


The Rise of China and the Future of the West

Can the Liberal System Survive?

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China's rise need not lead to a struggle for dominance with the United States, argues political scientist John Ikenberry. Past power transitions have generated varying degrees of great power conflict. Moreover, the existing international order is based upon a dense set of rules and institutions that are "hard to overturn and easy to join." China has benefited greatly from its increasing engagement with these institutions, mitigating the likelihood of conflict with the United States. Were China to shift course and seek to undermine the status quo, it would face the resistance not only of the United States but of the Western world as a whole. Washington can best preserve its leadership not by containing China but by co-opting Chinese power through the strengthening of existing multilateral institutions. 

Discussion Questions

- 1) How does China's rise compare with past cases where a rising power has challenged the position of an established hegemon?
- 2) From a Chinese perspective, which aspects of the current international order are most attractive? Which aspects might China wish to challenge?
- 3) Some argue that the U.S. should seek to slow China's rise through a policy of containment. Others, including Ikenberry, argue that a policy of engagement can forestall any Chinese threat by shaping its intentions. Which is the wiser course?
- 4) Does China's authoritarian political system pose an obstacle to its successful integration with an international order dominated by Western democracies?

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