

# International Relations Theory in Flux in View of China's 'Peaceful Rise'

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the fact that the conventional theoretical approaches used to understand international relations, especially hegemonic stability theory, have been witnessing consistent problems arising both from the experiences of the current hegemon, the US, and the challenge posed by the rise of China, a power which is increasingly willing and able to project and promote its historical and cultural position in the East Asian region through community building and soft power development. By analyzing both the theoretical discussion on hegemonic stability and constructivism, as well as criticism of the cultural dimensions of Chinese soft power, it concludes that China's cultural factors have become more useful and increasingly will be perpetuated more extensively as long as they fit into the political dynamics and economic changes in East Asia.

*Key words:* China, hegemonic stability, Confucianism, soft power, constructivism

## Introduction

This paper attempts to examine the fact that the conventional theoretical approaches used to understand international relations, especially hegemonic stability theory, have been witnessing consistent problems arising both from the experiences of the current hegemon -the US- and the challenge posed by the rise of China, a power which is increasingly willing and able to project and promote its historical and cultural position in the East Asian region through community building and soft power or simply 'peaceful rise (*heping jueqi*)' (Zheng 2005). Hu Jintao first used the term 'peaceful rise' in autumn 2003. Yet, the theoretical foundation was built by Zheng Bijian, Vice-president of the Central Committee's Central Party School. The notion of peaceful rise, according to Zheng, rests on three principles: perpetuating economic and political reform through the promotion of a socialist market economy, seeking cultural support for China's peaceful rise and balancing the interests from different sectors internally and externally to support its rise. (Glaser and Medeiros 2007: 294-295) The term 'peaceful rise' is either considered a reflection of China recognizing 'America is even stronger' or projecting

China as 'a hidden threat.' (*The Economist*, 24 June 2004) The peaceful rise is manifested *via* business and trade deals, Confucianism, soft power and East Asian education cooperation rather than more traditional mechanisms of war and military alliances.

China has been trying to solidify its regional hegemony and historical relations in East Asia with a view to project its position as the establishment status quo power by redeeming her East Asian historical/cultural relations, so as to confront the current system (from economic to political) of East Asian international relations established by the US. Some new Chinese textbooks also outline the grand strategy of China in Asia. For instance, Pang Zhongying has been trying to 'normalize' the East Asia region through Chinese effort. (2004: 189-190) Ikenberry and Mastanduno argued that 'Despite the robustness of American power, the ability of the United States to extend the frontier of its liberal hegemonic order further into Asia is problematic.' (2003: 8) Jia Qingguo, a professor from Beijing University, also emphasized the notion that external construction plays a crucial role in the formation and projection of Chinese nationalism:

[E]xternal factors are at least as important as historical, psychological and political factors in shaping the development of contemporary Chinese nationalism. If one accepts constructivism's argument in international relations, i.e. that a state's behavior is in part a product of the interaction between nation-states, current Chinese nationalism is also in part a product of the interactions between China and the outside world. (2005: 17-18)

This paper will first critically assess the notion of hegemonic stability through examination of Joseph Nye's depiction of the paradox between the power construction of the US and the exercise of soft power. The second section of the paper will examine the social construction of the concept of Chinese soft power through the influence of the economic values of Confucianism across East Asia, and the historical and cultural influences of text books, media (allowing international media to cover the earthquake in Sichuan in May 2008, for instance) and academic dissemination to enhance its power construction process. The final section will be a critical assessment of these measures in relation to the perception of China's peaceful rise.

## **Contested US Power Relations**

The United States has long been regarded as the hegemonic successor to Great Britain after Second World War. However, Joseph Nye disagreed with this assertion. He argued that 'The United States never enjoyed a

general hegemony after the war, so hegemony can be neither lost nor regained in the future.' (2002: 108) Charles Kindleberger's book (1973) first used the concept of hegemonic stability to assess US procrastination in exercising its financial leadership after the Great Depression in 1929. However, it was Robert Gilpin who systematically theorized the ups and downs of hegemonic succession through marginal cost analysis. He states that 'These successive dominant states have changed the system, expanding until an equilibrium is reached between the costs and benefits of further change and expansion.' (1981: 156) The hegemon will either cease to exist in that position, or being heavily criticized by the other states, shift from the role of being a balancer to that of a beneficiary, if not predator, of the system.

The opening up of the US market for goods from Hong Kong in the 1960s was said to be beneficial to Hong Kong in the face of the large number of immigrants from Communist China. (US Senate 1962). In order to tackle the immediate problems of a large influx of refugees, the US opened its market to Hong Kong's exports. It was both a careful calculation of the containment strategy as well as a way in which economic hegemonic function was maintained. However, the inability of maintaining the Bretton Woods System in the early 1970s (US dollars pegged with gold) foretold the weakening of the US as a monetary hegemon. (Komiya, Okuno and Suzumura 1988: 318) The trade disputes between the US and Japan over the semi-conductor industry in the 1980s revealed that national interests prevailed and the marginal cost of being a hegemon was too large in relation to the economic benefit. (Prestowitz 1988: 121) The current demand by many in the international community on the Chinese government to allow the Chinese currency (yuan or *renminbi*) to appreciate, was a result of the persistent trade deficit experienced with China. The US has experienced a growing trade deficit with China, increasing from about US\$83 billion in 2000 to US\$237 billion in 2007.<sup>1</sup> The US's role as a facilitator in maintaining its monetary hegemony was further discredited during the Asian financial crisis. Joseph Stiglitz, Nobel Prize winner 2001, asserted that pushing Korea to liberalize its immature financial market before 1997 was beneficial to the US, and especially US firms. (2003: 221-222) By pursuing an economic policy of 'fishing in the troubled waters', however, the US displayed behaviour seen by those in the region as below the standard expected of a hegemon.

Nye later modified his idea on the development of hegemony in *The Paradox of American Power* (2002). The so-called American hegemonic

leadership should be analyzed through further examination of globalization and transnational relations. It can be graphically depicted as follows:

**FIGURE 1:** Three Levels of Power Structure: A Critique of Hegemonic Stability

Power of What?	Power Structure	Dominated Actors
Military	Unipolar	U.S.
Economic	Multipolar	U.S., Europe, Japan and China
Transnational Relations	Outside government's control	Non-state actors: bankers, electronic herds

Source: Compiled from Nye (2002: 39).

As can be seen from figure 1, the current hegemonic leadership of the US is predominantly exercised through preponderance of military power. In terms of economic power and transnational relations, the US has to share power with regional entities as well as non-state actors. Among different economic issues, the US has to work with some international organizations, such as World Trade Organization (WTO) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to facilitate policy co-ordination. Following this line of argument, John Odell developed the idea that states needed to negotiate within the framework of an international economic chessboard of transnational relations (2002). Increasingly, the US has been excluded from some very important regional decision making processes in East Asia. (For example, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) + 3 (China, Japan and Korea) and East Asian Summit (EAS) did not even include the US as member (Dent 2008: 18)). On issues related to high politics or military confrontation, such as the Six-Party Talks in 2003 and 2004 over the North Korean nuclear crisis, the US had to work collectively with Russia, China, Japan, South Korea and North Korea in order to develop a kind of institutionalized political framework for regional security issue. (Choo 2005: 39-58). In terms of transnational actors and relations, the US, rather than being a hegemon, has become the target for criticism in areas such as environmental policy (refusal to sign the Kyoto Protocol), transnational migration and drug trafficking.

After many years serving in the Pentagon as Assistant Secretary of Defence during Clinton's administration in the 1990s, Nye eventually grew disillusioned with the narrow focus of the military strategies used

in the formation of US foreign policy. More alarmingly, he suspected that the US might lose its friends and influence because power was defined too narrowly among the decision-makers. Later, he bowed out and returned to the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University to devote himself to the study of 'soft power' which, according to him, can rescue the US from isolation. Long before the materialization of the concept of soft power, Keohane and Nye were working on the ideas of power and interdependence during the height of the Cold War in the 1970s to search for ways of international cooperation under which they calculated that interdependence could be maintained through multiple channels in dealing with international affairs, non hierarchical world relations and non-military means were a priority (1989: 24-25).

The term soft power was first coined by Joseph Nye to suggest the importance of the US maintaining soft power in the age of globalization because 'the presence of multiple cultures creates avenues of connection with other countries and helps create a necessary broadening of American attitudes in an era of globalization' (2002: 119). The concept of soft power was the culmination of various ideas and themes Nye had expressed in the past. In short, soft power refers to 'attractive power' instead of coercive power (Nye 2004: 5-6). Nye worried that 'The United States' most striking failure is the low priority and paucity of resources it has devoted to producing soft power' (Nye 2004: 19). Nye hinted at the importance of the US in maintaining soft power in the age of globalization when he stated, 'the presence of multiple cultures creates avenues of connection with other countries and helps create a necessary broadening of American attitudes in an era of globalization'(2002: 119). In this sense, China has seized the opportunity (if not hijacking the concept) to facilitate soft power capital in the implementation of its proclaimed peaceful rise, thereby creating the gradual deterioration of US influence in East Asia.

### **The Social Construction of Chinese Soft Power**

Social constructivism was heavily drawn from the sociologist's understanding of social interaction between individuals and societies. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1967) first pointed out the importance of individual behaviours in relation to social changes and development. Individual is not *a priori* derived, which means one's behaviours can actually be modified through social changes. Along some similar lines, George Herbert Mead once stated that 'What we have here is a situation in which there can be different selves, and it is dependent upon the

set of social reactions that is involved as to which self we are going to be' (1934: 143). Nicholas Onuf first applied social constructivism to the understanding of global relations with a view to examining social interactions and non-material based elements and ingredients rather than hard power context and military struggle. In the *World of Our Making*, he contended that 'It does not draw a sharp distinction between material and social realities – the material and the social contaminate each other, but variably – and it does not grant sovereignty to either the material or the social by defining the other out of existence' (1989: 40).

The climax of social constructivism came with Alexander Wendt's heavy scale attack on the realist school, focused on two issues: identities and interests (1992 and 1999). He clearly stated 'My objective ... is to build a bridge between these two traditions (and by extension, between the realist-liberal and rationalist-reflectivist debates) by developing a constructivist argument, drawn from structurationist and symbolic interactionist sociology, on behalf of the liberal claim that international institutions can transform state identities and interests.' (Wendt 1999: 391) His ideas on the challenges posed by the materially based arguments of the realist school became clear in *Social Theory of International Politics*, which juxtaposes the argument of social construction of IR in a larger context, concerning culturally based elements (Wendt 1999). As Wendt continued, one very important function of culture is to create collective memories: '[O]nce collective memories have been created it may be hard to shake their long-term effects, even if a majority of individuals have "forgotten" them at any given moment.' (Wendt 1999: 163). In this sense, Wendt augmented the notion of international relations theory, forcing it to take into consideration the importance of interaction, learning and epistemology seriously as core arguments underpinning international studies (Wendt 1992: 399 and 416). In a later critique on Mearsheimer's article, Wendt elaborated further, '[C]onstructivists argue that material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded.' (Wendt 1995: 73; Mearsheimer 1995).

In East Asia, social constructivism has been modified to extend the argument beyond the identity building among Southeast Asians, given their truncated colonial history and cultural diversity. As Benedict Anderson wrote in his seminal work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* 'Nations, however, have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural. Because there is no originator, the nation's biography cannot

be written evangelically, "down time," through a long procreative chain of begettings.' (1991: 205). If the imprints of history can facilitate social changes, other nations with a much stronger cultural heritage can be most effective in such cultural embedding, for example between China and East Asian countries.

The missing gaps between ideas and culture between China and East Asia were first bridged by David Kang. His controversial article 'Getting Asia Wrong' strongly suggested that China's historical weakness was the result of the chaos and disturbance in East Asia in its contemporary history, not the other way round. According to Kang, 'Historically, it has been Chinese weakness that has led to chaos in Asia. When China has been strong and stable, order has been preserved' (2003: 59). Obviously, he did not subscribe entirely the notion of constructivism being eclectic. Nor did he want to make 'a plea for research that includes a touch of realism, a dash of constructivism, and a pinch of liberalism.' (Kang 2003: 66) By bringing history and culture, Peter Hays Gries depicted a path through language as a means for the re-construction of Chinese identity. He contended 'Culture does matter: cultural differences clearly played a major role in the Sino-American apology diplomacy of April 2001 (2005: 109). More importantly, historical identities are being used and constructed as ways to rescue the Communist Party from losing 'hegemony over Chinese nationalist discourse.' (135) As David Campbell successfully indicates, US Cold War security can be re-written through the 'reconceptualization of identity and the state' (1992: 8). China apparently has been facilitating its historical legacy (in terms of historical, culture, social capital and ideational advantages) to further enhance and create a soft power base to motivate neighbouring East Asian countries to develop more cordial relations with China.

### **Confucianism**

The economic values of Confucianism have been discussed widely by those who examine the economic activities of the Chinese overseas in Southeast Asia. Gordon Redding contended that 'directly Confucian ideals, and especially familism as a central tenet, are still well enough embedded in the minds of most Overseas Chinese to make Confucianism the most apposite single-word label for the values which govern most of their social behaviours' (1993: 2). This common cultural trait integrates economic and social relations among the overseas Chinese to form the foundation of working habits and the craftsmanship of business activities (Cheung 2004).

The extent of Confucianism, according to Peter Berger and Michael Hsiao, may help trace the ideas in which cultural consensus can be articulated through the 'Odyssey' of cultural history among some Asian states. Their personal encounters and interviews conducted in various Asian countries such as South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore and Hong Kong have allowed them to derive an 'East Asian development Model' (Berger and Hsiao 1988: 4). The assumption or the major ingredient of the Asian model maintained that 'both Japan and the newly industrialized countries of East Asia belong to the broad area of influence of Sinitic civilization, and there can be no doubt that Confucianism has been a very powerful force in all of them' (Berger and Hsiao 1988: 7). The powerful force underneath Confucianism is interpreted further by Hsiao as the 'Confucianist moral definition of the state' (1988: 18). The Confucian tradition of Asian countries, therefore, enables the state to mobilize human resources more freely, as well as the use of bureaucratic authority.

Furthermore, the Confucian ideal of strong family tradition is used extensively by Siu-lun Wong (1989) as a model to analyse the modernization of Hong Kong's economy. Admitting the tradition of family ties and subordination of paternalism, Wong suggests that so called 'paternalistic management' (Wong 1989: 174) is the core successful mode of Hong Kong's economy. In particular, the emphasis on entrepreneurialism among Hong Kong people also gives rise to a vibrant and vigorous economic and industrial structure for the growth of Hong Kong. The above mentioned factors are some representative opinions of scholars who use Confucianism as a way of understanding Asian economic growth. Many of them extensively use such doctrines as family relations, respect, hierarchical structure of kinship, management of society, etc. as a foundation for their argument.

### **Soft Power of China**

In China, the use of soft power to facilitate the peaceful rise of China has gained momentum. Ding and Saunders' studies force us to think about the obsolescence of using traditional balances of power or force to deter China from rising. On the contrary, the Chinese language, along with globally established Confucian values are gradually being accepted as symbols of Chinese soft power (2006: 3-33). Huang and Ding further explained that global perceptions of China's cultural importance and the contest of soft power are actually quite positive (2006: 22-44). 'China's patience, confidence, and rising economic power translate into a

growing pool of 'soft' power', according to Jean Garrison, 'giving China increasing influence in East Asia and the global economic system' (2005: 25). In *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power in Transforming the World*, Joshua Kurlantzick argued: 'China's soft power indeed has proven successful in many cities [in East Asia] like Mandalay, allowing China in some cases to supplant the United States as the major external cultural and economic influence' (2007: 107). Li Ying-chun (2006) echoed Zheng's aforementioned notion of peaceful rise. By strengthening China's soft power capabilities over historical culture, Li argues, involving it in global affairs with a view to accommodate Chinese interests, developing a communication industry, and promoting a 'Beijing Consensus' or 'Chinese model' to challenge the Washington Consensus (Ramo 2004). Another way to facilitate Chinese soft power is to substantiate 'Public Diplomacy,' including media diplomacy, educational exchange, organizing international events, etc, in order to create a responsible image (Huang 2005).

In contrast to the double-act between the US and IMF measures toward East Asian countries before and after the Asian financial crisis, China did something less expected by the West, which proved to be another strong case for the maneuverability of soft power. After the Asian financial crisis in 1997, China did not capitalize immediately from the dilapidated financial chaos across the East Asian region by devaluating its currency, the *Renminbi*. Senior leaders such as Zhu Rongji, Dai Xianglong and Li Lanqing made explicit and coherent statements on their refusal to devalue the *Renminbi*. These statements were made in many international forums and on important occasions after the crisis, such as the Insurance and Securities System Conference on 14 January 1998, the Press release of National Affairs Department on 23 January 1998 and the Annual Meeting of World Economy Forum on 1 February 1998.<sup>2</sup>

Another way in which China could conjure up a collective historical memory across East Asia, is to re-interpret East Asian history in a way which reinforce a cultural and regional consensus for the education of the next generation. This process of socialization, according to G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, is crucial because 'At the international level, the emerging hegemon articulates a set of normative principles in order to facilitate the construction of an order conducive to its interest' (1990: 284). A team of academics from China, Japan and Korea, for instance, have been working on a collaborative project to create a textbook on the history of East Asia *Dongya sanguo di jinxiandai shi* [The Contemporary and Modern History of Three East Asian Coun-

tries] (*Dongya sanguo* ... 2005). The reason for such collaborative effort, according to their main argument, was to reconcile their historical disagreements on the contemporary history of East Asia. These differences were due to differing view points, national interests and interpretations. Through historical documentation, they were trying to focus on several historical pieces such as the Japanese aggression and the demonstration of the importance of the Confucian influence across this region. (*Dongya sanguo*... 53) However, as I argued previously (Cheung 2008: 197):

Apart from providing the basic cultural and historical development of these three countries, the narrative of their contemporary history was almost stopped around the time of World War II (with only a flimsy final chapter about the future East Asian trajectory), leaving the history of the Cold War un-touched. If the history of the Cold War was basically constructed by the US, the omission of this big chunk of history is trying to erase the presence of the US in East Asia via soft educational power.

In addition to scientific contributions, Chinese social sciences have also witnessed an integration with the main stream academic channels through the publication of various academic journals, which effectively opened up a window of opportunity for China to penetrate into the international academic discourse, a field which has always been pre-occupied by US ideas (Hix 2004: 298; O'Leary 2005: 3).<sup>3</sup> For instance, *China & World Economy*, the official journal of The Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) has been successfully linked up with the main stream English publishers.<sup>4</sup> In Hong Kong International Airport, you can find *China & World Economy* displayed side-by-side with other media books, business books or general magazines in the book stores. Placing an academic journal such as *China & World Economy* in an international airport inevitably brings some pro-China ideas (economic and political) to the attention of global travellers, business people, academic workers, etc. Secondly, a group of scholars from Tsinghua University established a journal entitled *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* which was aimed at 'providing a forum for academic papers and articles on problematic issues. Most of its articles are either related to China or have implications for Chinese foreign policy.'<sup>5</sup> Obviously, such development will not replace the dominance of the US in the academic discourse. Nevertheless, the intention is to disseminate Chinese academic (both CASS and Tsinghua are relatively more pro-government) viewpoints through English language media, a powerful soft power element that can gradually influence people's thinking.

A recent example of the so-called peaceful rise of China was when China Central Television (CCTV) (the mouthpiece TV channel)'s TV series *Daguo Jueqi* [The Rise of Great Powers] - a 12-part TV series on the study of the rise and fall of nine historical great powers - was aired on TV from 13 to 24 November 2006. The countries profiled in the series-Portugal, Spain, Holland, Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, former Soviet Union and the United States of America-were selected and heavily documented to pave the way for the call of the rise of China in the future. According to *Yazhou Zhoukan's* analysis (a Hong Kong-based Chinese magazine), this TV series looked at the rise of great powers from a positive angle, not necessarily from the conventional notion of victim/victor, or Marxist view of exploitation. To put it simply, this so-called 'general education' TV show gave the impression that China will naturally take its place as one of the world's great powers in time (10 December 2006, 68-75). By the same token, the relaxation of the media coverage (local and overseas) of the earthquake in Sichuan province in May 2008 further perpetuated the established notion of Chinese soft power (*Yazhou Zhoukan*, 1 June 2008 , 24-31). Such gestures help reinforce the openness of Chinese politics, allowing international society to assess through global medias.

### **Cultural Assessment and the Peaceful Rise of China**

The post-Cold War world economy has witnessed a more pluralistic distribution of power among different nations of various sizes and capability. If a nation tries not to be drawn into the swamp of the contemporary world politics, or even attempts to be included in the existing situation, it has 'to obtain a broad measure of consent on general principles - principles that ensure the supremacy of the leading state and dominant social class - and at the same time to offer some prospect of satisfaction to the less powerful' (Nye 1991: 32). If power is defined as an act of influence, the instrument should not be seen as too coercive, or as having the result of jeopardizing too much the position of less powerful states.

The notion of a Chinese peaceful rise, does not mean that China is moving towards a frontal assault with the US through direct competition in a zero sum manner, which, according to, Thomas Christensen, would imply that 'China's deepening economic and diplomatic ties to the region have come at a high price for the United States because, by necessity, those newly developed ties increase China's power in the region' (2006: 82). In fact, China openly refused to be the hegemonic successor, contradictory to many realists who assumed that should be a

logical outcome of Sino-American relations. Neither did China want to sacrifice three decades of economic development after 1978, which has now become almost the only reserve of legitimacy left to rationalize the continued monopoly of power of the Chinese Communist Party (Rossi 2005, Pei 2006 and Cheung 2006). Although Hu Jintao has pointed out the importance of 'scientific development' and 'harmonious society' in his 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress report in October 2007, the focus of the report was intended to convey a continuation of Deng Xiaoping's idea on economic development.<sup>6</sup> Nor does it make any difference if the rise of China has turned into an economic force that has challenged American economic hegemony, providing competition to US economic interests regarding acquisitions, and more generally competing with economic sectors that are considered to be very critical and sensitive in maintaining US power and prosperity (Marchick 2006).

In addition, the extent of the use of Confucianism is not without limitation. Its concept goes beyond the two founding fathers' (Confucius and Mencius) ideas. As a concept, Confucianism has a well-established meaning. *The Analects of Confucius* (1992) contains the dialogues between Confucius and his students, aiming at fostering the proper way of governance and the crux of human relations.<sup>7</sup> For instance, in Book 16, Ji Shi, Confucius has substantiated his idea of equality by saying that 'For when wealth is equally distributed, there will be no poverty; when the people are united, a small population will not matter much; and when there is stability throughout the land, there will be no such things as peril and subversion' (*The Analects of Confucius* 1992: 281). It is clear that his idea of government concerns the fairness of society. The connotation is much closer to socialism than capitalism. Again, the sense of growth and economic development is less transcendent in the original spirit of Confucius.

Furthermore, in practice, if Confucianism has such a profound effect on economic development, how come North Korea, Thailand and Burma were suffered from poverty before World War II, given that Korea subscribed to Confucianism and Thailand and Burma had substantial Chinese populations? Finally, to put it more bluntly, Ezra F. Vogel argued that 'If Confucianism alone explains why countries modernize, why should the Confucian motherland lag behind? It is true that after 1949, failure can be attributed to socialist planning, but China had not achieved widespread industrialization before 1949, either' (1991: 84). Finally, Confucianism entails other dimensions of social and economic interactions, which perhaps should also be taken

into consideration in a comprehensive assessment on the cultural explanation of political economy. By ignoring 'the historical processes and specific relations of political power,' according to Lisa Wedeen, 'the treatment of culture in political science has downplayed the heterogeneous ways in which people experience the social order within and among groups...' (2002: 715).

China's soft power relations are inevitably useful in the current debate on the discussion of US power relations and the rise of China's economic and political profile. As William Callahan argues 'China is not merely trying to use its new economic power to transform its political status from that of a third world country to that of a Great Power. In addition to catching up to the West economically, China now aims to narrow the "normative gap" in international relations theory' (Callahan 2004: 570). From in-depth interviews and analysis on Chinese nationalism, Peter Hays Gries concluded that there is a general feeling in China that 'China's sun will rise as America's sets' (2005a: 406). Using culture and civilization within the soft power approach, is one way to view Chinese culture as the historical lynchpin. The key question is not its usefulness, but a matter of acceptance, especially from the points of view of the existing hegemony. In the keynote address delivered in the National Bureau on Asian Research in November 2006, Kenneth Pyle, Henry M. Jackson Professor of History and Asian Studies at the University of Washington, rightly pointed out the importance of the use of history and culture in the making of US foreign policy. He reminded us that 'The ability of the United States to pursue its traditional goals of maintaining a balance of power, keeping the region open to trade and investment, and pressing for the expansion of democracy is more constrained because this is now a region in some ways much more pro-active and resistant to US influence' (Pyle 2006: 11). The regional and global institutions that the US helped create, however, remained intact and will be sustainable even when the US hegemonic power has eclipsed. Similar arguments came along in the same vein by Chinese watcher in the US. Susan Shirk in *China: Fragile Superpower*, clearly stated that 'The best way for China to rise peacefully is to behave like a responsible power and accommodate to the current superpower, the United States' (2007: 219). On another occasion, John Ikenberry echoed the point 'it may be possible for China to overtake the United States alone, but it is much less likely that China will ever manage to overtake the Western order' (2008: 37). He concluded that the US may be weakened, but China has to comply with the established world order created by the US and its partners. China is a follower after all.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper demonstrates that the theoretical notion of hegemonic stability needs substantial improvement through which the current hegemon—the US—is increasingly less able to facilitate most of the functions which were taken for granted for decades. With the approach of a more interdependent and diversified global environment, international affairs are perhaps less suitable to be carried out by a single dominant power. Many agendas and issues are transnational in nature, with more countries sharing different parts of it. The peaceful rise of China within the arena of foreign policy cumulates with the unique nature of Chinese economic and social changes. However, these factors do not necessarily coincide with the established power relations in the East Asian region. Yet, East Asian economic development and the regionalization of many economic, political and international relations allow countries in this region to augment its sphere of influence which, nevertheless, enables some historical and cultural discourse to penetrate into the consensus building process. China's cultural past, therefore, has become more useful and, increasingly, will be exploited more extensively, as long as it fits the political dynamics and economic changes in East Asia.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> U. S. Census Bureau 2000-2007 [<http://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5700.html>] (accessed January 26, 2007)
- <sup>2</sup> *People's Daily*, January 15, 1998: 1; *People's Daily*, January 24, 1998: 1 and *People's Daily*, February 2, 1998: 1.
- <sup>3</sup> For instance, nine of the top ten (measured by impact score) Political Science journals are American journals.
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/cwe> (accessed May 3, 2007)
- <sup>5</sup> <http://cjp.oxfordjournals.org/> (accessed February 23, 2008)
- <sup>6</sup> Report of the 17<sup>th</sup> NPC [<http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/104019/104099/6429414.html>] (accessed on October 15, 2007).
- <sup>7</sup> All together, there are twenty books in *The Analects of Confucius*. They are all dialogues. Those dialogues distill many abstract ideas of governance into workable disciplines of day-to-day practical norms. See (*Analects of Confucius* 1992).