


Chapter 14

China and the Global South: A Postcolonial Reading of the Northern–Led Global Order

Alireza Samiee Esfahani

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-4729-075X>

University of Isfahan, Iran

Ali Alihosseini

University of Isfahan, Iran

ABSTRACT

The concept of “Global South” has recently emerged as a symbol of unity, and geopolitical reality among postcolonial and developing nations. Following decolonization, these countries have sought to reclaim political and economic agency through movements such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and G77, consistently advocating for a more just international order. From the perspective of postcolonial studies, this research seeks to answer the following central questions: (1) How has the Global South deconstructed the Western liberal order in international relations? (2) What are the tangible manifestations of “agency” within this emerging order of the Global South? The findings suggest that over the past few decades, the Global South, led by countries like China and other emerging economies, has critically challenged the epistemological and ontological foundations of the liberal world order, which is Western, imperialist, and hierarchical, and has promoted its agency through South-South cooperation to escape from its inferiority/marginalized position in the international system.

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INTRODUCTION

The rise of the Global South as a geopolitical and geo-economic reality has led to significant systemic changes in the global order. The unipolar moment has run its course, and a multipolar world order is steadily emerging. While the geopolitical center of military power remains in the West, still primarily led by the United States, economic power and growth are gradually shifting eastward, thanks to the rise of actors such as China, India, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This global divergence, in which geopolitical power is centered in the West while economic power is increasingly located in Asia, represents a unique feature of the current historical moment, unprecedented in the history of capitalism.

This shift in political and economic power has prompted geopolitical thinkers such as Parag Khanna and Kishore Mahbubani to speak of the arrival of an “Asian century.” Others, like political scientist Oliver Stuenkel, have begun referring to a “post-Western world” (Heine, 2023). The transformation of international politics and the rise of new powers, especially within the Global South, are key characteristics of today’s global order. Above actors, through the creation of alternatives such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), BRICS, and the Group of 77 (G77) as a coalition of developing countries within the United Nations, have challenged the ontology of dominant Northern/Western discourses in shaping the international agenda. The critique of dominant discourses, particularly in the era of decolonization, has been prominently articulated through critical concepts emerging from the Global South, along with other alternative frameworks aimed at “reordering the global system” and enabling the “coexistence of multiple orders,” with a particular emphasis on South–South cooperation. According to some analysts, the shared experiences and solidarities of the Global South have been most effectively embodied in a common foreign policy ideology. This ideology has been variously referred to as “anti-colonialism,” “non-alignment,” “positive neutrality,” “Afro-Asianism,” “Third-Worldism,” “South–South solidarity,” “structuralist perspectives,” and a “multipolar development outlook” (Roberts and Parks, 2007; Solarz, 2012; Mielniczuk, 2013; Lüthi, 2016; Lewis and Stolte, 2019).

From a postcolonial standpoint, the Global South functions both as a discursive construct and as a geopolitical force of resistance. This part of the world, long considered a “secondary” and “passive” variable in global geopolitics, has now attained a degree of self-awareness and agency that actively challenges the Global North. The resistance and proactive initiatives of the Global South over the past few decades have already initiated, and will continue to initiate, profound transformations in the international order. Since World War II, the Global South has passed through three historical phases: (a) decolonization (1945–1989), (b) globalization (1990–2008), and (c) the emergence of developing economies as a group (since 2009). Initially,

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