundations upon which U.S. hegemony is built, and it does so in a smooth and gradual manner (Rodríguez & Rüland, 2022).

Carmody et al. (2022) are very supportive of the idea of China's liberal hegemony. They oppose Rodríguez and Rüland's perception that China is challenging the liberal system established by the U.S.; instead, they find that China is a status quo power seeking to assume the position of U.S. hegemony within the existing global system, which has been very beneficial to China's rise and growing power. In other words, China cannot achieve hegemony by imposing its own norms and values, which would be largely unacceptable (Carmody et al., 2022).

Indeed, liberalism and constructivism provide incomplete explanations for China's hegemony because they focus on specific aspects without considering the broader picture. For instance, China benefits from the existing liberal system, yet at the same time, it attempts to challenge it through its own foundations, such as the AIIB. Moreover, it continues to develop vast economic and military power while promoting normative global values despite remaining a totalitarian regime and facing numerous social problems. Therefore, Peng (2018) argues that the Neo-Gramscian perspective is the ideal approach to explain China's path to hegemony and its efforts to counter U.S. hegemony. Peng finds that China's path to hegemony represents a historic bloc based on material power and institutional and ideational dimensions designed to achieve global consent for this hegemony (Peng, 2018).

Ak and Yurteri (2023) also adopt the Neo-Gramscian perspective. They contend that since 2013, China has been working to prepare the world to counter U.S. hegemony. To do so, China presents innovative and appealing ideas and concepts in various fields that may draw countries away from the failing Western model, such as the comprehensive concept of global governance that promotes economic participation and shared benefits for all. In this way, China does not seek to challenge the U.S. directly, especially militarily; rather, it aims to build the necessary consent to help counter U.S. hegemony (Ak & Yurteri, 2023).

Also, Xi Jinping's hegemonic strategy, as elaborated by Goldstein (2020), appears to be dominated by a Neo-Gramscian character. Xi Jinping has reinforced China's hard power to secure its core interests. However, at the same time, he has adopted confidence-building measures aimed at convincing the world that China is a responsible and benign power seeking mutual benefit for all. He also works to reassure the U.S. that China is a great rising power rather than a challenger or revisionist power, in order to avoid the "Thucydides Trap" and to dispel the "China threat theory" promoted by the U.S. In this regard, Xi Jinping, for instance, adopted a neighborhood policy through which China engaged in deep economic partnerships across East Asia. Moreover, China under Xi Jinping has embraced constructive positions in many areas, particularly in addressing climate change, which has strengthened the world's perception of China as a responsible leader committed to achieving prosperity and peace for humankind (Goldstein, 2020, p. 177–182).

Against this backdrop, what is certain is that China, under the leadership of Xi Jinping, seeks global hegemony and aims to undermine U.S. hegemony in the Neo-Gramscian sense. This is what the study seeks to confirm by detailing and analyzing China's Neo-Gramscian policies and procedures for countering American hegemony.

As for the reasons behind President Xi Jinping's preference for Neo-Gramscianism, they are likely due to several factors,

including his conviction that a hegemony based on power and coercion would force China into an early and devastating military confrontation with the U.S. Alternatively, it could lead the U.S. to mobilize anti-China alliances around the world, especially since the balance of power between the two remains relatively close.

It is also likely that Xi Jinping holds a strong belief that realist hegemony, which relies on the imposition of military force and coercion, is unsustainable and, in turn, generates endless counter-alliances.

B- Theoretical Framework: Neo-Gramscian Theory

1-Gramscian Theory

Gramscian theory is a critical political theory developed by the Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci. The key focus of the theory is power and the political and class struggle within society, similar to Marxist theory. However, it begins from a different perspective on the struggle over the means of production, emphasizing that understanding class struggle and the possession of power in society lies in the decisive role of ideas and culture. In this vein, Antonio Gramsci contends that the main instrument of domination in capitalist society is the discourse of civil society institutions such as schools and churches. These institutions can establish cultural hegemony in favor of the ruling class or capitalist power. In short, Gramscian theory argues that building and maintaining hegemony are based primarily on the power of ideas rather than coercive force. Fascist and Nazi hegemonies, for instance, were essentially powerful intellectual exercises (Okereke, 2015, p. 128–130).

Neo-Gramscian theory is a more advanced development of Gramsci's ideas; it was further elaborated by Robert Cox and Stephen Gill. It constitutes a challenge to both realism and liberalism, as its understanding of international politics is based on the dynamics of the interplay between history, ideology, and material power (Ergun, 2022, p. 28).

2- Hegemony and counter-hegemony within Neo-Gramscian Theory

The concept of hegemony occupies a significant place in international relations (IR) theories. However, most of these theories—especially realism—define hegemony as a dominance relationship primarily established on material capabilities. Hegemony, accordingly, is a type of power relation between a dominant power, which is able to impose its domination over others, and the weaker actors who are forced to be subservient to it (Dogan, 2021, p. 1–2).

The Gramscian school presented a completely different and unique conception of hegemony, based mainly on the idea of consent or the voluntary acceptance of hegemony by others. In other words, there can be no hegemony unless the dominant actor or leader can secure the consent of subordinates to this hegemony, which embodies a set of shared ideas and norms (Ateed & Ozcan, 2023, p. 747).

Neo-Gramscian theory builds upon Gramsci's main depiction of hegemony—consent. However, it focuses on global hegemony and introduces new ideas and perspectives on achieving hegemony through consent. Cox (1983) argues that hegemony is achieved through the acceptance by peripheral or subordinate states of the dominant power's ideology—what he calls the "consensual ideology of hegemony." According to Cox, the persistence of hegemony in the global system is secured not by force or coercion, but mainly by the set of ideas advanced by the dominant power that align with the interests and demands of other states. In other words, states voluntarily accept this hegemony because it respects their independence and secures their interests (Cox, 1983, p. 171).

Cox did not overlook the significance of power and coercion in the persistence and establishment of hegemony. Indeed, no hegemony can exist without military power, which adds greater credibility to persuasion. Its use is occasionally necessary to protect interests; however, the use of power or coercion should be kept to a minimum to support hegemony. Nevertheless, Cox contends that hegemony is fundamentally a cultural relation or project, and only cultural hegemony can achieve the consent that sustains hegemony for as long as possible (Dirzauskaite & Ilinca, 2017, p. 31–33).

According to Cox, hegemony cannot be understood through the hierarchical distribution of power among states, as that would imply an arrogant and absolute hegemony. Hegemony, in the Gramscian sense, consists of historical blocs established to counter existing hegemonies. To achieve this, the dominant actor must establish or promote universal norms that accommodate the interests of subordinates and appeal to social and civil forces within subordinate states. Such hegemony cannot be imagined solely within the interstate system, which addresses only the state and power, without

considering social forces and people (Cox & Sinclair, 1996, p. 136).

In connection with this, Cox argues that global hegemony is an external extension of the internal hegemony established by a class or social force. This dominant force, having achieved significant success on various domestic levels, contributes to rendering the country an attractive model for others and encourages it to extend its hegemony abroad. In this regard, the economy plays a crucial role in fostering consent from the Neo-Gramscian perspective. A growing domestic economy not only motivates the internal dominant class to expand externally but also becomes an inspiring model for other states. This, in turn, makes it easier for the ruling class to promote universal ideas and values that sustain hegemony (Ateed & Ozcan, 2023, p. 749).

However, for Cox, exercising and maintaining hegemony require the coherent interaction among three factors or powers: material power, the prevailing collective image of world order (including certain norms), and a set of institutions. Based on his examination of U.S. power, Cox argued that the United States could not become a global hegemon after the First World War, despite its immense power, because it lacked specific norms and institutions (Cox, 1981, p. 139–140).

From the above, global hegemony, according to the Neo-Gramscian perspective, is essentially ideological or cultural hegemony, in which the global leader seeks to promote normative and constructive ideas and values to generate consent for hegemony. As such, hegemony is difficult to achieve through interstate power relations alone; rather, it is realized through dominant social classes across states that find such hegemony aligned with their interests and preserving their dignity and independence. Consequently, such hegemony may endure for a long time, and resistance to it will emerge, but it will be quiet and peaceful.

C- China's power pillars to counter the US hegemony

1- Material Power

President Xi Jinping inherited tremendous economic power. In 2010, China’s economy was ranked as the world’s second-largest after that of the U.S., with a gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate exceeding 10% annually. To make China the world’s leading economic power and to challenge the U.S. economy, Xi Jinping launched multiple initiatives both domestically and internationally. Immediately after assuming power in 2013, the Communist Party announced ambitious new plans to reinforce domestic production and attract more direct foreign investment, which required adopting new and more liberal reform policies.

The fruits of these plans were quickly reaped. According to international economic reports—particularly those of the IMF—China surpassed the U.S. in 2014 in terms of GDP and goods exports. Externally, China worked to expand its economic footprint by intensifying foreign investments and economic cooperation agreements. In 2014, China successfully concluded several free trade agreements with Asian countries, including South Korea (Ross, 2019, p. 303; Yağci, 2016, p. 37).

In 2015, Xi Jinping’s economic ambitions expanded dramatically with the announcement of the *Made in China 2025* initiative, which primarily aimed to make China the world’s largest manufacturer by 2049, particularly in the technological sector. It also sought to reduce China’s reliance on Western technology investments and imports, especially from U.S. companies (Morrison, 2018, p. 46–47).

Within the context of this initiative, since 2015, China has maintained GDP growth rates of nearly 7% annually, with steady expansion of the overall economy—exceeding 5% in 2023, according to IMF projections—which has made China’s economy the world’s second largest after the U.S. (Wardhani, 2023, p. 70–71).

According to China’s National Bureau of Statistics, China’s GDP and gross national income (GNI) rose by over 6% in late 2023, while GDP per capita exceeded 5%. Moreover, foreign exchange reserves increased by 111 billion U.S. dollars by the end of 2023. Additionally, the value added by Chinese industries rose by over 4% (National Bureau of Statistics of China, February 29, 2024). Similarly, in January 2024, China achieved a trade surplus exceeding 35 billion U.S. dollars due to the increase in exports of goods and services, particularly technological products (China’s State Administration of Foreign Exchange, January 2024).

Economic power, in particular, is vital for Neo-Gramscian hegemony. In China’s case, its growing economic strength

has given Xi Jinping great confidence to expand China's global influence and, accordingly, to counter U.S. hegemony. Under Xi Jinping, China's economic presence worldwide has been significantly amplified. China has become a major competitor to U.S. influence in global energy centers and strategic maritime locations. Through its economic power, China has also gained tremendous influence among many of Washington's allies, particularly in the Persian Gulf (Ghosh, 2021, p. 17).

Since 2015, China has become a fierce competitor to U.S. influence in reshaping the global economic system and has taken the lead in defining economic arrangements in East Asia. The world now depends heavily on China as a producer, importer, exporter, and market (Ross, 2019, p. 303).

What has greatly helped China expand its global economic influence is the transformation of its development model under Xi Jinping into one that is especially attractive to developing countries. This model has encouraged many nations to join the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and other Chinese economic and security arrangements (Yağci, 2016, p. 38).

2- Ideological pillar: Beijing Consensus

Since abandoning the isolation policy, China has adopted five main peaceful principles in its foreign policy, which stem from China's history, culture, and civilization. This also facilitates the global consensus of China's hegemony in the Neo-Gramscian sense. Moreover, since taking power, Xi Jinping has maintained these principles and has also put forward a set of new ideas that affirm China's desire for global leadership—leadership that is cooperative, peaceful, and responsible, not arrogant. In this respect, Xi Jinping has presented concepts such as "harmonious world," "cultural pluralism," "building a common community," and "shared destiny for mankind" to portray China's leadership with Chinese characteristics, playing a vital role in achieving peace, development, and prosperity for all. In other words, he has sought to portray China as a leader, not a hegemon, in a world where peace and cooperation must prevail because all nations share the same destiny (Carmody et al., 2022, p. 207; Li & Soobaroyen, 2020, p. 11).

Xi Jinping affirmed this in his speech at the United Nations in 2021, clearly stressing that China vehemently rejects hegemony and power politics, and fully supports the sovereignty and development of developing countries (Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the United Nations, October 25, 2021).

In his 2024 New Year message, Xi Jinping sought to affirm that China is a major, responsible country seeking the good of humankind and working to make the world better because we share the same future. He also affirmed that peace can only be achieved through cooperation for mutual benefit (*Full text of President Xi Jinping's 2024 New Year message*, December 31, 2023).

Furthermore, he sought to convey through these concepts that the values and norms adopted by the leader are not mandatory or imposed by force. They do not prevent the existence of the values and norms of others in a harmonious, multi-civilizational, and multicultural world (Wren, 2022, p. 70–71).

According to Xi Jinping, no civilization is greater than another; each civilization has unique characteristics. Therefore, the good of humankind requires harmony among civilizations (Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the United Nations, October 25, 2021).

Xi Jinping has also worked extensively to promote China's comprehensive perception of global governance, which rests on "wide consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits." In this way, this perception ensures the fair participation and benefit of everyone in the world without discrimination (Peng, 2018, p. 65–66).

To counter U.S. hegemony, Xi Jinping has sought to challenge the global liberal system, or "Washington Consensus" (WC), by presenting an alternative economic and development model to the Western one—known as the "Beijing Consensus" (BC).

Indeed, neoliberalism has only created complete economic and political dependency on the U.S. and deprived countries of exploiting their true economic potential. In other words, it has produced a false global peace premised on American military power and arrogance (Saleem et al., 2023, p. 99).

The global financial crisis of 2008 revealed that the Western liberal system suffers from a major defect, which was later

confirmed by successive crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit. This system has been unable to confront emerging global challenges or achieve global economic prosperity, and it has also reflected the West's double standards regarding democracy and human rights. In response, China promotes a global model—especially to developing countries dissatisfied with the Western model—based on participation and diversity within the global economic system, ensuring justice and shared gains for all rather than focusing on individualism. It also emphasizes that ensuring basic human rights depends on achieving economic development (Ghosh, 2021, p. 7–9).

China is promoting its model, driven by its successful economic development, which has become an attractive global alternative to the failing Western model. Within two decades, China has achieved very high growth rates, lifting nearly half of its population out of extreme poverty. China's economy has also steadfastly withstood global economic challenges by adopting different policies and standards distinct from the prevailing Western model. This makes the Chinese development model particularly inspiring, especially for developing and non-democratic countries. Consequently, it undermines the Washington Consensus and challenges the "China threat" narrative promoted by the U.S., as China's economic development model can achieve for countries what the Western model could not—ensuring their sovereignty and independence (Yağci, 2016, p. 33). In this respect, Xi Jinping stresses that it is unreasonable to describe a specific development model as universally successful and impose it on everyone; each country must pursue a model suitable to its own circumstances (Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the United Nations, October 25, 2021).

This is embodied in the rush of countries to join international organizations led by China, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. These countries have joined because such organizations offer genuine partnership and mutual benefit. This also reflects a global consensus on China's responsible and peaceful international leadership (Li & Soobaroyen, 2020, p. 12).

Furthermore, the promotion of China's soft power has received great attention from Xi Jinping. Soft power represents one of the most important tools for achieving hegemony—or consent to hegemony—in the Gramscian sense. The continuation of U.S. power to this day largely depends on the superiority of its soft power. Therefore, countering U.S. hegemony entails promoting strong global cultural values and patterns with Chinese characteristics that stand in contrast to Western values. In the same vein, China under Xi Jinping has allocated huge sums of money to establish Confucius Institutes worldwide to promote Chinese culture and language. It also provides hundreds of scholarships annually for learning the Chinese language and supports numerous art and museum activities related to Chinese heritage. Through these measures, Chinese soft power is witnessing growing progress and acceptance, particularly among young people, since Chinese culture embodies values and principles that are more humane and equitable than Western ones (Saleem et al., 2023, p. 98–100).

3-Institutional Factor

In Cox's view, international institutions or organizations are vital mechanisms for empowering and legitimizing the global norms of hegemony, as well as for confronting counter-hegemonic norms. Within these international institutions, the dominant power promotes fair rules that serve everyone's interests, especially those of peripheral countries. These rules can also be adjusted to a significant degree if they prove harmful to the interests of subordinates, particularly the weaker or peripheral countries. That is why international institutions are the best mechanism for the dominant power to facilitate consent (Cox & Sinclair, 1996, p. 137–138).

In this respect, Xi Jinping has paid great attention to enhancing China's presence in Asian regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Additionally, China has established many regional organizations and arrangements, such as the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and the China–Japan–South Korea mechanism. These initiatives aim to reinforce China's image as an economically and strategically beneficial partner (Ashok et al., 2023, p. 4).

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Among the institutions established and promoted by China under Xi Jinping, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the

most important and largest global institution. Experts argue that the BRI embodies China's global hegemonic endeavor under Xi Jinping. More specifically, it represents China's attempt to counter U.S. hegemony in a Neo-Gramscian sense. The material factor is extensively manifested in the BRI through the massive infrastructure projects developed by China in BRI member countries, through which China has already undermined U.S. global hegemony to some degree. For instance, thanks to the BRI, China has succeeded in maximizing its influence in Pakistan, one of the United States' largest strategic allies (Windsor, 2020, p. 73–74).

By 2023, China's investments in BRI member countries since its launch in 2013 had exceeded one trillion U.S. dollars, most of which were directed toward infrastructure projects. In 2023 alone, China's investments exceeded 90 billion U.S. dollars across more than 140 member countries (The Green Finance & Development Center, February 5, 2024).

More importantly, through the BRI, China promotes multiple civilizational and developmental standards that contribute to achieving voluntary acceptance of China's hegemony and to undermining U.S. hegemony—particularly the value system and institutions of the global liberal order. China places special emphasis on the concept of the "public good," which serves as the golden source of generating global consent. Moreover, China has adopted the slogan "Win–Win Cooperation" as a founding element of the BRI. Under this slogan, the BRI guarantees its members fair benefits, participation, and respect for their individual development paths, dignity, and sovereignty (Dogan, 2021, p. 115).

It should be noted that the "win–win" concept is one of the main ideas in Confucian philosophy, which holds that achieving goodness and prosperity must include everyone—even opponents (Wren, 2022, p. 70). This principle was affirmed in the BRI Action Plan, which states that the main aim of the initiative is to establish a cooperative economic system that benefits all (Action Plan on the Belt and Road Initiative, 2015).

In this regard, President Xi Jinping announced in November 2014 that China would contribute U.S. $40 billion to establish the Silk Road Fund. The fund was officially launched in Beijing on December 29, 2014. According to China, the fund aims to finance and provide financial support for joint trade and investment cooperation within the framework of the initiative, in order to promote development and well-being for all participating countries (Silk Road Fund, n.d.).

In his speech at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2017, Xi Jinping affirmed that China's main aim within the BRI is to realize development and peace through building a community with a shared future for humankind (Xi Jinping's Report at the 19th CPC National Congress, October 18, 2017). For instance, BRI investments have contributed to creating more than 180,000 jobs in BRI member countries (Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the Opening Ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, May 14, 2017).

In this vein, Xi Jinping also vowed that the elimination of poverty and job creation would remain priorities within the BRI through the support of livelihood projects (Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the Opening Ceremony of the Second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, April 26, 2019).

As for countering U.S. hegemony, observers agree that the BRI is the strongest initiative so far and constitutes the greatest challenge to U.S. global dominance—a fact acknowledged by Washington itself. Several significant manifestations can be observed. One of the most notable is the substantial growth in the number of countries wishing to join, including those allied with Washington and members of the Western bloc. According to Statista, the total number of BRI member countries reached 149 in 2023 (Statista, February 29, 2024).

Through the BRI, China has also managed to undermine U.S. dominance in the highly developed technological field, particularly in the export and import of advanced manufacturing components. For example, China's 5G network has expanded to all parts of the world. The BRI has also allowed China to transform its economic influence into a geostrategic presence, granting it greater ability to affect U.S. interests by influencing the positions and policies of countries that have become increasingly aligned with China. For instance, several countries bordering the South China Sea have begun to oppose an extension of the U.S. military presence on their territories, despite ongoing sovereignty disputes with China over the sea (Lew et al., 2017, p. 17–18).

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is the second-largest institution established by Xi Jinping after the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is also one of the most important financing arms of the BRI and serves as the main platform for establishing a global financial system led by China, countering Western hegemony over the global financial order.

AIIB was proposed by Xi Jinping in 2013 to provide financial support for infrastructure projects in Asia and its neighboring regions. It was officially established in 2015 with 57 founding member countries, including European nations such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Italy. China holds the largest voting share in the bank's decisions, estimated at 26.6 percent (Weiss, 2021, p. 1).

By the end of 2023, the total number of countries joining the bank had reached 109, after the accession of three new members in 2023: El Salvador, the Solomon Islands, and Tanzania. Hence, AIIB members collectively account for 81 percent of the world's population and 65 percent of the global gross domestic product. Since its establishment, the bank's capital has reached 100 billion U.S. dollars (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank [AIIB], September 26, 2023).

AIIB represents a powerful instrument for China to enhance its hegemony and to counter U.S. dominance in the Neo-Gramscian sense. Indeed, the bank's operational principles and membership rules strongly reflect China's main developmental and civilizational norms, which aim to achieve prosperity and well-being for all. According to the bank's founding charter, membership is open to all countries, institutions, and international banks, which has helped expand the bank's scope beyond Asia—its original focus (Grieger, 2021, p. 3).

Such an open approach to membership enhances China's credibility as a responsible economic leader seeking to establish new rules for a global financial system characterized by transparency, integrity, and justice. Moreover, the AIIB transcends political considerations and differences between countries. Membership is even open to the United States, though it has refused to join. However, many of Washington's closest allies are members and hold significant voting shares—for instance, the United Kingdom with 2.89 percent and India with 7.59 percent. These are strong indications that the bank is very close to overtaking the World Bank as the leading global multilateral institution (Yu, 2024, p. 153–155).

More importantly, AIIB's lending policy focuses on the poorest countries without imposing economic or political conditionalities, unlike Western institutions that require programs of economic austerity or political reform and respect for human rights. This approach has contributed to attracting many African and Asian countries (Grieger, 2021, p. 7).

In this regard, AIIB granted Rwanda 100 million U.S. dollars in 2024 to finance clean energy projects and provided Tajikistan with nearly 75 million U.S. dollars in the same year to support infrastructure development (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank [AIIB], April 18, 2024).

Furthermore, through the AIIB, China seeks to reflect its perception of global governance, emphasizing equality in the distribution of leadership positions among members and the participation of all members in decision-making. Most importantly, it gives poorer countries a greater role in leadership and decision-making processes (Yu, 2024, p. 156–158).

As a result, China, through the AIIB, has significantly undermined U.S. economic and financial hegemony, which has been a key pillar of U.S. unilateral dominance since the end of the Cold War. The AIIB has succeeded in attracting many countries—even from the Western bloc—and has become a fierce competitor to U.S.-backed institutions such as the IMF and World Bank.

Conclusion

China seeks global hegemony under Xi Jinping; this is clear and beyond doubt. However, China's hegemony is exceptional—unlike the hegemonic powers in history, China has favored Neo-Gramscian hegemony.

Neo-Gramscian hegemony is essentially cultural or ideological hegemony. In other words, it is based on consent—the voluntary acceptance by the world of the leader's norms and ideas because they serve the world's interests and respect its independence and dignity.

According to Neo-Gramscian theory and the Chinese perspective, cultural hegemony ensures the persistence of

hegemony for as long as possible. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, it contributes to countering existing hegemony peacefully and smoothly. Accepting or embracing the ideas of a new hegemony implicitly means building a counter-hegemonic bloc against the existing hegemony based on military force and coercion.

Perhaps this is the main reason for Xi Jinping's preference for Neo-Gramscianism—he does not wish to engage in a devastating military confrontation with the United States in the context of the struggle for global hegemony. Such a clash would be tantamount to suicide for China, which has learned from the lessons of history, particularly from the excessive use of military force that led to the downfall of Nazism and the Soviet Union.

Xi Jinping's strategy to counter U.S. hegemony is a practical interaction among the three main components of Neo-Gramscian hegemony, and it appears to be effective and successful so far. Through steady economic growth, China has expanded its global political influence at the expense of U.S. influence. It has also become an inspiring global economic model, undermining the position of the Western economic model.

Xi Jinping has put forward a set of new, constructive ideas to portray China as a global leader rather than a hegemon—a responsible power contributing to global peace and development. Moreover, Xi Jinping has sought to undermine the U.S. neoliberal economic model (the Washington Consensus) by presenting China's alternative model, inspired by its economic success, and based on building a new global economic order in which fair participation and benefits for all can be achieved.

In fact, China's increasing global role in addressing international issues—such as climate change—its growing number of international partnerships, and the expansion of its soft power, along with the rising number of countries joining Chinese-led organizations and arrangements, are strong evidence of China's success in creating a global perception of itself as a responsible and benign hegemon. Consequently, this significantly undermines U.S. hegemony, particularly its neoliberal model.

International institutions are the best mechanisms for ensuring consent, and Xi Jinping has paid close attention to this. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in particular, greatly contributes to building consent. Through the BRI, China promotes civil and constructive ideas and contributes to the development and economic prosperity of its members. The BRI also embodies the principle of "win–win cooperation," which aims to establish a new economic system that is fairer and more beneficial for all.

That is why the BRI, along with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), is the most indicative evidence of the emergence of an actual Neo-Gramscian hegemony led by China. Their memberships continue to grow steadily, and through them, China is successfully undermining U.S. influence on a global scale.

In a nutshell, China under Xi Jinping is pursuing Neo-Gramscian hegemony, and it appears to be successful so far. This is the main purpose of the study, which sought to demonstrate this reality. However, the researcher recommends conducting further critical studies on this subject, including the ongoing development of China's Neo-Gramscian hegemony strategy, the challenges it faces, and how the United States seeks to confront it.

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