"Normative Challenges to International Society: Rising Powers and Global Responses"

Economic and Social Research Council Seminar Series convened by Dr Jamie Gaskarth; Seminar One, King’s College, London, 2 November 2012.

This was an action packed, varied and vibrant seminar which raised a number of theoretical and practical issues relating to the rise of China and India and the challenges their rise poses to international society. A group of enthusiastic panellists delivered thought provoking papers which initiated deep, interesting and at times fierce debate between the participants. The seminar’s underlying narrative was that both China and India were emerging as global powers, especially in the economic sphere of international relations, and that international society was possibly entering an ‘Asian Century’. It was suggested by some panellists that the norms, values and beliefs which underpin Chinese and Indian domestic and foreign policy are inherently different to those which currently dominate international society. However, others panellists did identify that there was no guarantee that China and India’s rise in economic power would directly translate into normative power and that some of both China and India’s recent foreign policy decisions appear to have contradicted the norms outlined in their government’s discourse. Therefore, the extent to which an ‘Asian Century’ would actually develop and whether it would challenge the current order within international society was left open for further debate. A brief summary of the seminar’s proceedings are recorded in the four sections below.

This seminar was divided into four parts: three predominately theoretical panel discussions followed by a more policy-orientated roundtable discussion. The first panel focussed on international society as a broad theoretical concept and how international society has responded to the threat posed by rising powers in the past. Jamie Gaskarth criticised the current ‘simplified’ mainstream academic narrative relating to the threat posed by emerging powers. Shogo Suzuki assessed how China’s historic experiences have resulted in them suffering from an ‘identity crisis’. David Armstrong outlined eight different models of international society that may emerge as a result of the proposed global power shift.

The second panel discussed the nature of Chinese values and beliefs and whether or not China’s rise will lead to a restructuring of international society as we know it. David Kerr focussed on how the lack of a shared ‘Asian identity’ may obstruct the development of an ‘Asian Century’. Yiwei Wang argued that China and ‘the West’ need to cooperate in order to establish an international society that benefits all members. Jane Duckett examined the domestic challenges facing China and how these challenges may influence the role they are willing to take within international society. Jennifer Althenger looked at how studying the history of Chinese international relations can further our understanding of the current situation.

The third panel outlined Indian perceptions of international society and the impact that India’s increasing international presence is having on its foreign policy. Ian Hall concentrated on how new external and domestic pressures have transformed India’s foreign policy mechanisms and outcomes. Constantino Xavier highlighted that although values and interests have always been central to Indian foreign policy, India’s rise has caused certain traditional values and interests to be reconsidered. Chris Ogden demonstrated how Indian
foreign policy discussions are dominated by a conflict between adhering to India’s traditional roots and meeting their aspirations to become a great power.

Finally, the roundtable discussion focussed on Britain’s responses to emerging powers with a particular emphasis on their engagements with and changing policies towards both China and India.

**International Society**

*Dr Jamie Gaskarth* (Plymouth) argued that the mainstream academic literature relating to the rise of China and India represents a monolithic narrative which focuses on a materialistic explanation that over simplifies the situation in question. According to an extensive literature, international society is witnessing an economic and material shift away from ‘the West’ towards Asia which will result in the birth of an ‘Asian Century’ predominately led by China and India. This poses a challenge to the current order within international society because it has been assumed that as China and India rise they will want to mould international society in their own image; representing a normative power shift from West to East. This argument’s rationale is based on two interpretations of certain material elements of China and India’s society: economic growth and large populations. Moreover, the argument is underpinned by certain ontological assumptions: economic and material power will automatically translate into normative power and that the rise of China and India will be at the expense of ‘the West’. However, history shows that often economic and military power does not directly translate into normative power because ‘great powerhood’ is not recognised via physical might but it is also a metaphysical status. Similarly, this simplified argument does not account for differences in ‘Asian practice’; the fact that China and India, for various reasons, often disagree over international relations matters; nor that the systems within China and India are in fact changing.

*Dr Shogo Suzuki* (Copenhagen/Manchester) examined how China’s historical experience, especially isolation from international society during much of the Cold War, led to China developing a ‘crisis of identity’. China is an ‘occidentalist’ state continually fearful of how they are viewed by ‘the West’. China thus pursues a policy centred on earning recognition from ‘the West’ and membership within international society. China’s difference, and the idea of ‘yellow peril’, continues to develop fear within ‘the West’ and a belief that China’s rise will lead to them developing revisionist policies aimed at manipulating international society for their own gain. However, China considers being viewed differently as an insult and in fact history would stipulate that China only develops revisionist policies when they feel ‘ostracised’ by ‘the West’. This was apparent during the 1950s and 60s when China was kept outside of international society and developed a policy underpinned by a strong revolutionary rhetoric; placing itself as the self-professed guardian of developing states’ interests. But as soon as China became recognised by international society in the 1970s it quickly dropped this revisionist stance in favour of joining international society. Based on this rationale, and in light of China’s policies slowly becoming more ‘westernised’, China is unlikely to develop revisionist tendencies. As a ‘veto player’ Chinese support is needed in all key international decisions. Thus China now finds itself as an integral member of international society even if it does often choose to remain in the fringes.
Professor David Armstrong (Buckingham) initially focussed on ‘what the past can tell us about today’s situation’ before outlining eight possible designs for future international societies. Based on early historical examples and hyper-realist assumptions the argument that we should be preparing for a ‘coming war’ with China and Asia is often posited. According to a hyper-realist rationale, history shows that increases in a state’s wealth often upset the balance of power and almost inevitably leads to conflict. But such an argument does not accommodate a realisation that the ‘rules of the game have changed’. Military power no longer dominates international relations. Instead, the focus has shifted to economic factors where the benefits of trade and cooperation greatly outweigh military competition. New factors – technology, markets and politics – have replaced purely military power and this new world order is more integrated and multilateral where new technologies combine to make the threat posed by rising powers less significant. The historic great power world order has been replaced by a more integrated economic world order. But making predictions about the future is difficult, the economic integration argument has failed before and what awaits international society remains unknown. Nonetheless, China’s rise, due to their alternative ideas and ideology, remains an important realisation within international relations: China’s economic model – controlled capitalism – is an unknown quantity and their approach towards developing regions, such as African ‘trade not aid’ policy, deviates from the traditional methods deployed by great powers. In sum, the ‘rules of the game have changed’ and great power conflict is unlikely to return. Instead, we can expect international society to change but to what we cannot say.

China

Dr David Kerr (Durham) concentrated on the meaning of the emerging term ‘Asianisation’; the problem of defining ‘Asian’ and how the lack of a common Asian identity will probably hinder the development of an ‘Asian Century’. ‘Asianisation’, as a term, is understood to consist of two dimensions: a redistribution of power towards the Asian continent and the development of new, non-western, political and social identities. However, what it means to be ‘Asian’ is not agreed upon and the Asian identity is often defined territorially. This lack of identity has not only resulted in a ‘national branding’ of both ‘Asia’ and ‘Asianisation’ but it has also confused and obstructed the development of Asian regionalism; allowing an ASEAN to develop that starts in North America, crosses the Pacific Ocean and ends in the Baltics. Based on perceptions that China is different, some view ‘Asianisation’ as a normative process and argue that a Chinese-led Asian world order would be different to the world orders previously witnessed; ‘international society with a human face’ perhaps. But this begs the questions: what would a Chinese/Asian world order look like? What institutions would develop? And what would be the place for the current institutions? However, in reality China is not challenging the norms of international society. China prefers political narrative over political change. Instead it is operating a policy of ‘selective obstruction’ or a ‘China says no’ policy. Moreover, many young Chinese people will argue that China and the Asian continent in general is not well governed and cannot continue to develop without internal change. Thus China and Asia need first, to find a common identity and second, reform internally before they look to ‘reform’ international society.
Professor Yiwei Wang (Tonji) discussed how China’s aim was not to create a new international society but instead to reform the current model into a society that would be of benefit to all members. China as a state is an enigma: who are the Chinese? China has many self-visions but is also viewed in various ways by external actors: emerging power, traditional civilisation, ‘Middle Kingdom’, socialist country, along with some others. China also remains the only developing country with a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. Although initially isolated from the current globalised international society, China, since 2001 with its accession to the WTO, has become a full member; but, this means that in comparison with other global powers China remains a relatively new member of the post-1991 ‘New World Order’. However, the realisation that China is now a fully pledged member of international society places it in the middle of an ‘identity crisis’: what/who is China? Many different conceptions of China exist: traditional, modern, global. The traditional Chinese concept Tianxia means ‘all under one heaven’ and this means that traditionally Chinese society has no concept of international and this idea is often evident within its international relations. Ancient Chinese philosophy and the modern socialist tradition dictate that Chinese norms, values and beliefs are different to their western counterparts. Nevertheless, China does not want to replace the current world order. Instead, China believes that a compromise with ‘the West’ is required to make the current model of international society more inclusive, sustainable and harmonious. This desire for compromise gives hope that global governance can succeed but in China’s view the norms and values that currently exist need to be negotiated because they are too small to include everyone. China and ‘the West’ need each other to ensure the development of international society continues. Thus, China and ‘the West’ need to set aside their differences and develop a new consensus where international society’s actions are underpinned by a desire for the creation of a long lasting peace and common prosperity not an East/West dichotomy.

Professor Jane Duckett (Glasgow) outlined the domestic problems facing China and their implications for China’s rapid rise to global power status. ‘The West’s’ decision to view China as a threat to its dominant global position actually continues to ‘puzzle the Chinese’, begging the question: why does ‘the West’ view China as a threat? The main rationale behind this position is based on the ‘yellow peril’ perception of Chinese difference. Within domestic China the government is dominant and powerful and some in ‘the West’ remain fearful that a powerful China will adopt a similar position globally; but there exists no indications that Chinese foreign policy will adopt such a position. Currently, China is going through a transition period: a leadership transition is underway and China is facing never before seen domestic challenges resulting from its rapid industrialisation. This means making any accurate predictions about China’s role within international affairs is difficult because the Chinese Premiership is faced with a decision between prioritising domestic or global issues; with China’s focus currently being local not international. Furthermore, China is faced with the problem of defining ‘who China is?’ a debate which is often underpinned as ‘Socialism vs Confucianism’ or ‘modern vs traditional’. Confucian philosophy continues to dominate much of China’s thoughts about itself and other states. China has a unique self-perception of its position within international relations insofar as it sees its central role as challenging the moral vacuum that exists within international society. However, before China can attempt to mould international society it must address its own internal problems.
Dr Jennifer Althenger (King’s College) approached the ‘China question’ from a historical perspective. China represents a ‘push and pull’ between many popular paradigms and explanations of International Relations. China is seen by some as a threat to ‘Western’ supremacy: ‘so why is China still standing?’ Some traditional approaches may struggle to explain China’s continual existence and rise considering it has faced many internal problems, been involved in many wars and spent a long time isolated from frontline international politics. But, understanding China’s history can help us explain certain irregularities that we observe. Examining periods within international relations history does not only shape our knowledge of how and why other states view China in a particular way. Analysing the context within which international relations took place within these periods allows us to see how China acted at that time; an outcome that may be repeated. China continues to face many questions relating to their identity: ‘what is China?’ ‘Where does Taiwan enter the equation?’ ‘What is modern China?’ The identity question is often approached in reference to a dichotomous debate between modern international China and contemporary traditional China. But China’s identity is also shaped by other internal and external factors: economics, regionalism, transnationalism, isolationism and the artificially constructed East/West divide. Questions of international law exist, specifically: ‘what role does China see for international law?’ And ‘what role does China play in the establishment of international law?’ China has always been influential in the development of international law in particular its nature and reach. The role China played in the League of Nations is similar to how the current Chinese delegation acts at the United Nations.

India

Dr Ian Hall (ANU) explained how India has made changes to its foreign policy institutions and approaches in order to meet its developing desires. India represents a unique case within the realm of foreign policy making because whereas many states have adopted a decentralised approach India’s foreign policy was traditionally highly centralised with the decision making power placed firmly in the hands of a few ‘core foreign policy elites’. Moreover, India’s foreign policy aims and guidelines are outlined within the state’s constitution. India’s foreign policy has long been adopted in accordance with the 1945 UN order. However, India’s own domestic interests, not international matters, were central to the foreign policy produced. Recently though India has somewhat suffered a ‘crisis of governability’ which has resulted in more elections and thus more of a say for the electorate in foreign policy matters. Moreover, in a rapidly globalising era India has faced new internal and external pressures which propose alternative foreign policy demands to those emerging from New Delhi: the rise of a ‘new gentium’; increased power of the federal components and an increase in demands from border areas. These new pressures have challenged the legitimacy and credibility of the traditional Nehruvian centralised foreign policy model. Indian foreign policy has become an increasingly contested realm with many alternative positions proposed: standard nationalist; neo-Nehruvian; hyper-nationalists; great power realists; liberal globalists; leftists. As a result the Indian foreign policy making mechanism is being revamped into a system which allows for a plurality of actors with differing viewpoints. New foreign policy institutions and positions have been created within the Indian government which have initiated a visible decentralisation of the foreign policy process; changing not only the decision making mechanisms but also their outcomes.
Constantino Xavier (John Hopkins) highlighted the importance of norms, values and interests within Indian foreign policy making and how these have shaped India’s role within South Asia. But also how we may be witnessing a break from these traditional norms, values and interests as India pursues its ultimate desire: ‘great power status’. Indian foreign policy is often characterised as being underpinned by an ‘ideas vs interests’ dichotomy: utopian-moralistic; evolutionary; instrumentalist. But also that Indian foreign policy is often irrational, lacks any formal strategy and is reactive as opposed to proactive. Classical Realism often dominates Indian foreign policy thinking which is not surprising because India exists in arguably the most ‘volatile and insecure region on the planet’. Many decisions, however, are often made in a space of ‘normative or liberal realism’ where policy makers are aware of the benefits of force but their decisions are also constrained by understandings of morality. Within the discipline of International Relations, India is a new phenomenon inasmuch as never before has international society had to deal with a rising democratic state from Asia. Additionally, India has a unique self-perception and vision of its role in the world: revisionist power. India has a different history to most other great powers having been both a great civilisation and a colony; which has shaped the norms and values it prioritises and promotes when conducting its international relations. Nonetheless, the norms, values and interests promoted by India have shifted in the post-1991 era as it has become more involved in international politics and a more active member of international society. Thus the future direction of Indian foreign policy is unknown and is understood differently by seven schools of thought; the rationale of these schools would create various policy implications for India.

Dr Chris Ogden (St Andrews) claimed that Indian foreign policy and its role within international society is underpinned by a conflict between its desire to remain a norm-entrepreneur, looking out for the interests of the developing world, and its ambition to become a great power. India’s foreign policy is underpinned by a great power yearning which impacts on how India interacts with different multilateral regimes. But what do we mean by international society and how does India fit into this vision? International society, in its simplest form is a society of states constructed around common norms and a collective identity. Institutions/regimes play a vital role in maintaining order according to the ‘western’ view of international society; but this is only a single world view. India prioritises power, influence and prestige and much of their foreign policy is centred on them gaining recognition as a great power. However, India is the vanguard of the ex-colonies and conducts its foreign policy in accordance with common post-colonial norms: fairness, progress, development, self-reliance and self-determination. India’s underlying foreign policy aims make its foreign policy very practical but a number of ‘anti policies’ underpin Indian thinking: anti-colonial; anti-imperial; anti-expansionist; anti-interference. India does not want to change its core post-colonial values and its hard-line diplomatic approach demonstrates that India remains wary of the intentions of, and aware of the limits to, multilateral relations. However, India’s desire to become a great power and gain global recognition has led to a ‘paradox of norms’ developing around Indian foreign policy thinking. India represents a ‘system in flux’ and its foreign policy is a ‘synthesis of opinion’ dominated by two visions: the ambition to restore India as a great civilisation or global power and respecting its more recent colonial history and continuing to promote post-colonial progress.
Roundtable

Dr Jamie Gaskarth (Plymouth); Eleanor Fuller (FCO); Professor Yongjin Zhang (Bristol); Dr Ian Hall (ANU); Professor David Armstrong (Buckingham); and Linda Yueh (Oxford) featured in a roundtable discussion which addressed more policy orientated issues. The discussion primarily focussed on Britain’s relationship with, and emerging policy towards, China, India and other rising powers. It was stated that Britain’s proposed approach towards emerging powers had cross-government support and would feature concerted efforts to develop stronger bilateral ties especially with China and India. Tony Blair talked about establishing a ‘global network’ but the rise of Asia, led by China and India, reflects a ‘network shift’ from West to East. This does not have to be at the expense of Britain. Two questions were raised: ‘what the future holds for Britain?’ and ‘what Britain’s position within a new international society would be?’ Britain understands that other states will become more powerful and that Britain is no longer an industrial, economic or military power of the highest rank. But it is important for Britain to realise that they still have an active role to play within international society and in order to fulfil this role Britain needs to concentrate on what it is good at. Despite this, Britain retains its position that human rights are non-negotiable and will remain a central feature of its international relations with all developing states. However, existing British foreign policy partnerships would not become less relevant: Britain remains committed to maintaining both the special relationship with the US and its current role with the EU.

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