The English School Approach in the study of China and India in a Changing World Order

Sharinee L. Jagtiani

Centre on Asia and Globalisation, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore, Singapore

sharinee.j@nus.edu.sg

Abstract:

This paper proposes a framework for study of the implications of the rise of China and India as emerging powers in a changing world order. It rests on the following hypothesis: while the say of both countries will increase in shaping and defining world order, they do not have a coherent picture of an alternative or anti-hegemonic world order. The main reasons for the lack of this vision stems from differing normative preferences at the international level shaped by different histories of state formation, complicated bilateral relations and differing abilities to respond to civil society actors at the expense of the state. Given the levels of interaction it aims to analyse, it considers the English School Approach relevant to ground it theoretically and it pursues a qualitative historical methodology to meet its objectives. This paper hopes to provide a strong framework for the comprehensive and timely analysis of China and India as rising powers and their ability to respond to, and in turn influence, the restructuring of the unipolar order, both individually and collectively.

Introduction

Context of proposed study and Research Question(s)

While the old unipolar order – led by the United States – still commands presence in the international system, China and other non-western powers are growing in wealth, power, influence and ambition (Ikenberry, 2014). What are the implications of the rise of China and India as emerging powers in a changing world order? While this means

1 This paper has been written for the ISA Global South Caucus Conference 2015, Singapore. Not to be cited or circulated without permission of the author.
greater ‘decentralisation’ of global decision-making, it poses challenges, given that this pair of emerging powers face conflicting worldviews shaped by a history of geopolitical tensions, different historical experiences with state formation and finally different political systems. Hence, given their varying levels of divergence and convergence, this study argues that their rise is conflicted, consequently affecting the shape of the new world order.

This paper proposes the use of the English School Approach (ESA) as a theoretical and methodological framework to draw conclusions about the implications of China and India’s rise on the changing world order. The main reason is that as the theoretical section of this paper demonstrates, the English School Approach studies the interplay of between three domains of international state, society and world society. It provides a strong opportunity to theorise about state and non-state actors within a single theoretical framework (Delven, James, & Ozdamar, 2005). Furthermore, as Buzan (2004, p. 3) suggests it is well suited to study ‘the transition from Westphalian to post-Westphalian international politics, whether this be at the level of globalisation or regional developments’. It is the impact of this transition on emerging powers ability in shaping world order that needs to be studied.

The reasons for using China and India form an interesting set of comparative case studies, to illustrate the reasons for the challenges and complexities of emerging powers in shaping or influencing world order. In essence, it illustrates that while there is a transition from an American-led unipolar order, emerging powers such as China and India do not have a coherent vision of an anti-hegemonic world order. Both disagree on international normative issues, which is then further offset by bilateral tensions. Finally, the increase in civil society activation in both countries has put new domestic checks and balances to their status as emerging powers, reminding them of their ‘responsibilities’ as international actors.

At the international level, both countries have different views on world order despite them having evolved along a similar trajectory—driven by strong anti-colonialist impulses—opposition to great-power politics and calling instead for a multipolar world (Tellis & Mirski, 2013). They are in the midst of their state-building projects and give great importance to state sovereignty. However the degree to which they do so, is different. China sees many threats to sovereignty coming from the West, particularly the United States and opposes it entirely. India on the other hand is becoming less concerned by threats posed by other states as it recognizes “the
importance of states shedding some sovereignty to promote international cooperation,” an evolving position shaped both by Indian democracy and its liberal political inheritance (Mohan, in Tellis & Mirski, 2013). Hence their position on foreign intervention in domestic affairs of the state might differ based on situations.

Next, and often discussed in the literature on China-India relations, both have deep-seated geopolitical rivalry that impedes efforts for cooperation, at the international level, this hampers collaboration at the international level. For instance, both countries seek greater reform of the United Nations. China has a seat on the Security Council, which is a position that India desires. China’s views on India joining the Security Council are ambiguous and conflicting. A recent study attributes this to the possibility that China sees this as a challenge to its pre-eminence in Asia (Panda, 2011).

Lastly, in their pursuit of being major powers, both China and India – but more in the case of India- civil society, interest groups and public opinion are also informing the nature of their rise and ability to influence world order. This is also seen as a challenge to their sovereignty and both actors struggle to respond to these emerging realities.

Hence by delving deeper into such examples, key areas where China and India converge and diverge and why can be identified in order to assess the implications on their ability to shape world order.

In this study, world ‘order’, in this is study is seen as a system, which shapes and is shaped by the rise of emerging powers such as China and India. Scholars have used various concepts to encapsulate the diffusion of power from the United States, and the new order that could emerge out of the transition from unipolarity. The concept of multipolarity, as propounded by Kenneth Waltz, views the transition as a global redistribution process among an increasing number of states categorised as ‘emerging powers’, based on their military and economic capabilities. On the other hand, in his concept of a multiplex world, Amitav Acharya predicts a decentralisation of power in terms of greater involvement of the established powers as well as emerging powers, along with global and regional bodies and transnational non-state actors, in a

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2 In his chapter on the Intimations of multipolarity, late Kenneth Waltz states that for three centuries the structure of international politics remained multipolar, in the twentieth century has changed three times. Multipolar at the outset, it became bipolar after the Second World War, unipolar with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and as the new millennium dawns; it is gradually becoming multipolar once more. See (Waltz, 2000)
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This paper proceeds as follows. Section two illustrates the framework within which the implications of China and India as rising powers can be studied, and is split into theoretical framework and methodology. It explains the relevance of the English School Approach to meet study rising powers in a changing world order and proposes a qualitative historic approach or QHA to guide its methodology. Finally, the literature review in section three discusses that there are limited studies that focus exclusively on China and India and their impact on changing world order. Either they have been discussed in isolation - and there is more work on China than on India in this case - or, when together, the focus has been on bilateral relations and geopolitical tensions that underlie their relations. It concludes by reiterating the topicality and timeliness of this study and its hopes contribute to theorising how the two emerging powers have navigated their space within the changing international order.

Framework

Theoretical Framework
Pu (2012, p. 16) observes, that as the power and influence of emerging powers grow, they will not passively accept the normative preferences of the Western powers. International legitimacy of great power status implies that the emerging powers want to have a say in defining which norms are legitimate in international society. That said, emerging powers, such as China and India face several challenges in having a unanimous ‘say’ in critical issues in a changing world order.

The English School Approach is indeed a ‘middle-approach’ that not only incorporates the realist elements of international relations with an emphasis on the state, but also various other critical elements, particularly non-state actors and civil society, that forms an integral part of a multiplex world order.

Robert Murray (2013) succinctly discusses the three-fold method for understanding world politics within the English School approach: through the concepts of international system, the international society and world society.
International system views interstate relations in terms of perpetual anarchy characterised by a continuous state of geopolitical rivalry. This concept is critical to this study as it highlights the challenges in the ability of China and India to shape international order, individually and in concert with each other, due to the geopolitical rivalry that underlie their relations with other emerging powers, including with each other.

International society, on the other hand, places importance on shared interest and identity amongst states, giving importance to norms, rules and institutions at the centre of analysis. This would help identify where and why the two countries diverge and converge to assess implications of their role as emerging powers of the extent to which they are socialised and can socialise into an ‘international society’. On one hand, it explains what shapes China and India’s convergence and why they are expanding their international and regional multilateral engagements despite existential differences. On another hand, the kind of integration within a Western dominated international society differs between China and India, and in concert with the other emerging powers, they do not have a coherent vision of what or to what extent should the Western-dominated world order be replaced (Kupchan, 2012). This stems from the different historical experiences shaping their worldviews and state formation.

Finally, the concept of world society takes individuals, non-state organisations, individuals and ultimately the global population as a whole as the basis for a world order (Buzan, 2001). It focuses on the idea of shared norms and values, but at the individualist level and not the state. Shared norms such as human rights, for instance protected under international law, often challenge the sovereignty of states. China and India, are both in the midst of their state-building projects and hold on to sovereignty with great levels of impunity (Tellis & Mirski, 2013). Both resist international intervention in their domestic affairs. Increasing civil society activism in both countries represents the penetration of world society at the domestic level in both countries. Both struggle with but cannot ignore these changing realities. The responses of Chinese and Indian states to civil society groups such as human right advocacy groups, will reflect the extent to how they respond to what they may see as ‘threats’ to sovereignty and to what extent they are willing to compromise on it.

Methodology
One of the biggest strengths of the English School Approach is also its biggest challenge, i.e. methodological pluralism. Indeed, the three concepts it sees occurring in parallel are each associated with different methodology, international system with positivism, international society with hermeneutics and interpretivism, and world society with critical theory (Little, cited in Buzan, 2001). Hence, this study will use a qualitative case study approach, which use both primary and secondary sources of data.

This approach helps to study the implications of China and India as emerging powers in the International World Order. It rests on the following hypothesis: while the say of both countries will increase in shaping and defining world order, they do not have a coherent picture of an alternative or anti-hegemonic world order. The main reasons for the lack of this vision stems from differing normative preferences at the international level shaped by different histories of state formation, complicated bilateral relations and differing abilities to respond to civil society actors at the expense of the state. For this purpose, a qualitative historical methodology can be used, which will involve intense sourcing of information from foreign office documentation, memoirs of the major political actors of the time, interviews, newsprint, and historical archives, with the aim of understanding the meaning of diplomatic action and on the precepts behind that action (Navari, 2010). ‘History’ is used in this study to assess a deliberate “presentness” in treatments of the past: to throw light on the development of the contemporary practice as indicators of China and India influencing world order (Navari, 2010).

**Literature Review**

The study of rising powers has been of major interest in the academic community. This review discusses works within three main themes that this study aims to place itself on. The first is studies done on changing world order in relation to the growth of ‘rising’ or ‘emerging’ powers and finally China-India relations.

Acharya states that ‘…American hegemony has to change a lot, and accommodate, rather than co-opt, other forces and drivers, including the emerging powers …’ (2014, p.4). Kupchan (2014, p. 23) furthers this claim by stating that it is unlikely that emerging powers will embrace an international order from the West and that they will ‘craft hegemonic aspirations informed by their own histories, cultures and social norms’. In their special issue in the Third World Quarterly on ‘Rising
powers and the future of global governance’ Grey and Murphey (2013, p. 184) write that the financial crisis of 2008 has opened up space for rising powers of the global South to play an increasingly active role in the reform of global economic and political governance. Finally, Narlikar states, ‘that while rising powers are not yet well-integrated into international institutions, they have acquired the de facto status of veto players “whose agreement is required for a change of the status quo”’ (cited in Stuenkel, 2011).

While these works differ in their approach and areas of focus, the authors seem to agree on the fact that the global system is undergoing a transformation and non-western actors such as China, India and the rest are putting pressure on the old order that was dominated by the United States and its allies. While the rise and increasing influence of emerging powers such as China and India are undoubtedly increasing, the English School Approach can be used to identify the normative challenges that might emerge given the inevitable redistribution of power from the United States.

An edited collection by Nau and Ollapally (2012) and study conducted Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Tellis & Mirski, 2013) are key texts in rising power studies. Nau and Ollapally study the foreign policy worldviews of five aspiring powers including China and India, given their increasing material power with the aim of ‘interpret[ing] what they want to do with this power’ (2012, p. 4). The study by Carnegie also attempts to read into Chinese and Indian thinking on various dimensions of the emerging order, to provide clues into ‘how they might seek to reshape it if they acquire the ability to do so in the future’ (2013, p.5). These works are rich with perspective and empirical material can undoubtedly influence the approach that this study aims to take. This can be taken forward bearing in mind international issues such as the Crisis in Ukraine and Syria, which are fresh indicators of the decline of the influence of the United States on a global stage.

Finally, a large corpus of literature exists on China-India relations as well as on the experiences of each country in a changing world order. Garver (2001) writes that unless India is willing to become a junior partner of China in the emerging world order, Asia and the world might see further China-India rivalry in the first part of the twentieth century. Sidhu and Yuan (2003) write that China and India have the ability to transform the international system into a multipolar world either individually or in concert with likeminded states (2003, p.79). In their otherwise excellent analysis in this volume, the international system is seen as static and constraining – ‘As two
emerging great powers, China and India attract attention from existing great powers, but they are constrained by the current international environment’. In other words, they see the international arena as anarchical – in the realist sense – with an emphasis on the structure that would determine their behaviour.

The benefit that the English School has is that it helps analyse how and why states ‘act’. As Buzan (2001, p.477) argues. ‘[j]ust like human beings live in societies that they shape and are shaped by, states live in an international system, which they shape and are shaped by’. By adding the social element to the way states behave, the study does not entirely discard a state-centric robe, but sees it more as a setting that influences and is influenced by various actors.

The English School Approach can be used to string these themes together to explain the contestation these powers experience between being actors in international society and world society. As rise and ability of emerging powers to shape world order will increase, they will face certain challenges, due to differing worldviews, bilateral tensions and domestic challenges.

**Conclusion**

This paper proposes the English School Framework to assess the implications of the rise of China and India as emerging powers in a changing world order. It rests on the following hypothesis: while the say of both countries will increase in shaping and defining world order, they do not have a coherent picture of an alternative or anti-hegemonic world order. The main reasons for the lacks of this vision stem from differing normative preferences at the international level shaped by different histories of state formation, complicated bilateral relations and differing abilities to respond to civil society actors at the expense of the state.

Studies on rising powers can use a qualitative historical methodology to best extract analysis from the English School Perspective. Finally, the literature review compiled in this proposal stems from different bodies of study ranging from world order studies to China-India relations. It reflects that while there is vast amount of literature there have not been any studies that use the English School Approach to conceptualise how China and India respond to, and in turn influence, the restructuring of the unipolar order.
Given the increasing interest in the study of rising powers, changing world order, the decline of a unipolar world order it is hoped that this proposed framework can provide a comprehensive and timely analysis of China and India as key actors in the international system in this context. Such analysis not only requires examining their relations within the international architecture, but also takes into account the evolution of domestic politics and bilateral relations. By developing these linkages, this study aims to contribute to three main bodies of work in international relations, first, the application of the English School Approach in Asian international relations, second, China-India Studies and finally world order studies.

References


