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# Hegemonic Stability in a New Era: China as a Global Competitor to the United States

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## Abstract

This literature review explores the concept of hegemonic stability in the context of rising global competition between the United States and China. Drawing upon foundational theories of hegemonic stability by scholars such as Robert Keohane, Charles P. Kindleberger, A. F. K. Organski, and Robert Gilpin, alongside Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony, the paper examines how global leadership and stability are maintained through political, economic, and ideological dominance. The review traces the historical evolution of U.S. hegemony and investigates the emerging challenge posed by China's rapid economic growth, global infrastructure investments (notably the Belt and Road Initiative), and increasing international influence. Through a theoretical and empirical analysis, the paper argues that China's ascent marks a shift toward a multipolar world order and raises the question of whether China could potentially displace the United States as the global hegemon. The study concludes by emphasizing the significance of leadership, legitimacy, and consensus in sustaining international stability amid shifting power dynamics.

## Key Words

Hegemonic stability theory, U.S.–China rivalry, global leadership, Belt and Road Initiative, power transition

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## 1. Introduction

This article is a literature review aiming to explain “Hegemonic Stability in a New Era: China as a Global Competitor to the United States”. The literature review includes explanations based on data from various sources and official websites that discuss concepts and theories about hegemonic stability and empirical studies. The flow of this literature review includes: starting with an explanation of concepts and theories in international relations, and analyzing the theories applied in this paper. It is followed by a chronological presentation based on data and facts quoted from several sources. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary. This paper is supported by sources from several experts in international relations studies on the Theory of Hegemonic Stability, including Robert Gilpin, Charles P. Kindleberger, A. F. K. Organski, Robert Keohane, and Antonio Gramsci.

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## 2. Theoretical Foundations of Hegemonic Stability

In Hegemony Theory, the word "hegemony" is a term coined by an Italian Neo-Marxist intellectual, Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci explains that hegemony can maintain power through political or economic consensus or agreement, without the use of force or violence, or possibly through the ability to lead. It means that influence is not always related to violence; it can be accepted naturally by society, whether it is a concept of ideological representation or resistance (Sipahutar et al., 2024, p. 554). The core of this theory is that hegemony exerts dominant power through efforts to impart ideas about a system to society, thereby constructing society's worldview. Hegemony is created based on consensus and agreement on ideologies or values that are naturally accepted by society (Leila, 2025). Thoughts emerge with research explaining that hegemony is divided into two, namely realism and liberalism, but this paper focuses on realism, which focuses on the role of competent leadership (Gohar, 2023). Then, Robert Keohane put forward the "Hegemonic Stability Theory," which is a form of approach combined with A. F. K. Organski's Theory of Power Transition as two dominant approaches in realism. After World War II, there was great turmoil in the international world, both economically and politically. The economic turmoil that arose caused widespread unrest and depression. Then, a scholar named Charles P. Kindleberger put forward his ideas on hegemonic stability theory in his 1973 book "The World in Depression: 1929-1939". Charles P. Kindleberger explained that World War II brought about great chaos and depression because at that time, there was no hegemony with political and economic superiority capable of leading and stabilizing the situation. This theory refers to economics, that behind the emergence of hegemonic stability theory, the role of global stability, in terms of politics, international law, and so on, depends on the ability of the hegemon to regulate the system (De, 2025, pp. 1-2).

In the international arena, economic stability is determined by the existence of leadership that is capable of regulating and possessing dominant or hegemonic power. The dominance of power referred to here is that of a country or leader that has superior power in various aspects, such as political power, economic power, and military power (Yazid, 2018, pp. 36-39). Why is this so? Because of such superiority, the hegemon can create international laws and organizations. Furthermore, superior hegemonic power can act as a sole leader who can regulate the system as a form of unipolar center in the international world. When hegemonic power can create a stable world, whether through diplomacy, coercion, persuasion, or unilaterally, this is what is meant by using power superiority in running the international system. This domination of power leads to the ability of the state to regulate international economic and political relations unilaterally. Conversely, when the hegemon falls or there is no hegemony to run a system, the system will become unstable or even chaotic (Maiwan, 2015, pp. 199-121).

Furthermore, Robert Giplin's theory is more focused on economics. The Theory of Hegemonic Stability is a theory rooted in research in the fields of economics, politics, and history. Returning to Robert Giplin's explanation of his theory, he states that the reason for the establishment of the international system was by very powerful hegemonic states, which aimed to advance specific political and economic interests. Then Charles P. Kindleberger, with his theory, concluded that the depression caused by the wars of the twentieth century, in his explanation "the main lesson of the inter-war years [is] that for the world economy to be stabilized there has to be a stabilizer, one stabilizer" (1973, 305). It means that stability can be created when there is a hegemon in the international system. Then, with another statement made by Keohane, "one state is powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing interstate relations, and willing to do so" (1984, 34-35). This means that a hegemon needs strong political and economic power to be able to establish rules in the international economic system (Kakeyi, 2007, pp. 4-5).

### **3. The United States as a Traditional Hegemon Vs China's Emergence as a Global Competitor**

Hegemonic culture, a term initially used by the British Empire, is the place of origin of the white race in the United States, which built an empire that later rivaled the hegemonic power of Great Britain. The United States emerged as a superpower, and its influence grew stronger after the end of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. This hegemonic culture is inherent to the identity of the United States, which has become its strength, covering various aspects such as politics, economics, education, security, and so on. The influence of the United States' dominant power has enabled it to remain a global hegemon for decades (Kasiyarno, 2015, pp. 14-15). This was further strengthened by the United States' alliances with various countries such as Japan and South Korea based on trust in the stability offered, as well as many countries joining organizations led by the United States such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and so on, which are clear evidence of the influence of American dominance.

However, over the past few decades, new competitors have begun to emerge from the hegemonic power. The emergence of these competitors has caused the influence of American dominance to diminish gradually. What we can see today is that China has become one of the countries that is beginning to rival the dominant power of the United States. China is slowly building its power, and its dominant influence today is its rapid economic development, which is facilitated by its capitalist system and principles, providing substantial benefits for its government in managing the economy. As explained by Organski and Giplin, a strong economy plays a crucial role for a hegemon; with a strong economy, hegemony can influence others to acknowledge its position. However, on the other hand, China faces weaknesses such as the gap between the government and the people, leading to various social pressures. Fareed Zakaria calls this problem "spiraling decentralization," meaning that it is a significant issue that the government must resolve. China's efforts to move in a positive direction have begun with economic reforms that recognize openness and individual freedom.

Not only is China focusing on improving its domestic economy, but it has also begun to focus on developing its international strategy by expanding its influence in the international community. China's efforts include joining a forum called BRICS, which includes countries such as Brazil, Russia, and India, formed in 2001, with South Africa joining in 2010. This forum is an organization whose objectives include fostering dialogue, cooperation, and strengthening political and economic power (Budi, 2024). The United States views China's rapid development as a threat to its dominant position, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, and has therefore implemented a "rebalancing" strategy to maintain the influence it has built over decades with powerful countries in Asia, such as Japan and South Korea.

China's position has been strengthened by its efforts to create a program called the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI), which was launched in 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping. This program aims to provide capital in the form of investment in the development sector in Asia, Europe, Africa, and even Latin America. Approximately 150 countries worldwide have agreed to the BRI (Amanda, 2024). The BRI program is considered the most ambitious of this century, carried out by Xi Jinping through cross-continental cooperation and connectivity, demonstrating that Africa and Asia are dependent on Chinese investment. It is reinforced by the investment made by the China Development Bank in the BRI, amounting to \$900 billion (The Diplomat, 2016). Meanwhile, the "Marshall Plan," an economic program of the United States established in 1948 after World War II, was valued at only \$12 billion and approximately \$130 billion in 2015 (Djankof & Miner, 2016). Undoubtedly, China's efforts to boost its economy are highly ambitious, even though China's military spending in 2018 was only \$175 billion (Xinhua, 2018). Meanwhile, the

United States spent \$639 billion on military expenditures in the same year (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018). The United States' military dominance is immense, but China's strong economic development efforts will serve as a significant foundation for funding its military power in the future (Korwa, 2019, pp. 1-5).

The BRI now seems to be China's hidden agenda to shift the dominant power of the United States. However, this differs from Xi Jinping's statement that the BRI is not a plan or strategy, but purely an initiative. The hegemonic power of the United States, which has persisted for decades, cannot be denied after the rise of China with its economic strength as a new competitor that will displace the United States as the hegemon. Thus, in the future, a new hegemonic power will emerge with various policies and regulations that will change the international system that has been in place for decades under the United States.

#### 4. Conclusion

As a conclusion to this paper, the author can draw the following conclusions. In the international system, there is a need for a party capable of leading and regulating international relations, which will create stability. Hegemonic stability is crucial to impose limits on those who act arbitrarily, although it cannot be denied that there will be parties that disrupt global stability. The United States, which has been the hegemon for decades with its dominant power, now faces a new competitor in China, which may play a significant role in the dominance of power within the hegemonic stability in the future. Of course, the competition between the United States and China is a cause for concern for the world, as the power struggle will occur between these two powerful nations, potentially fracturing the parties that have long been caught in the middle of this power dynamic.

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