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States, Norms and Power: Emerging Powers and Global Order

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Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter, *China, the United States, and Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 352 pp., £22.99 pbk).

Henry R. Nau and Deepa M. Ollapally, eds, *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan, and Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 241 pp., £15.99 pbk).

Martin A. Smith, *Power in the Changing Global Order: The US, Russia and China* (London: Polity Press, 2012, 224 pp., £16.99 pbk).

The interactions of major and rising powers are a central feature of international politics today. Far-reaching structural changes are affecting the international distribution of wealth and power – reflected in talk about ‘rising’ and ‘emerging’ powers, the *deja vu* of American decline, and a return to economic and political multipolarity. But what qualifies a state as a major or rising power? What do rising powers want, and what effects will they have on world order? What worldviews underpin the foreign policies of new and aspiring powers? And how will this affect the institutional and normative structures of world order? Into the middle of these overlapping debates come these three books. Each book tries to come to grips with how emerging or aspiring powers such as China, India and Russia perceive the existing American-dominated order, how these perceptions inform their interactions with other powers, and what the implications are for the future of multilateralism and global governance. Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter’s *China, the United States, and Global Order* has become a landmark intervention in these debates by authors in the English School tradition, leveraging a qualitative and historical framework

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to study what they argue to be the core bilateral relationship of the twenty-first century. Martin Smith's *Power in the Changing Global Order* seeks to re-evaluate the concept of power through a comparison of the foreign policies of China, Russia and the United States, while Henry Nau and Deepa Ollapally have assembled an illuminating ensemble of comparative studies of the foreign policy debates amongst the aspiring Eurasian powers of our time. A central challenge of contemporary research on the interactions of major powers is to accommodate the return to the drama of great power politics while accounting for the numerous structural changes that distinguish the contemporary power shift from its historical precedents. Grappling with this challenge, reading these three books together provides important lessons in the nature of contemporary international power, its relationship to the ideas and norms that structure the system and, most of all, the ideas and preferences of rising and major powers today. At the same time, all three books share basic assumptions about state- and power-centricity that will have to be questioned if the contours of the emerging order are to be fully understood. All books have strengths and weaknesses. Before addressing possible weaknesses, let us first extract what lessons we can from the books' undoubted strengths.

The Nature of State Power

An occupational hazard of rising power research is to fall into the rut of traditional power centrality. In this regard, the subject of 'rising' and 'major' powers is a loaded die: studying states because they are powerful might privilege the role of power in explanation. How can we avoid simplistic approaches to power and better understand, and possibly measure, the power of major states in the liberalised, globalised, institutionalised contemporary order? Martin Smith tackles this question in his book *Power in the Changing Global Order*. The first two chapters discuss the concept of power and how it is possible to measure and analyse the 'power' of individual states. Drawing briefly on Parsons, Weber and Gramsci, Smith develops a 'social' view of power that integrates understandings of power from theorists in sociology and International Relations. The major argument is that power in the contemporary era is 'fundamentally about interactions and relationships'.¹ While power resources may convey the potential for power, 'The key is the effectiveness and skill with which their leaders can harness their possession of relevant resources to achieve desired ends through interaction with others.'² Moreover, power must be able to be translated into intended effects to really count.³ Smith therefore makes three points central to thinking about power and its relationship to major states: first, that power operates through social relationships and is present in international structures and institutions; second, that power must be able to produce intended effects to really matter; and third, that power is most effective when it becomes 'hegemonic', that is, when it is accepted by those who are the subjects of that power.⁴ He illustrates the

1. Martin A. Smith, *Power in the Changing Global Order: The US, Russia and China* (London: Polity Press, 2012), 13.

2. *Ibid.*, 14.

3. *Ibid.*, 33.

4. *Ibid.*

argument with short histories of the recent behaviour and foreign policy ideas of the United States, Russia and China.

The concept of power is also central to Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter. In *China, the United States, and Global Order*, they sketch a wide-ranging picture of the relationship of these two major powers, and their orientations towards 'global order norms'. In this view, the redistribution of power that is taking place today can be understood above all as a dyadic process, between an established (though not necessarily declining) United States and a rising China. While avoiding an explicit conceptualisation of power as a state resource, their reasons for selecting these two states centre on their being 'the two most important states in the international system'.⁵ This importance seems to stem primarily from their power resources, but also from their systemic significance to global norms. What features are relevant to such power today? The authors suggest at least three: having a large economy, having a large defence budget, and the more subjective idea of being able to command 'deference to [one's] leadership'.⁶ While these features are particularly germane to the United States, China's significance includes its possession of nuclear weapons, permanent membership on the Security Council, a large aid budget, and increasing global economic importance.⁷ Crucially, however, Foot and Walter also take into account the *interaction effects* of the power resources of different states, and how they can reinforce or mutually limit each other. In an echo of power transition theory, in the contemporary power shift, the United States and China appear as 'the current hegemonic state and prospective challenger, respectively'.⁸ In this essentially binary perspective, Foot and Walter argue that both Beijing and Washington perceive each other as their 'most important interlocutor on a range of crucial issues, arising as much from their interdependence as from the competitive nature of their relationship'.⁹ By enmeshing each other in variably cooperative and rivalrous webs of relations, these two states become the two power centres of the modern world, around which global order has an especial dependence.

What Is Power For? What Rising Powers Want

Nuancing our understandings of power today leads inevitably to the question: for what purposes is this power exercised? This question takes a central position in Henry Nau and Deepa Ollapally's collection of insightful essays. *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers* examines in much greater detail the foreign policy schools of thought amongst five 'aspiring powers' in the greater Asian area: China, India, Iran, Japan and Russia.¹⁰ What

5. Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter, *China, the United States, and Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

6. *Ibid.*, 16.

7. *Ibid.*, 17.

8. *Ibid.*, 21.

9. *Ibid.*, 1.

10. Henry R. Nau and Deepa M. Ollapally, eds, *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers: Domestic Foreign Policy Debates in China, India, Iran, Japan, and Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

do these aspiring powers want from the existing world order? What kind of foreign policy beliefs exist in these countries? For Henry Nau, these foreign policy conceptions are important because they constitute ‘a broad ideational variable affecting foreign policy outcomes’,¹¹ while for Nikola Mirilovic and Deepa Ollapally, they are important ‘regardless of whether they have an independent causal effect on foreign policy choices or if they reflect underlying shifts in the strategic environment and in material interests’.¹² In contrast to much of the existing literature of rising powers, *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers* therefore seeks to open up the black box of rising powers’ policy debates, and does so admirably.

Henry Nau opens the book by advancing a common framework for comparing schools of foreign policy both within and between different countries.¹³ This framework pivots on each foreign policy school’s *scope* (national, regional, global), *means* (hard or soft power), and *goals* (geopolitical, ideological, institutional), although Nau himself concedes that these categories ‘do not please all specialists including some of our own authors’.¹⁴ On the basis of this analytical guidance, the following empirical chapters not only provide a typology of foreign policy debates within each country, but begin to connect these views to the domestic institutions and personalities that espouse them – research institutes, academics, members of the foreign service, the armed forces, and so on. The book argues that these internal foreign policy debates can be understood through traditional IR concepts such as realism, nationalism and liberal internationalism or ‘globalism’. While liberal globalists – in favour of integration into the global economy and its governing institutions – are present in nearly all of these countries, it is in fact varieties of nationalism and realism that dominate their foreign policy outlooks. Only Iran stands out as having a sizeable constituency of ‘revisionist’ or ‘revolutionary’ visions of world order, founded on a radical Islamic idealism that challenges some central tenets of the international system.

The conclusion of *Worldviews* outlines three key findings regarding the ambitions of these aspiring powers: that their contending foreign policy ideas are broadly comparable, that they tend to incline towards a realist and/or nationalist understanding of the world, and that this inclination towards relatively pragmatic realism and nationalism is growing.¹⁵ These conclusions chime especially with Martin Smith’s understanding of the worldview of Russia, which is seen as cultivating an illiberal statist regime with a cocktail of modernist and Russian nationalist ambitions. This is embodied in the Russian concept of ‘sovereign democracy’, emphasising a large and powerful state apparatus domestically, and an ability to project primarily military and strategic power abroad. ‘Inherent in this concept is the view that only a handful of international actors actually

11. Henry R. Nau, ‘Introduction: Domestic Voices of Aspiring Powers’, in *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers*, eds Nau and Ollapally, 4.

12. Nikola Mirilovic and Deepa M. Ollapally, ‘Conclusion: Realists, Nationalists, and Globalists and the Nature of Contemporary Rising Powers’, in *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers*, eds Nau and Ollapally, 211.

13. Nau, ‘Introduction’.

14. *Ibid.*, 15.

15. Mirilovic and Ollapally, ‘Conclusion’, 210.

meet the key criterion for being truly sovereign – i.e., not relying for their security on others to the extent that their freedom of action becomes significantly constrained.¹⁶ This criterion suggests a world of four or five major powers, centring on the US, and including Russia, China, India, and ‘perhaps’ the European Union. Smith reveals that the speeches of Russia’s foreign policy elites invoke a distinctly realist worldview of competitive great power politics, in which, in the words of one observer, ‘By definition, [Russia] can have no natural friends or sponsors. Instead, it has partners who are also competitors. Virtually anyone can be a partner, and practically anyone can be an opponent.’¹⁷

As the nature of international power has been changing, these foreign policy visions of aspiring powers indicate that the purposes behind this power may be more traditional. But how can nationalism and realist understandings of international politics be reconciled with these countries’ integration into global capitalism and its governing institutions? The prevalence of realist and nationalist schools of thought in all of the countries examined in this book might indicate that these aspiring powers will shape world order in a way conducive to political sovereignty, away from international institutions and universal norms, and privileging great powers on the international stage. However, in all of the countries examined, there are sizeable ‘globalist’ coalitions which promote closer collaboration with established powers in a world of multilateralism and interdependence. In this respect, the concluding chapter observes that, crucially, nationalist, realist and liberal globalists all agree on the need for continued economic growth, which has come to depend on integration into transnational economic processes.¹⁸ Consequently, reconciling realism and nationalism with their own functional needs for international cooperation would appear to be the major challenge facing these aspiring powers. The systemic consequence would seem to be compatible with the notion of ‘soft’ geo-economics coming to define the relations of the aspiring powers: a configuration of competitive but ultimately manageable politico-economic rivalries.¹⁹

Changing Power Relations, Changing Norms?

All three of the books considered here take norms seriously, but seek to elucidate the role of power in shaping normative orders as well as the capacity of norms to constrain naked power. Smith argues that a neglect of the normative dimensions of power, indicated by concepts such as ‘legitimacy’ and ‘liberal hegemony’, undermined the effectiveness of the United States’ neoconservative project. The ability of subordinates to withhold legitimacy from American actions is seen to have caused a rethinking on the part of the Bush administration. While not drawn out explicitly, Smith effectively underlines the efficaciousness of these ‘weapons of the weak’ in the face of overwhelming military power. Consequently, while embedded in an overwhelming material and above all military

16. Smith, *Power in the Changing Global Order*, 141.

17. Dmitri Trenin, cited in Smith, *Power in the Changing Global Order*, 141–2.

18. Mirilovic and Ollapally, ‘Conclusion’, 217.

19. Barry Buzan and George Lawson, ‘Capitalism and the Emergent World Order’, *International Affairs* 90, no. 1 (2014): 71–91.

preponderance, neoconservatism ultimately led to ‘the degradation of American power’.²⁰ *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers* focuses not on the role of norms in constraining and conveying power, but on the ideological ambitions and worldviews that can become as central to states’ perceived national interests as their material interests.²¹ But it is Foot and Walter’s book that most explicitly investigates the relation of state power and behaviour to the existing normative order.

The major object of reference for Foot and Walter is ‘global order’, and in particular its instantiation in the form of particular ‘global order norms’. Foot and Walter seek to explain the factors that ‘shape the degree to which actor behaviour is consistent with global order norms’. The assumption is that the United States and China are especially significant for the stability or erosion of the existing normative order, and that, by identifying the factors that shape their behaviour, we can come to a better understanding of the likely future of global order. This overriding research question is then applied to global order norms in five areas: the use of force (especially the Responsibility to Protect), economic policy surveillance and coordination (especially currency values), nuclear weapons non-proliferation, climate change and financial regulation (especially banking standards). Their basic conclusions are summarised in their concluding chapter, and are as follows.²² Regarding the use of force, US conformity is low to mixed, with China representing ‘gradually higher’ consistency. Both powers have a mixed record regarding macroeconomic policy surveillance, with the United States providing few hegemonic ‘public goods’ in its economic policies, and China reluctant to adjust its policies due to its own severe domestic constraints. On nuclear non-proliferation, China has gradually converged to the global norm along with the United States. On climate change, the United States has been largely non-compliant, while China has participated in the regime, but only because it has few real obligations in it. Finally, regarding financial regulations, despite the historical role of the United States as a ‘norm maker’ and China as a latecomer ‘norm taker’, both have adopted mostly norm-consistent behaviour. A concluding chapter argues that in a broad historical perspective, both China and the United States adhere only partially to existing global norms for a mixture of genuine and strategic reasons. China’s trajectory is, however, towards ‘gradually higher levels in the majority of areas covered in this study’, while the United States’ record is ‘much more mixed’.²³ In the end, the authors are relatively pessimistic. Either the US and China will become increasingly instrumental and ad hoc in their cooperative endeavours and undermine ‘solidarist’ (cosmopolitan) norms of global governance, or they will shift towards strategic rivalry and ‘endanger global society’.²⁴ Such a conclusion indicates that power redistribution, by exacerbating the competitive tensions between the two countries, will erode and endanger the existing normative order.

20. Smith, *Power in the Changing Global Order*, 92–1.

21. Nau, ‘Introduction’, 12.

22. Foot and Walter, *China, the United States, and Global Order*, 274–80.

23. *Ibid.*, 275.

24. *Ibid.*, 302.

Pitfalls

While elucidating the nature of power, the purposes to which it is being put, and the implications for normative orders, these books also exemplify three limitations that must be addressed to future studies of the implications of rising powers for world order.

The first is methodological. Conceptual sophistication and refinement must be able to be translated into empirical indicators in order to become 'operational'. There is a danger that despite conceptual advances in our understandings of national power, the same old indicators are used. For example, despite Smith's attempts to better conceptualise how power operates today, his potentially useful distinctions are little used in the empirical chapters, which consist of short histories of the recent foreign policy behaviour and ideas of the United States, Russia and China. Smith's style is direct, jargon-free and unambiguous, and yet there is a lurking ambiguity in the way that power as a concept is related to empirical indicators. In an attempt to avoid seeing power as a stock of material military resources, Smith adopts a much broader idea of 'power resources'. This enlists a host of different concepts from different theoretical traditions, encompassing talk of population and economic size, military capacity, 'soft power' and influence, ideological resources, legitimacy and hegemony. But a tension can be observed between the book's conceptual goals and its chosen empirical material. References to Anne-Marie Slaughter's notion of 'networked power' do not translate, for example, into an empirical investigation of how and whether rising powers are integrated into transgovernmental networks;²⁵ and neither does invoking Susan Strange's concept of 'structural power' lead to illustrations of the respective countries' structural power.²⁶ Rather, the book's empirical studies centre almost entirely on cases drawn from the policy field of (traditional) security. This is clearest in the chapters on the United States (which take up roughly half of the empirical content), which recount the different coalitions involved in the key military interventions launched by the United States and its allies. This 'case' selection, drawn exclusively from a NATO-centric interpretation of international security, not only seems to contradict the broader emphasis on the social nature of power, but also calls into question the reliability of the overall findings as applied to international politics more broadly. In this endeavour, Smith has opened up the right question without providing a fully satisfying answer.

The second pitfall concerns the issue of normative change. The central objects of investigation for Foot and Walter are the factors that determine the degree to which Chinese and American behaviour is consistent with 'global norms', understood, following Peter Katzenstein, as 'collective expectations for the proper behavior of actors with a given identity'.²⁷ But trading-in the rationalist focus on 'compliance' for the

25. See Anne-Marie Slaughter and Thomas Hale, 'Transgovernmental Networks and Emerging Powers', in Alan S. Alexandroff and Andrew F. Cooper, eds, *Rising States, Rising Institutions: Challenges for Global Governance* (Waterloo, Ontario: Center for International Governance Innovation and Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 48–62.

26. Susan Strange, 'The Persistent Myth of Lost Hegemony', *International Organization* 41, no. 4 (1987): 551–74.

27. Peter Katzenstein, quoted in Foot and Walter, *China, the United States, and Global Order*, 6.

constructivist language of 'level of behavioural consistency' raises the question of the relationship between norms and state behaviour. Simply stated, non-compliance with a norm (or inconsistent behaviour) cannot be equated with challenges to the normative content of global order. That is because norms have an inherently communicative and intersubjective quality. Often, states choose not to comply with the apparently appropriate course of action indicated by a norm, but seek discursively to affirm the legitimacy of the norm itself – for example, by explaining how the norm does not apply in a particular case, or that it must be weighed against the legitimate criteria of alternative norms. The normative validity of the norms is consequently affirmed through legitimacy statements that seek to justify the action as actually conforming to the norm, or as an extreme case in which the norm cannot be held to apply. Resilient norms have a capacity therefore to be 'honoured in the breach'. In contrast, overt challenges to global norms are relatively rare, such as the Bush administration's challenges to the norms of pre-emption.²⁸ Engaging in normative contestation or the politics of 'legitimacy' is inherently discursive – which is why the absence of analysis of the public statements of the American and Chinese governments in Foot and Walter's case studies is so surprising. This point was made some time ago: 'Indeed, such communicative dynamics may tell us far more about how robust a regime is than overt behavior alone. And only where noncompliance is widespread, persistent, and unexcused – that is, presumably, in limiting cases – will an explanatory model that rests on overt behavior alone suffice.'²⁹ Consequently, while Foot and Walter's study is a major analytical accomplishment, we must go beyond its focus on behavioural consistency in order to understand the meaning of contemporary power shifts and normative change.

A third and final observation is in order. Each of these books expresses a power- and state-centric view of the world. The subject of rising and major powers lends itself to such an approach. But power centrality need not necessarily imply state-centricity, and even states can be analysed in ways that do not necessarily assume that they constitute unitary actors. While each of the books acknowledge that contending domestic debates shape international behaviour, there is little attempt to relate these foreign policy debates to the social forces and domestic interests that underpin them. *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers* shows that each of the new powers is host to considerable 'liberal globalist' coalitions which favour continued economic integration, the projection of power through international institutions, and adherence to the basic rules of international order. Relatively little attempt has been made in these accounts to relate these worldviews to their socio-economic fundamentals, associated with new outwardly-oriented capital and vast emerging 'middle classes'. Consequently, the opportunity for understanding the contemporary power shift through the interaction of state-society complexes embedded in a global political economy is passed up. Such an account could place rising power behaviour within the broader context of their integration into global capitalism, the persistence and coexistence of multiple varieties of capitalism in the national context, and

28. Ian Hurd, 'Breaking and Making Norms: American Revisionism and Crises of Legitimacy', *International Politics* 44, no. 2 (2007): 194–213.

29. Friedrich Kratochwil and John Gerard Ruggie, 'International Organization: A State of the Art on an Art of the State', *International Organization* 40, no. 4 (1986): 753–75, 768.

the question of their socialisation (or not) into transnational circuits of capitalist class linkages and networks of global governance.³⁰ Attention to these material processes can help to avoid seeing power shifts as simply a redistribution of power from some states to others, and to assuming that states remain the fundamental containers of socio-economic processes. While the political aspirations of rising powers might signal a resurgence of international geo-economic competition and contestation over the hierarchies of the existing institutional order, the normative and material structures of global capitalism seem to have an increasing functional pull over their own interests and identities. Such developments are hard to consider if the state remains the only ontological 'given', and on which power, norms, and the future of world order are supposed to depend.

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