
Han-Hui Hsieh
PhD Candidate, University of Southern California

Abstract

This paper focuses on the foundation of China’s superpower status, and seeks to address the puzzle why historically China had a great deal of ideational power that enabled it to establish a hierarchical international system in East Asia, while nowadays the PRC does not. I compare the hierarchical institutions that the historical China and the contemporary PRC have established and their foundations. The main argument is that the PRC has lost its legitimate claim to be the preserver of traditional Chinese civilization and culture that historical China utilized to establish and maintain its hierarchy, and that the sources of soft power that the PRC claims are not originally Chinese, while similar examples already existed. This reduces the ideational attraction of the contemporary Chinese example. Furthermore, according to its official policy documents, the PRC mainly sees “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” as the ideology that it intends to promote to develop its soft power. This, however, does not serve as a plausible source of soft power that could attract many followers. A comparison of China’s past and present reveals that the PRC lacks sufficient ideational power to be a legitimate leader of a hierarchical international system with substantial authority, and this provides a policy implication for the current U.S.-Sino relationship or potential competition between the U.S. and the PRC.
Introduction

Historically, China has been a powerful state with not only substantial material power but also superior ideational power. Such ideational power was based on the Chinese civilization and Confucian values, and the participants in the hierarchy led by China voluntarily imported and emulated Chinese culture and institutions. China maintained its hierarchical tributary system not through military coercion but through cultural attraction. However, today the People’s Republic of China under the Chinese Communist Party’s rule does not enjoy the same hegemonic status as the historical imperial China did. The PRC is said to be rising in its material power, but it is not enough to establish and maintain a hierarchy with just material power. Ideational power is an essential and indispensable part of a stable and peaceful hierarchy. Although the PRC gradually has been focusing on developing its soft power, yet its soft power is not growing as fast as its hard power. States in the region and around the world might consider a rising China with stronger hard power as a potential threat or a possible next hegemon, but currently it is not considered a superpower of substantial soft power. This paper tries to provide an answer to the puzzle why historically China had a great deal of ideational power or soft power that enabled it to establish and dominate hierarchical international systems, and in the PRC’s official government policy documents the term soft power is used, therefore I find it necessary and proper to also mention the term soft power here. The definition of the term soft power does overlap with that of the term of my choice, ideational power. However it is important to note that there exist certain similarities as well as differences between the two terms. According to the definition by Nye, soft power includes culture, values, and foreign policy, while hard power means achieving intended outcome through economic and military coercion. This definition is similar to the ideational power that I used in my paper, which could be superior civilization, culture, religion, ideology, value, institutions, etc. that other actors voluntarily follow or accept. Essentially ideational power means that the dominant actor or the hegemon has authority and legitimacy that the subordinates in the system accept. These sources of ideational power do not need to be supported by a material foundation. However there is a difference that I see in between two terms of soft power and ideational power. Nye’s soft power includes the use of foreign policy, which I consider could still belong to and supported by material power. Therefore this makes the term ideational power that I propose and use in my research different from that of soft power, as I argue that it is entirely possible for a certain type of influence or power to function effectively without any material foundation, and that type of influence or power could be entirely ideational.

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1 In this paper sometimes I would use the two terms of “ideational power” and “soft power” interchangeably. I propose the term ideational power and use this term in several previous working papers. Yet as this paper is a comparison of how historical China and contemporary China utilized their non-material-based power to establish and dominate hierarchical international systems, and in the PRC’s official government policy documents the term soft power is used, therefore I find it necessary and proper to also mention the term soft power here. The definition of the term soft power does overlap with that of the term of my choice, ideational power. However it is important to note that there exist certain similarities as well as differences between the two terms. According to the definition by Nye, soft power includes culture, values, and foreign policy, while hard power means achieving intended outcome through economic and military coercion. This definition is similar to the ideational power that I used in my paper, which could be superior civilization, culture, religion, ideology, value, institutions, etc. that other actors voluntarily follow or accept. Essentially ideational power means that the dominant actor or the hegemon has authority and legitimacy that the subordinates in the system accept. These sources of ideational power do not need to be supported by a material foundation. However there is a difference that I see in between two terms of soft power and ideational power. Nye’s soft power includes the use of foreign policy, which I consider could still belong to and supported by material power. Therefore this makes the term ideational power that I propose and use in my research different from that of soft power, as I argue that it is entirely possible for a certain type of influence or power to function effectively without any material foundation, and that type of influence or power could be entirely ideational.
dominate over a hierarchical international system in East Asia, while nowadays the PRC does not. Now the PRC is considered a great power mainly because of the fast growth of its hard power. This paper would also compare the hierarchical institutions that the historical China and the contemporary PRC have established and their foundations. The main argument that this paper proposes to answer the puzzle is that the PRC has lost its legitimate claim to be the preserver of traditional Chinese civilization and culture that historical China used to establish and maintain its hierarchy, and that the sources of soft power of the PRC are not originally Chinese, and previous successful examples already existed. This reduces the attraction of the Chinese example. Furthermore, the PRC mainly sees the “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” as the type of culture that it intends to promote to develop its soft power. This, however, does not serve as a plausible source of soft power that could attract many followers.

This paper hopes to compare China’s ideational power in the past and present, and the hierarchical institutions that it establishes using its ideational power. The argument is that a stable and peaceful international hierarchy needs ideational power, or soft power, as its foundation. Material power, or hard power, could be a necessary condition, but is not a sufficient condition for a hierarchy to exist and to be stable and peaceful. I will address the ideational foundation of hierarchical international system in the beginning of the paper to provide some theoretical background. Then an overview of the hierarchical system led by historical China with ideational power or soft power as its foundation will follow. Then the next part is an analysis of the PRC’s soft power and the hierarchical international institutions that it hopes to establish nowadays. A comparison of China’s past and present will reveal that currently the PRC lacks sufficient ideational or soft power to be a legitimate leader of a hierarchical system with substantial authority. This paper ends with a brief conclusion and policy implication section.
Hierarchy in International Relations and its Ideational Foundation

I argue that anarchy is not the default setting of international relations, as we do observe often that higher authority exists above states’ sovereignty. In this setting, there are hierarchies, instead of anarchies, in the international system. Especially in historical East Asia, the norm of the international system in this region has been hierarchy and not anarchy. In such a system, the territorial states operated in an orderly hierarchy, and not all of them were equal to each other. Also, a higher authority did exist above states’ sovereignty, and such authority was external to these states. They requested and accepted the investiture of another state which dominated the hierarchical system, which implies that part of their sovereignty was separated and surrendered to a foreign country, and that there existed a higher authority above states’ sovereignty. Furthermore, these states did so not because of the coercion or threats from the dominating state, but mainly because they were voluntary to participate in such system.

The observation above counters the conventional wisdom and the widely accepted notions of sovereignty and anarchy in international relations, and brings up some puzzling questions. If sovereignty is integral to a state actor and is indivisible, why would a state surrender parts of such ultimate authority to govern and control itself to a foreign state and voluntarily be a subordinate to the latter? This demolishes the Westphalian international system of anarchy composed of equal sovereign states. And if the equality of sovereign states does not exist anymore, meanwhile there is an unequal relationship among the state actors, then such a system has a hierarchical structure. But I also hope to understand how hierarchy is established, and what its foundation is. Existing literature on anarchy and hierarchy in international relations informs us that anarchy is not the default setting of international relations, and hierarchy actually often exists. Also, hierarchy is not necessarily built on
material powers. Ideational power is more important for hierarchy to be maintained. I argue that material power could be a necessary condition, but is not a sufficient condition for a hierarchy to exist.

Kenneth Waltz, the founder of neorealism or structural realism, sees national politics as hierarchical, while international politics as anarchical (1979: 113). Sovereign states that are equal to each other, as a consequence of the Treaty of Westphalia, create an anarchical system in international relations, and that the anarchical system is the root of war and peace, according to Waltz. However, it is not always correct to perceive international politics as anarchic and chaotic without hierarchical order. The notion of international anarchy without a central authority or without order and governance, if given careful reconsideration, cannot be said to be true, because “every international system or society has a set of rules or norms that define actors and appropriate behavior” (Krasner, 2001: 173). An international system with authoritative institutions cannot be said to be anarchical (Hurd, 1999). If we accept that some authoritative international institutions exist, then the international system is not an anarchy, as it has parts that are governed.² Hurd also recognizes the concept of legitimacy as an ordering principle at the international level. Although the traditional default setting of the international system is anarchy and the lack of legitimate authority; however, in reality, legitimate authority exists and we should consider that the international system is not entirely anarchical but a system of authority.

In this paper, hierarchy is conceptualized as an international system which has multiple actors with one center of power that is recognized by all other participants as legitimate. Such a system could be regional or global. In this hierarchical system, there is “a rank order based

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² Hurd (1999: 401) argues that in this case the accepted norm of sovereignty is the institution present in the international system.
on a particular attribute” (Kang, 2010: 17). And more importantly, hierarchy exists when the ruler possesses authority (legitimacy, or rightful rule) over the ruled (Lake, 2009: 51). Within the hierarchical system, the leading state actor, or the hegemon, provides order and stability as well as the rules that govern the interaction and relationship among the participants. Furthermore, a hierarchy needs not to always be a global system; in fact, more often do we observe the existence of a regional hierarchy. Also, considering the powers possessed by the leading figure of a hierarchical system, such powers are not just about the distribution of material capabilities; ideational or normative power is also important in the formation and the stability of hierarchy.

Hierarchy is not formed just because of the use of force and coercion by the dominant state; it is a result of voluntary acceptance and recognition from the followers. Existing international relations literature, especially from the realist school, mainly defines the hegemon or great power as the state actor with the most material power, and the distribution of capabilities is crucial to outcomes in international relations (Dunne and Schmidt, 2008: 98). Rarely does the IR literature address power in non-material forms, aside perhaps from the idea of “soft power” (Nye, 2004). Historically, diplomacy in the Western World was also seen conducted through the influence of other actors through soft power, such as the Byzantine Empire’s soft power came from its clients’ admiration of its culture (Cohen, 2013: 23). Granted, considering the need for the dominant state to maintain the order within the hierarchical international system, and the expectations from the subordinates for it to do so, part of the feasibility of the establishment of a hierarchy depends on the material (especially military) power of the dominant state. Yet the legitimacy of that state to be accepted to sit on

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3 In this paper sometimes I use hierarchy and hegemony interchangeably, as I conceptualize the two terms to be very similar, according to Mastanduno (2005: 179), that hegemony has authority, while unipolarity does not. Similar to Mastanduno’s words, I also conceptualize hierarchy to be a system that needs authority and legitimacy to be its foundation.
the top of the hierarchy needs not always be based solely on the material capability. For example, Zhao Shuisheng points out that, despite being a significantly militarily stronger power, China’s centrality in the tributary system was based on its civilization and culture, and the order in that system was maintained by the strength of the Chinese civilization (2013: 32). Therefore, I argue that material power is perhaps a necessary condition, but definitely not a sufficient one for a stable hierarchical system to emerge.

Also, for hierarchies to be formed, some sense of legitimacy must be present for a state actor to be recognized by all other state actors as the accepted leader of the system, and that such legitimacy the dominant state possesses is backed by its superior ideational power that proves to be attractive to all other members of the system. Similarly, Hurd (1999) argues that legitimacy and authority matter in international politics. Hurd defines legitimacy as the normative belief held by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed (1999: 381), which is subjective to the actor’s perception. Legitimacy contributes to compliance by providing an internal reason for an actor to follow a rule. When an actor believes a rule to be legitimate, compliance is no longer driven by fear or by self-interests, but instead by moral obligation (Hurd, 1999: 387). The narration and explanation of the stable and lasting peace among East Asian states by Robert Kelly (2011) also identifies that the shared Confucian values and ideology helped bind the states in that region together and formed a sense of “imagined community” that served as the foundation of that system.

**Historical China’s Ideational Power and the Hierarchical Systems Based on it**

Continuing from the previous section of this paper which argues that ideational or soft power is the foundation for the formation of an international system, empirical cases from historical East Asia serve as ideal evidence to support such an argument. For example, in East
Asia’s long history, Confucianism has been the dominant ideology for centuries (Kelley 2005; Kang, 2010; Kelly, 2011). Though it was first adopted by Chinese empires to serve as their national ideology, various other states in East Asia would then go on to accept that set of ideas and values, and gradually enter the Confucian cultural sphere. Korea, Vietnam, Ryukyu, and Japan are the states that have been influenced by Confucian values more than other Asian states, and David Kang (2010) terms these states the “Sinicized states.” Even tribes not originally from the China proper would later gradually accept some of the Confucian values and rituals after they occupied or conquered these territories, albeit with different extent. In this way, the region of historical East Asia provided us a stage where most of the actors in the system shared similar values and were placed in the same hierarchical international order in which the members were ranked according to their cultural assimilation with the hegemon (usually the Chinese empires) which had the highest level of civilization, or was the most Confucian society, as recognized by all other members. Within such hierarchical system, cultural achievement was the source of status and ranked order for the members within the system (Kang, 2010: 8). Borrowing from Benedict Anderson (1991), this shared culture and Confucian ethical values created an “imagined community” — a Confucian community — among these East Asian states. Therefore, these cases of different eras of East Asian hierarchical international systems could be the most likely cases to do a plausibility probe to examine the hypothesis proposed in this paper that an ideational-power based hierarchy is more stable and peaceful than a material-power based one.

The shared Confucian ideology and values were the most important elements that bound the East Asian states together and contributed to their peaceful interaction (Kelly, 2011). Such interaction between the East Asian states, namely, how they conducted diplomacy, was well documented and preserved, and this provides the necessary empirical evidences supporting the argument that there has been a hierarchical international system in historical East Asia.
and that such hierarchy was mainly based on ideational power. Also, the fact that these
countries shared the same writing script (Chinese characters) and similar institutions
(meritocratic examination system and government structures) illustrated clearly the ideational
foundation of such community.

In order to better capture the ideational power in such hierarchical relationship, such as
authority and legitimacy, a direct observation would be the subordinates’ attitude, their words,
and their behaviors, when they were interacting with other states, especially with the
dominant hegemon in the hierarchical tributary system. There is a risk if we only look at how
the hegemon unilaterally views the hierarchical relationship. Also, because legitimacy is
backed by ideational power and attraction, instead of coercion, and serves as the foundation
of authority in an international system, hence authority is essential for the followers, to
recognize and respect the status of the hegemon, or the leader of the hierarchical system. The
empirical evidences that support the argument that there has been a stable hierarchical
international system in East Asia and that such hierarchy is based on ideational power mainly
come from the secondary sources that interpret the interactions and relationship between
China and its vassal states. The practice of diplomacy among East Asian states has been well
documented in the history of these Sinicized states, as they followed the Chinese tradition of
recording their history in detail. Examples such as Liam Kelley’s Beyond the Bronze Pillars
(2005) illustrating Vietnamese tributary envoys’ positive attitude towards China and
acceptance of their country being subservient to a dominant power, and Alexander
Woodside’s Lost Modernities (2001) documenting how Vietnam and Korea voluntarily
adopted China’s meritocratic civil service examination that was considered modern, all
successfully capture the role of ideational power or attractiveness of Confucianism and
Chinese civilization in interactions among these countries in a hierarchical system.
Assessing China’s Ideational Power Nowadays

In the previous parts of the paper I have argued that ideational power is necessary for building and maintaining a stable and peaceful hierarchy in international relations. In this part, I will argue that the contemporary China that we are studying nowadays in international relations, namely the PRC, although might be rising in hard power, yet still lacks the adequate ideational power to build up a hierarchy that is led by it. However, the PRC does recognize such deficiency and state in its official policy documents that it is hoping to promote its soft power internationally. Yet the types of soft power that the PRC conceptualizes that it possesses and is trying to promote might not be the values and ideas that could attract many followers in the contemporary international system. Also, the sources of the PRC’s soft power are not original and unique to China, hence reducing the attractiveness of this model. Countries in the region and around the world will first seek to emulate the paths and experiences of other more successful examples to be the models for their own development.

After the Cold War ended, international relations scholars have been debating whether there will be a rival challenger to U.S.-led unipolar system. Especially, when the Chinese economy has been growing fast and that its military expenditure increases at the same time, the PRC has been the focus of such a debate. The question that has been asked is that, borrowing Aaron Friedberg’s (1993) words: is the international system now “ripe for rivalry?” Pessimists, such as John Mearsheimer, believe that ultimately the U.S. will face the challenge of another rising power, and it is likely going to be the PRC. Meanwhile, more optimistic scholars favoring U.S. endurance, such as John Ikenberry, maintains that the international institutions built and maintained by the U.S., will be the foundation for enduring U.S. hegemony.
The China specialists also debate on this issue, but not from IR theoretical perspectives. For example, Martin Jacques (2009) controversially argues that China will dominate the world in the 21st century. He argues that the rise of the Asian powers provided a different path towards development and modernity, and the experiences from the West would no longer be the paradigm, and the world will enter what he calls an era of contested modernity. The central player in this new world will be China, which has different characteristics, attitudes and values derived from its long history, and that Jacques believes that China’s extraordinary size and history mean that it will remain highly distinct. But on the other hand, in *The China Boom: Why China Will Not Rule the World*, Ho-Fung Hung (2015) suggests that China, like the majority of other players in world politics, finds itself also operates in the status quo characterized by U.S.-led institutions. This work reveals how much China depends on the existing order and how the interests of the Chinese elites maintain these ties. He finally argues that China’s economic practices of exploiting debt bubbles are destined to fail.

And now that the PRC has surpassed Japan as the largest economy in Asia and second largest in the world in 2010, it seems to provide more reasons for the U.S. as the sitting hegemon to worry about the presence of a potential challenger to its position. Despite the fact that the PRC has been aware of the concerns from not only the U.S. but also its neighbors in the region, and hence slightly modified the terminology of its grand strategy from peaceful “rise” to peaceful “development” to reduce the anxiety of others, the debate on China being an imminent challenger to the U.S. and that it will soon take over as the new hegemon of the international system has not stopped. Moreover, in the U.S., after the controversial unilateral invasion of Iraq without U.N. approval in 2003, it has sensed that its legitimacy as the global leader and its soft power have been in steady decline. Liberal institutionalists such as Ikenberry have argued that such a unilateral action has weakened the order and institutions
that the U.S. has built (Ikenberry 2008). Meanwhile, there are also concerns that China is rising not only in hard but also soft power. A U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations report in 2011, which came before the 6th Plenary Session of the 17th Central Committee of the CCP in 2011 in which Party General Secretary Hu Jintao decided to develop a grand strategy for CCP and the PRC to develop its culture and soft power, discussed the insufficiency of U.S.’s use of its soft power and public diplomacy facing China’s growing influence in soft power. This shows the growing concerns that the U.S. might not only lose its no. 1 status in terms of material power to China, but its lead in ideational power could also be narrowing.

Considering the above debate on U.S.-China potential rivalry in soft power, the question that will be analyzed in this part of the paper is that, is China’s soft power really attractive and able to undermine U.S. hegemony and authority, and can China successfully build its own hierarchical institutions to counter the U.S. in international relations? The main argument that will be presented in the following paragraphs is that, a state actor that desires to lead the international system needs not only material/hard power but also ideational/soft power to build and maintain a stable and peaceful hierarchy. Legitimacy and authority are the essential ideational foundations that can successfully attract followers to do what you want them to do that they would otherwise not do. I argue that the PRC does not possess the kind of ideational power that makes it attractive and gives it legitimacy and authority to establish an equivalent rivaling hierarchical order that could be a potential challenger to U.S.-led hegemony.

Existing IR literature has pointed out that, although China is rising in its hard power, yet

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4 The report is titled “Another U.S. Deficit- China and America- Public Diplomacy in the Age of the Internet” and was released on February 15, 2011.
it has not reached the parallel to that of the U.S.\textsuperscript{5} This paper focuses on the soft power of the PRC and its limits. In 2011, during the 6\textsuperscript{th} Plenary Session of the 17\textsuperscript{th} central committee of the CCP, Hu Jintao decided to develop a grand strategy for CCP and China to develop its culture and soft power. The primary sources that this paper uses to analyze the PRC’s soft power and strategy are the official documents released after the conclusion of that session.\textsuperscript{6}

In The Decision by the CCP Central Committee on Deepening the Reformation of Cultural System and Promoting the Grand Development and Prosperity of Socialist Culture, or 《中共中央关于深化文化体制改革推动社会主义文化大发展大繁荣若干重大问题的决定》，the CCP’s Central Committee decided that culture now plays an ever more important role in China’s comprehensive national power (综合国力), and that in the era of globalization, for the CCP to lead China on the global stage, it is “more imperative to strengthen the nation’s soft power, and to spread the international influence of Chinese culture.”\textsuperscript{7} It is clear that the CCP wished to focus on developing China’s soft power and culture on the global stage as revealed in this document. However, the “culture” and the source of such soft power conceptualized by the CCP is mainly Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, and the Advanced Culture of Socialism (社会主义先进文化) in this document. On promoting the socialist culture, the CCP’s strategy in this document is to “strengthen the nation through socialist culture” (社会主义文化强国). Although later on page 5 in the document, the CCP did mention “construction excellent traditional culture” (建设优秀传统文化传承体系) and

\textsuperscript{5} For a more detailed account of this argument, see Beckley’s (2011) “China’s Century? Why America’s Edge Will Endure.”

\textsuperscript{6} These include: 《中共中央关于深化文化体制改革推动社会主义文化大发展大繁荣若干重大问题的决定》、《中国共产党第十七届中央委员会第六次全体会议公报》 and 《国家“十二五”时期文化改革发展规划纲要》 that were adopted by the 6\textsuperscript{th} Plenary Session of the 17\textsuperscript{th} Central Committee on October 18, 2011, as well as 《文化部“十二五”时期文化改革发展规划》 made by the PRC’s Ministry of Culture in order to plan the development of China’s culture and soft power in the 12\textsuperscript{th} Five-Year Plan according to the decision made by the CCP’s Central Committee.

\textsuperscript{7} The original Chinese expression is: 增强国家文化软实力、中华文化国际影响力要求更加紧迫 as appeared on page 1 on the web version of the document. This paper uses the web version of these official documents available on line as its primary sources.
on page 7 “promoting Chinese culture to the world” (推动中华文化走向世界), the majority of the document focused on the socialist culture, and the content mentioning traditional Chinese culture only accounted for a minority part. The same pattern exists and repeats in the other official documents reviewed in this paper.

Therefore, from analyzing the texts of these official policy documents, it is demonstrated that the PRC now tries to promote a different kind of culture, and a different image of China that is completely different from those of the historical China that had successfully attracted many followers and built up stable hierarchical systems through its ideational power, namely, superior civilization and culture. Also, the PRC does not have the same sources of soft power as its predecessors in history. After all, the PRC had experienced the decade-long Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that diminished the majority of traditional culture and values in the Chinese society, and therefore, the People’s Republic of China, though occupies the Mainland where Chinese traditional culture originated from, could be said to have preserved less traditional Chinese culture compared to the Republic of China on Taiwan, which saw itself as the legitimate inheritor of traditional Chinese culture and promoted such culture on Taiwan after its defeat in the Chinese Civil War and its retreat to there.

If the source of PRC’s ideational/soft power is no longer its traditional culture and superior civilization, then what could be the new sources of its ideational/soft power that could make it attractive? According to Nye (2004), there are three sources of soft power, namely culture, political values, and foreign policy. The culture that the PRC is promoting at home is socialism with Chinese characteristics, not necessarily the traditional Chinese civilization that helped its predecessors build up and maintain the hierarchical tributary system. But in terms of political values and foreign policy, there are still some possible sources that could be attractive to others, such as the Beijing Consensus, and the Five
The Beijing Consensus is coined by Joshua Ramo in his 2004 report titled “Beijing Consensus.” In this report, he argues that the Beijing Consensus is gradually replacing the Washington Consensus of neoliberal economic principles as the favorable development model, especially in developing countries. Ramo explains that the Beijing Consensus has three core features: development model based on innovation; emphasis on sustainability and equality; and foreign policy of self-determination. But most importantly, the Beijing Consensus represents a model of development that the PRC has successfully adopted in which a capitalist free market coexists with a communist authoritarian regime. This model proves to be attractive to those authoritarian developing countries that are still lagging behind. Indeed, this model could well be the most attractive asset that the PRC could export to other regions of the world and hence be a valuable source of its soft power.

However, the Beijing Consensus as a model for development is hardly anything new or originally Chinese. For example, Zhao Suisheng (2010) argues that the Beijing Consensus, or the Chinese model of development, is actually just a different version of the East Asian developmental state model. The East Asian developmental states proved to be successful in their economic development, hence could be equally attractive to others when compared with the PRC. Also, the fact that there existed several other similar successful developmental models previously suggests that this Chinese model is hardly anything new or originally or uniquely Chinese that would make others want to emulate only this model but not other ones. There are other options as well and the original models that came before the Chinese one might just be more attractive than the latecomers such as China that developed after its East Asian neighbors.
Another important factor to be noticed is that, although the PRC and these East Asian developmental states, such as Japan, Taiwan and South Korea, have all experienced state-sponsored capitalism in which the centralized authoritarian state determines the flow of finance and direction of the state economy, however, the most important difference between them and the PRC is that, most of the East Asian developmental states, after developing their economies and achieving modernization, went on to political development and democratization, which follows the path of previously industrialized and modernized states in the West. In the literature of modernization theory, once the economic development reaches a certain level, through certain causal mechanisms, political liberalization and eventually democratization will ensue.\(^8\) But the economic development model in China has not yet resulted in political liberalization as predicted by the modernization theory literature, and in the era when democracy, freedom, human rights, and rule of law have become the norm of the international society, and the lack of these features is considered undesirable by most state actors, although the fast economic growth of the PRC’s experience could be attractive to some, the fact that it is not a democratic and free country prevents it from becoming a universally attractive role model, hence reducing its ideational power.

Aside from the so-called Beijing Consensus, the other possible source of the PRC’s ideational power could be the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The PRC’s foreign policy follows the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which are based on the PRC’s agreement with India in 1954. The five principles include: mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity and sovereignty; mutual non-aggression; mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; equality and cooperation for mutual benefits; and peaceful co-existence. Because of such principles’ nature of non-interference, they could well be

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\(^8\) See Lipset (1959), Almond and Verba (1963), Boix and Stokes (2003), Inglehart and Welzel (2005), among other influential literature on modernization theories and possible causal mechanisms between economic development and political liberalization.
attractive to other states, as many newly independent states that formed the non-aligned
movement did concern about foreign imperial encroachment and their newly gained and
hard-fought sovereignty. However, these principles are still not originally or uniquely
Chinese that would make others want to emulate this but not the models of others. These
principles are all based on the notion of the Westphalian state system, where every sovereign
state is equal to each other, and that the states would respect each other’s boundaries and
autonomy. Again, respect of sovereignty and non-interference along with all other features
present in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were followed by state actors firstly in
the Western European international system as early as 1648, and then such norms were
gradually spread out by those European states when they encountered new actors in the
international arena and expanded into distant regions around the world. After 1840, China
had been forced to abandon the hierarchical tributary system that it has been practicing for
almost a millennium in which there did not exist the idea of sovereignty, and there was
clearly no equality among participants in that international system. Analyzing from the
perspectives of the English School of IR theory, these features are the norms, orders, rules,
and institutions that create an international society. These are hardly anything new to the
world, and hence could hardly be a source of the PRC’s soft power, as such ideas have been
in existence long in history.

Another issue to look at is the international institutions that the PRC is establishing and
hopes to dominate, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Regional
Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and most recently, the Asian Infrastructure
Investment Bank (AIIB). These institutions are still based on material/hard power, and not
ideational/soft power. For example, the SCO focuses on security issues among the members,
and was firstly based on the foundation of a series of existing treaties on military activities
and cooperation between China and its Eurasian neighbors. The RCEP as well as the AIIB, on
the other hand, both show the influence of Chinese economic power, which again belongs to
the category of hard power. The RCEP is a free trade agreement proposal that would include
all ASEAN member states as well as the other states in the Asia-Pacific region that have
FTAs with ASEAN, including Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea.
But as this arrangement is led by China and excludes the participation of the U.S., it is often
perceived as a rivaling alternative to the U.S.-led Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement,
and hence a potential challenge to existing U.S.-led liberalist economic and trade institutions.
The AIIB faces similar issue, as the U.S. believes that China is now wielding its economic
power to try to establish and dominate a new international economic order in Asia. The U.S.
has expressed its opposition to its close allies in Europe such as the U.K. to join the AIIB, and
that its closest ally in Asia, Japan, did not join the AIIB. With the presence of the established
Asian Development Bank (ADB) which is dominated by Japan and the U.S., the members
with the largest and second largest proportion of shares in the ADB, the new comer of the
AIIB could also challenge the existing institution and order. But again, the point of bringing
up these examples of China-led international institutions is to show that they are all based on
the PRC’s material/hard powers such as economic and military might, and not ideational/soft
power like culture and values. This reveals the fact that, unlike its past, the PRC nowadays,
despite hoping to establish certain new orders, and wield its gradually increasing influences
on the global stage, yet so far the sources of power that it finds most useful are still the ones
that belong to the category of material/hard power. Without sufficient ideational power as the
foundation, such hierarchical international institutions, once established, could be fragile and
unstable as they develop.

Concluding Remarks and Implications

This paper starts from the argument that a powerful state would need ideational power as
the foundation of a hierarchical system that it intends to build, and takes the historical China’s successful experiences of using its attractive ideational power including superior civilization, culture, and institutions, to maintain its tributary system, to serve as a contrast to the China that we see nowadays. The PRC does not have the same sources of ideational power that its predecessors once had. The PRC is no longer the preserver and legitimate inheritor of the traditional Chinese culture after the destructive Cultural Revolution, and that its official policy is to promote Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the Chinese society as its soft power. Compared with its traditional culture and values, this new culture that the CCP promotes proves to be less attractive to its neighbors. Aside from this traditional source of soft power that the PRC no longer has, the other potential attractive items that the PRC could use to attract followers could be the Beijing Consensus of development model, and its foreign policies based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. However, as these are not based on features that are originally and uniquely Chinese, it also reduces the attractiveness of the versions that the PRC adopts, since there are also other more successful East Asian developmental states that other developing countries could emulate. Also, these East Asian developmental states later went on democratization, which is now the norm favored by the international society, and in sharp contrast, the PRC is still an authoritarian one-party regime. Moreover, the five principles are just a more elaborated version of the Westphalian notion of sovereignty, which has been in existence for a long time in history, and is also a universal norm that is not monopolized by China. The presence of existing and more successful previous examples reduces the attractiveness of the PRC’s case and the ideational power that could derive from these models that it has adopted.

To conclude, an implication, or policy recommendation, that could be drawn from this paper is that, in light of a rising China that is more powerful in hard or material power, despite an existing hegemon such as the U.S. is said to be in decline in terms of its material
capabilities, a hierarchical order led by the U.S. could still be maintained provided that it holds superior ideational power and that its status as leader of the international hierarchy continues to be accepted by other members of the system and is recognized as legitimate. In present-day East Asia, the relative distribution of capabilities could be shifting in favor of China in the long term; however, nowadays few states in East Asia imitate the institutions or culture of the People’s Republic of China, and its current values and ideology do not prove to be attractive to its neighbors. Without sufficient ideational power, a hierarchical system could not be established or maintained, as legitimacy and authority of the leader of the hierarchy are bestowed upon by the followers, not unilaterally claimed by the leader itself. The efforts of building up its own version of regional free trade regimes and developmental bank by the PRC might not last very long if the PRC is leading these institutions through the use of its material power only, as aside from the economic and military capabilities in those institutions, it still lacks the attractive ideational power that provides it legitimacy and authority.

Therefore, for those who argue that East Asia, Asia-Pacific, or the current international system is “ripe for rivalry,” it is simply not true. China’s material or hard power has not even surpassed that of the U.S. And it is also clear that the PRC still lags behind the U.S. in terms of ideational or soft power. In the debate between whether China will or will not overtake the U.S. and become the new hegemon of the world, the U.S. hegemony will likely persist as long as it maintains its attractive culture and political values, and works within the international institutions that it helps build up. Also, I argue that the existing successful Chinese models such as the Beijing Consensus or the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that might be appealing to others are hardly anything original or unique to China itself, hence reducing its attractiveness. The other fact that the PRC remains an authoritarian regime is defying the universal norm of democracy and freedom, which further reduces its attractiveness. For the sitting hegemon, the implication is that if the U.S. is not returning to
the undesirable neo-conservative foreign policy, and it respects its allies’ will as well as that of the U.N. and other international organizations, and the existing rules and institutions that it helped established, it could well maintain its legitimate authority and leadership and continue to be the leader of the hierarchical international order with itself sitting on the top without facing imminent challengers.

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