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**Trump 2.0 and the Churning Global Order**

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# The Arrival of Trump 2.0 and the Era of Global Turmoil



Yang Ping (杨平) is a leading scholar and editor in China's intellectual and cultural community. He is the founder, president, and editor-in-chief of *Wenhua Zongheng* (文化纵横), a leading journal of contemporary political and cultural thought in China. Since its founding in 2008, the journal has grown into one of China's most important thought platforms. He also founded the magazine *Strategy and Management* (战略与管理) in 1993.

The arrival of the second administration of President Donald Trump – hereafter, Trump 2.0 – has been a whirlwind. In just over a hundred days, his administration has drastically downsized the civil service, signalled a swift withdrawal from Ukraine, launched an aggressive new tariff war, and betrayed traditional allies in Europe. Trump's new policies have thrown the United States and the world into chaos.

How should we understand the governing patterns of the Trump 2.0 era? What underlying factors are at play behind his seemingly arbitrary behaviour? What impact will the Trump 2.0 era have on China and the world? How will the world change as a result? These questions are urgent and pressing for people around the world who are filled with anxiety.

The period from Trump's first term in office in 2016 to the dawn of the Trump 2.0 era in 2024 has made it clear that his political base consists of the vast disenfranchised segments of

US society and the new right-wing conservative social movements driven by these disenfranchised groups. Trump did not emerge out of nowhere, nor does he act on a whim; he is a product of this powerful ideological movement rather than its cause. To understand the underlying logic behind Trump's action, one must begin with his social base and ideological movement.

This new wave of right-wing conservatism, which has spread widely in Western societies, differs from traditional US neoconservatism. It is characterised by a clear anti-liberal stance, with outward manifestations such as opposition to immigration, gender relativism, and free trade. Its underlying traits, however, reflect anti-globalisation, anti-democracy, and anti-establishment sentiments. It no longer seeks the universality of Western liberal values or believes in the promises of a liberal utopia, instead retreating to the US and prioritising 'America First'. Additionally, its behavioural values have generally returned to Christian traditions, particularly the fundamentalist traditions of white Christianity.

The sweeping rise of the new right-wing conservative movement stems from the rampant spread of free-market capitalism. Over the past thirty years since the end of the Cold War, there has been an unstoppable global expansion of capital and individualistic values under the banner of liberalism. The greed of the US bourgeoisie has reached unprecedented levels, which has led to exacerbating income inequality, eroding social morality, and the dismantling of the fabric of communities. In this context, society urgently needed a movement of social protection to counter market forces. The new right-wing conservatism is a symptom of this need for social protection.

From the perspective of Marxist political economy, capitalism is characterised by cyclical patterns of expansion and contraction. Excessive accumulation becomes widespread due to overproduction, leading to a decline in the average rate of profit and the disruption of capitalism's internal equilibrium. In the era of globalisation, where national borders are constantly broken down, this cyclical movement manifests itself as unbalanced rapid expansion across all corners of the world, thereby driving the rise of emerging powers and the decline of traditional powers. The new right-wing conservative ideology is a feature of the decline of traditional capitalist powers.

New right-wing conservatism is a social ideology that emerges during the decline of liberal capitalism. Its emergence and development follow certain patterns. First, its emergence is on a world scale – it is a product of the global expansion of the capitalist mode of production. Secondly, it is long-lasting – as long as the wealth gap and the disintegration of communities caused by liberal capitalism remain unresolved, the ideology of new right-wing conservatism will persist. The scale and influence of this ideology are inversely proportional to the governance flaws of liberal capitalism. Thirdly, it has local characteristics – new right-wing conservatism will combine with the history and national conditions of different countries, resulting in ideologies with distinct features. Fourthly, it has the characteristics of its times – for instance, the new right-wing in Europe today cannot openly oppose the democratic system because Western-style democracy has become politically correct and denying it would come at a significant cost.

Given the long-term nature of the new right-wing conservative ideology, the Trump era is merely its beginning. Therefore, it is extremely urgent and necessary to analyse its relationship with the world and China.

The world order will undergo a drastic reorganisation, and chaos will become the norm in the face of the new right-wing conservative ideology. Because the values of the new right-wing conservatism are anti-liberal, US-led alliances based on Western liberal values will split, and friend-enemy relations in the Western world will change. The traditional allies of the US will seek strategic autonomy and break away from dependence. Some medium-sized powers in the West will form new alliances. At the same time, the new right-wing conservatism emerging worldwide will seek to establish a coalition of right-wing values – particularly between the new right-wing movements in the US and Europe – which will rapidly forge deep spiritual and material connections. In this context, Global South countries will find themselves marginalised by the new right-wing US because their development and security concerns will not be prioritised. This harsh reality will force some Global South countries that once followed the Global North to seek new avenues. More importantly, as the new right-wing conservative ideology sweeps the globe, the rules and norms that have governed the world since the end of the Cold War will be shattered (or even completely destroyed). As the world faces the narrow nationalism of ‘America First’, existing global rules will largely cease to function, and a new international system will be difficult to establish. The effectiveness of

international organisations such as the World Trade Organisation and the World Health Organisation will significantly decline.

Under the influence of neo-conservative right-wing ideology, Western countries are dominated by nationalism and populism, making conflicts between nations and ethnic groups highly likely. In such an international environment, it is not difficult to imagine that contradictions and conflicts will lead to war. For China, the rise of the new right-wing conservatism will also present significant challenges while also offering numerous new opportunities.

First, under the influence of the new right-wing conservative ideology, China's external relations will undergo profound adjustments. If the Trump administration continues to view China as its primary strategic competitor, then the EU – which previously prioritised values as its first principle in diplomacy – will distance itself from the US and readjust its relations with China for its own self-interest. Similarly, Asian allies of the US, such as Japan and South Korea, will also adjust their relations with China in response to the US narrowly pursuing its own national interests.

Second, the nature of the struggle between China and the US-led Global North will change significantly. The focus will shift from the ideological struggle, centred on Western concepts of 'democracy, freedom, and human rights', to a struggle over national interests characterised by the 'America First' policy. Because the new right-wing conservatism is anti-liberal and xenophobic, it no longer possesses a claim to universality and therefore significantly loses its appeal to human society. As a result, the primary contradiction of China's ideological struggle in international politics will shift from one of values to one centred on national interests.

Third, China's advocacy for a 'community of shared future for humanity' is a profound response to human society's growing desire for new universal values in times of great turmoil.<sup>1</sup> With the launch of the 'Global Development Initiative', 'Global Security Initiative', and 'Global Civilisation Initiative', China has proposed a set of values capable of replacing the decaying Western liberal

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<sup>1</sup> This concept was first proposed by President Xi Jinping at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations on 23 March 2013.

order and charting a new direction for human society.<sup>2</sup> At a time when new right-wing conservatism is widespread in the US, China should further advocate the concept of the ‘community of shared future for humanity’ and provide political-economic and philosophical interpretations of its profound theoretical connotations. The concept should be theorised and systematised to rally the people’s hearts and minds in this era of turmoil.

Finally, at a time when relations among friends and enemies are undergoing drastic changes, China should adhere to the Global South as its main strategic direction, unite the majority of the Global South countries, and form a united front in the new era. The reasoning behind this is not complicated. The US will not give up its strategic intention to contain China, and the EU will waver due to its liberal values. Only the Global South, especially those countries that seek to break away from the unipolar world dominated by the US, could be China’s friends in building a new multipolar international system. The difference between this and Mao Zedong’s ‘Three Worlds’ strategy lies in the fact that China’s current strategy is not merely about carving out a vast intermediate zone amid US-Soviet rivalry but about leading Global South nations in striving to create an equal and orderly multipolar world.

The arrival of the Trump 2.0 era marks the onset of a great era of chaos, with future turmoil only intensifying and constantly surpassing our expectations. Therefore, we must be prepared.

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<sup>2</sup> The three Global Initiatives were proposed between 2021 and 2023. They serve as strategic directions for the goal of building ‘a community with a shared future for humanity’. The initiatives focus on the main contradictions in today’s world, such as development, security, and civilisation. They aim to provide action plans for the reform and development of global governance.



# The Collapse of the Neoliberal World Order and the Rise of China and Russia in Global Governance



**Xu Poling** (徐坡岭) is a leading economist specialising in world economic theory, the macroeconomics of open economies, and the Russian economy. He is the director of the Russian Economy Office at the Institute of Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). He also serves as the deputy director of the CASS Belt and Road Research Centre, standing director of the China Society of World Economics, and a Tianshan Scholar Distinguished Professor at Xinjiang University of Finance and Economics. He has authored books including *A Study on the Trajectory of Russia's Economic Transformation* and *An Introduction to the Political Economy of Transition*.

For future historians reflecting on changes in the world order, 2025 could be regarded as a watershed year signalling a major global shift. The greatest challenge we face today is what Giovanni Arrighi referred to as the question of what the 'next world' will look like. This question reflects the prevailing systemic anxiety on a global scale and the fundamental concerns of our era.

During the 'Trump 1.0 era' (2017–2021), despite the United States' withdrawal from various international organisations and its overt promotion of 'America First', which blatantly abandoned the international responsibilities necessary to sustain its post-Cold War dominance, Europe – drawing on its lingering identity as the cradle of Western civilisation – still endeavoured to uphold the crumbling edifice of the neoliberal world order. With President Joe Biden's election to the White House in 2021, the United States reverted to its familiar alliance-based policy playbook and strengthened

its ties with Europe. Consequently, neoliberal European politicians were granted a brief respite that enabled them to relive the fading glory of Western hegemony – the neoliberal world order experienced a fleeting revival.

With the advent of Trump 2.0 in 2025, this order has suffered its final, fatal blow. At the 61st Munich Security Conference in February 2025, US Vice President J.D. Vance bluntly stated that Europe’s ‘fundamental values’, including freedom of speech and democracy, were regressing, and that Europe’s greatest threat came not from Russia or China but from within.<sup>1</sup> Vance’s remarks stunned European political elites. The United States subsequently initiated a systemic transformation of the world order. Ignoring Europe’s security anxieties, Washington unilaterally opened negotiations to ease tensions with Russia, shifting the responsibility and burden of the Ukraine crisis onto Europe. It then launched a global tariff war – including against Europe – and even laid territorial claims over Greenland, the Panama Canal, and Canada. President Donald Trump’s whirlwind of disruptions severed transatlantic relations, reset US-Russia relations, circumvented multilateralism, and bullied countries around the world through bilateral dealings. Ultimately, the United States swept the post-Cold War neoliberal international order into the dustbin of history.

Why has the United States abandoned the neoliberal world order that it once promoted and used to dominate the world? What kind of new world order will emerge amid the rise of conservatism and populism? Against the backdrop of America’s return to conservatism and Europe’s renewed pursuit of strategic autonomy, China and Russia – two major powers bound by a comprehensive strategic partnership – are sure to deepen their strategic cooperation in this turbulent world. As permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and key pillars of the international order, what support will their strategic partnership provide for international peace, security, and stability? What governance solutions might they propose for the emerging world order?

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<sup>1</sup> J.D. Vance, ‘Speech by JD Vance’, in *Munich Security Conference 2025: Selected Key Speeches, Vol. 2*, ed. Benedikt Franke (Munich Security Conference, 2025), 15–24.

## I. The Nature and Historical Fate of the Neoliberal World Order

The neoliberal world order characterises the international order that emerged during the era of economic globalisation. Its dominance has been relatively short-lived.

Neoliberalism, both as an economic theory and an intellectual movement, emerged in the 1920s and 1930s. The global economic crisis of the 1930s marked the end of the era of capitalist free competition. The Soviet Union's attempt to establish a planned economy sparked a debate on the 'economic calculation problem', with significant contributions from Austrian School economists Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, as well as Polish economist Oskar Lange. Although this theoretical debate did not yield a definitive conclusion, the successes of the Soviet planned economy and US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in addressing the Great Depression established, in practice, the ascendancy of Keynesianism in the West and the planned economies of the Soviet bloc. The Soviet-style planned economy and the state-interventionist welfare states in the US and Europe began to dominate the world during the Cold War. By the 1970s, as capitalist economies struggled with stagflation, the welfare state began to decline. Hayek's liberal principles regained prominence, and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan began a process of privatisation and deregulation as remedies for economic malaise. Subsequently, the Soviet planned economy also fell into an efficiency trap and embraced the Washington Consensus through a 'shock therapy' transition. Free-market competition became dominant, ushering the world into the era of globalisation.

In the era of globalisation, the first stage was the globalisation of the market economy which manifested in the integration of national markets and the rise of international free trade. Subsequently, to facilitate the unrestricted flow of global monopoly capital and the worldwide distribution of production, neoliberalism became politicised as a state-driven project and an institutional paradigm. This paradigm has been encapsulated by the ten policy prescriptions of the 'Washington Consensus', a term coined by British economist John Williamson.<sup>2</sup> This marked the ideological assertion of capitalism's transition

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<sup>2</sup> John Williamson, 'What Washington Means by Reform', in *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?*, ed. John Williamson (Institute for International Economics, 1990).

from national monopolies to international monopolies and served as a policy prescription to enable international monopoly finance capital to construct global hegemony. As the renowned US scholar Noam Chomsky pointed out in his book *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*, ‘The neoliberal Washington consensus is an array of market-oriented principles designed by the government of the United States and the international financial institutions that it largely dominates and implemented by them in various ways’. In the book’s introduction, Robert W. McChesney further emphasises that the essence of the Washington Consensus encompasses three dimensions: the economic system, the political system, and the cultural system.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of its origins and substance, neoliberalism, as both an economic and political ideology, advocates free competition, opposes state and government intervention in the economy, promotes privatisation and individualism, and rejects public ownership. In international policy, it emphasises the opening of national markets, supports international free trade, and encourages the international division of labour. Neoliberals oppose socialism, trade protectionism, environmentalism, and populism, viewing these as obstacles to free competition.

Politically, neoliberalism has gone even further by providing an ‘installation guide’ for corresponding political and cultural systems, steeped in the arrogance of Western triumphalism and disdain for other civilisations in the wake of the Cold War victory. Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* stands as a representative work.<sup>4</sup> Here, liberalism and individualism – rooted in Christian monotheistic philosophy and the Enlightenment’s resistance to religious oppression – are endowed with sacred status. Politicised neoliberalism elevates freedom to the level of a core value, sanctifies the power and unrestricted liberty of a small minority, and treats electoral democracy – originating from ancient Greece – as a tool to uphold these principles. Consequently, Western electoral democracy has been deified – in the more than thirty years since the end of the Cold War, electoral democracy has evolved into an ideological instrument for the US to leverage its hegemonic position to interfere in, and overthrow, the governments of other countries.

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<sup>3</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and the Global Order* (Seven Stories Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Free Press, 1992).

Economically, neoliberal globalisation has facilitated the international allocation of resources and created the conditions for international monopoly capital to establish international industrial chains. Throughout the course of globalisation, the internet and information technologies have given rise to international financial markets that operate continuously, enabling international finance capital to engage in round-the-clock, cross-time-zone arbitrage. Under this trend, cross-border financial capital flows – initially accompanying and serving international trade settlements and lending – came to be dominated by speculative financial capital after the mid-1990s. The convenience and scale of global arbitrage by international finance capital soon surpassed that of industrial capital, thereby creating the conditions for international financial monopoly capital to gain an overwhelming advantage over industrial capital.

Entering the 21st century, the development of the internet and information technologies coupled with US regulators' laissez-faire approach to financial innovation and accommodative monetary policies has helped Wall Street's finance capital rise to a position of unchallenged dominance in international capital markets. Following the 2008 financial crisis, bailout programmes led by US financial conglomerates firmly established the dominance of international financial monopoly capital in global economic and political decision-making. The international flow of this capital further enabled it to gain control over international industrial chains, thereby gradually monopolising international resources and industrial profits. These entities register subsidiaries worldwide, obscuring their national identities to legitimise the plundering of resources, the capture of manufacturing profits, and international speculation.

In neoliberal political discourse, free competition is considered paramount. Under the banner of liberal democracy, the United States claims that human rights take precedence over sovereignty in international affairs, using this as justification to interfere in other countries' internal matters – and to even overthrow governments in the name of justice. While some contend that the US neither seizes foreign land nor engages in colonialism, a comparison of the vast resources it controls, utilises, and consumes – along with the profits derived from its financial and technological hegemony – against the costs it bears reveals that when financial capital dominates the globe, the entire world effectively becomes its colony. No armies or governors are required to forcibly extract profits from overseas. This control over international resources and

industrial chain profits rests on the hard power of technological and military dominance. Within the neoliberal world order dominated by monopoly finance capital, resource-rich nations are unable to set the prices of their own resources or exploit them independently of external forces. Only when US finance capital acquires ownership or stakes in these resources do they gain access to international markets. Likewise, countries engaged in low-value-added manufacturing remain subject to the exploitation and control by monopoly finance capital. Dollar hegemony is the primary instrument through which this plunder is executed.

Italian political economist and historian of global capitalism Giovanni Arrighi has noted in his works that financialisation is a cyclical phenomenon within capitalist economies. He analysed the recurring cycles of financial expansion and collapse inherent to the capitalist mode of production, along with their geopolitical roots.<sup>5</sup> However, the expansion of financial capital that underpins the neoliberal order differs fundamentally from the financial expansions and collapses of earlier capitalist systems. For instance, during the late British Empire, financial expansion and rising debt were largely internal, mitigated by the exploitation and plunder of colonies which helped delay imperial decline. In contrast, Wall Street-centred international financial monopoly capital exploits the entire world through dollar hegemony, pushing the financialisation of the US economy to unprecedented heights. The US dollar, US Treasury debt, and US securities markets epitomise US hegemony and its economic structure. The world order dominated by US monopoly finance capital is essentially a plundering of the international material production chain and value chain, and the wealth of American financial elites is built on predatory accumulation, inevitably driving much of the population in developing countries into poverty. This is the fundamental reason why the US-led world system is destined to be replaced.

## II. The Final Chapter of the Neoliberal World Order

The neoliberal world order created a landscape dominated by monopolistic financial capital. Within this framework, international monopoly capital holds

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<sup>5</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (Verso, 1994).

an overwhelming advantage over private companies in any nation. As long as nation-states accept the neoliberal principle of so-called free competition with minimal state intervention, international monopoly capital gains an unassailable competitive edge, effortlessly seizing control of these countries' resources or industries – particularly in relatively weak developing nations. Thus, if resource-rich countries abandon state intervention, they effectively allow international financial capital to acquire stakes or even complete control of their resources. Similarly, if countries developing their manufacturing sectors abandon industrial policies, it would mean allowing international monopoly capital to extract most of the profits along the industrial chain, forcing these countries to remain trapped in the low-value-added segments of the chain. Once these two conditions are met, the United States can maintain its hegemonic position and continue to extract surplus value from the international industrial chain. If US monopoly capital could use its super-profits to bridge the vast income gap across social classes, the neoliberal economic and political order would achieve a self-sustaining, stable equilibrium. However, this last condition is fundamentally incompatible with the inherent greed of capital. Moreover, the two foundational conditions sustaining the neoliberal international order have increasingly faced challenges since the 2000s.

The first challenge was initiated by Russia. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia adopted the neoliberal programme prescribed by the Washington Consensus and implemented a 'shock therapy' market-oriented transition. At the time, facing severe fiscal shortages in the federal government, the Yeltsin administration was forced to accept the harsh lending terms imposed by the United States and the International Monetary Fund, thereby opening the doors to international monopoly capital. Simultaneously, the large-scale privatisation created private oligarchs – financial-industrial conglomerates capable of challenging the authority of the federal government. These domestic oligarchs, allied with international capital, plundered Russia's wealth, drastically weakening the central government's ability to govern the economy and society. When Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency in 2000, his top priority was to restore state capacity and rebuild political and social stability. His policies began with the re-nationalisation of strategic resources to reassert state control over the economy and a crackdown on private oligarchs to restore the federal government's political independence. Nonetheless, domestic Russian companies remained unable to compete with international monopolies in an open market environment. As a result, President Putin initiated the formation of massive corporate conglomerates including Rosneft,

Gazprom, Transneft, Russian Railways, and Rusal – all of which underwent corporate restructuring during this period. Furthermore, the Russian federal government extended policy support to these conglomerates for both domestic and international competition. These measures, to some degree, strengthened Russia's ability to resist international monopoly capital. After 2014, Russia adopted an import-substitution strategy, and national industrial policy evolved into a key instrument for countering international monopolies. The sweeping US-EU sanctions imposed on Russia in 2022 prompted the country to abandon neoliberal economic principles and political logic altogether, marking its complete withdrawal from the neoliberal world order and its governance framework.

The second challenge came from China, which used industrial policies to weaken the dominance of international financial and technological monopolies. Before US President Barack Obama announced the Pivot to Asia policy in 2011, China's industrial policies were primarily defensive, focusing on integrating its abundant labour resources into the modern economy. Since the reform and opening up, China has consistently upheld openness and integration into the international economy as fundamental principles to secure favourable external conditions for its economic development. At the same time, China has never abandoned state guidance and intervention in its economic growth. It has consistently maintained control over international capital flows and adhered to innovation and industrial policies as the driving forces behind its economic development, continuously promoting the ascent of manufacturing toward the higher end of the industrial value chain. After joining the World Trade Organisation in 2001, China's manufacturing sector grew rapidly, accompanied by swift industrial upgrading and technological advancements. Following the global financial crisis, China's rapid economic growth and full-scale industrial development began to reshape the international economic landscape. Following the 2015 exchange rate reform, when the renminbi transitioned from a managed float pegged to the US dollar to a basket of currencies with an independent floating mechanism, China began to alter the closed model of goods and capital circulation between China and the United States. This reform undermined the very foundation of dollar hegemony's ability to harvest international wealth through financial tides. China's commitment to developing a market economy while firmly using state power to regulate the

activities of international monopoly capital has safeguarded national interests and challenged the US-led neoliberal world order. This was a key reason why the Obama administration implemented the Pivot to Asia strategy and sought to contain China through the labour and environmental standards of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), while upholding the principle that the judicial authority of international monopoly capital overrides national sovereignty to safeguard the interests of US monopoly capital. In response to US suppression and containment, China's industrial policy became more proactive after 2015. With the introduction of *Made in China 2025* and the renminbi no longer pegged to the US dollar, the logic of US financial capital hegemony, which had harvested international wealth through capital tides, began to falter.

However, the primary force driving the neoliberal world order toward its end came from the United States itself. Russia's discontent with neoliberal globalisation, combined with China's challenge to the US framework for harvesting international wealth, led the United States to begin doubting its ability to maintain control over this order. The 2008 global financial crisis marked the starting point of the United States' efforts to mend the neoliberal world order. Obama's push for the TPP was a systematic attempt to place the power of international monopoly capital and US financial dominance above the sovereignty of other nations, aimed particularly at weakening China's industrial policy framework. These efforts ultimately failed, which was a significant factor behind the wave of withdrawals from international organisations and abandonment of global responsibilities during Trump 1.0. Foreign policy during Trump 1.0 had already begun to destabilise the US-constructed neoliberal world order. Yet post-Cold War US hegemony was fundamentally underpinned by this very order. Consequently, after Biden entered the White House, he sought to rebuild the alliance system, step up containment of China, and intensify pressure on Russia. By 2022, with sweeping US-EU sanctions on Russia, the neoliberal world order had begun entering its final chapter. When Trump returned to the White House in 2025, his administration's whirlwind of disruptive policies shook transatlantic relations and overturned US-Russia-Europe dynamics. On 2 April 2025, Trump launched a global tariff war, completely dismantling the foundational pillars of the neoliberal world order – free trade and multilateralism.

### **III. China-Russia Strategic Cooperation and the Vision for the Next World**

There is no doubt that the so-called ‘liberal international order’, carefully constructed and promoted by the United States, was merely the international order of the two decades following the Cold War – a form of political globalisation under unipolar hegemony driven by neoliberalism. From Washington’s perspective, this order signified the hegemon’s freedom; from the perspective of other countries, it meant the US forcibly imposing Western-style electoral democracy worldwide by reshaping or toppling foreign governments. This international order is neither free nor just, nor could it ever represent the ultimate state of human history. With China’s rise and Russia’s resurgence, the reach of US hegemony is shrinking. In its attempt to reverse its declining dominance, the US has sought to contain and suppress China and Russia. Yet the internal contradictions of the liberal hegemonic order ensure that efforts by both the Republican and Democratic parties are ultimately futile.

As two major pillars of the world order and international landscape, China and Russia share a high degree of consensus in promoting the reform of global governance and building a fairer and more equitable world order. Russian statesmen have long envisioned an entirely new model of global governance. At the same time, China has put forward the initiative of building a community with a shared future for humanity, along with more concrete political concepts and proposals such as the Global Security Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, and the Global Civilisation Initiative.

China and Russia are key forces in global governance, and their comprehensive strategic partnership for a new era could serve as a cornerstone for maintaining world peace, stability, and security. The principles advocated by China and Russia – such as ‘anti-hegemony, a multipolar world, and the democratisation of global governance’ – have gained recognition from most countries worldwide, and the new world landscape will inevitably be a multipolar one. In this new multipolar order, how will China and Russia advance their strategic cooperation in global governance?

### **i. China-Russia Consensus and Proposals on Global Governance**

In the new era, China and Russia's strategic coordination is guided by the principles of 'mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation', aimed at steering the international order toward a more just and rational direction. Through joint declarations and high-level dialogues, both sides consistently align their positions, serving as a crucial force defending multilateralism and opposing unilateral hegemony in global governance. Their consensus and proposals include:

First, promoting multipolarity and the democratisation of international relations, upholding multilateralism, and opposing interference in domestic affairs and 'long-arm jurisdiction'. China and Russia both advocate for global governance to be a collective endeavour, rejecting the monopolisation of international decision-making by a few powers. They emphasise that emerging economies and developing nations should play a larger role in global affairs and support the building of a fairer and more rational international order. Both countries uphold the central role of the UN, advocate resolving international disputes within the UN framework, and actively participate in and strengthen multilateral mechanisms such as the G20, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. At the same time, they oppose interfering in other countries' internal affairs under the pretext of human rights and democracy, and criticise the Western countries' double standards and unilateral sanctions. Finally, on issues such as the Ukraine crisis and the Taiwan question, both China and Russia have made it clear that they oppose external forces inciting confrontation and undermining regional stability.

Second, they continue to promote economic globalisation and open cooperation, jointly addressing global challenges and advocating for a new vision of security. They oppose protectionism and 'deglobalisation' trends, including decoupling and the breaking of supply chains, calling instead for safeguarding the stability of global industrial and supply chains. They support regional economic integration, aligning the Belt and Road Initiative with the Eurasian Economic Union to enhance connectivity across the Eurasian continent. They also advocate for joint responses to global challenges such as climate change, public health security, terrorism, cyberspace security, and artificial intelligence. Both adhere to a security outlook of common, comprehensive, cooperative,

and sustainable security; rejecting notions of ‘absolute security’ and opposing bloc-based military confrontations.<sup>6</sup> In Asia, they support the centrality of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and promote the development of an open and inclusive regional security framework.

Third, they promote reform of the global governance system, maintaining an international order based on international law and advocating for dialogue among civilisations and inclusive development. They call for increasing the representation and voice of developing countries and enhancing their influence. They criticise exclusive alliances or ‘small circles’ based on ideological divides, advocating instead for inclusive cooperation. They uphold the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, oppose the abuse of ‘long-arm jurisdiction’ and unilateral sanctions, and support improving the international legal system, while rejecting the use of so-called ‘rules’ to safeguard the interests of a few nations. They advocate for equality among civilisations and mutual learning through exchanges among different cultures, opposing the ‘clash of civilisations’ theory. They uphold the diversity of development models, emphasising that each country should choose its own development path based on its national conditions and oppose imposing one’s own model on others.

## **ii. The Future World Order Will Be Realist Rather Than Value Driven**

The so-called liberal international order proclaimed by the West is an illusory construct born of a myopic view of history. Before the modern Industrial Revolution, the world order resembled a mosaic composed of premodern states that were largely isolated from one another. The Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment facilitated the birth of the modern international order. Still, for centuries, the forces driving and shaping the evolution of the international order were not liberal democracy but war, violence, and bloodshed. As the birthplace of the modern international order, the fleeting peace and stability in Europe’s modern and contemporary history were largely governed by the principles of realism.

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<sup>6</sup> Editor’s note: ‘Absolute security’ is a Chinese foreign policy concept used to criticise the expansionist approach and containment policies of the US and NATO.

Over the past century, Western efforts to forcibly impose liberal democracy have elevated it to the status of an ultimate symbolic value in Western ideological discourse. As for Western electoral democracy, this form of political governance – originating from the city-state politics of ancient Greece – has a ‘mixed reputation’. Electoral democracy, manipulated by interest groups and money, has already become a malady in modern American politics. The United States’ imposition of Western electoral democracy worldwide has been a primary reason why many countries have fallen into the ‘electoral trap’ and the ‘development trap’, while being manipulated by international monopoly capital. So, what will the next world order look like after neoliberalism? In other words, what values will dominate the world after liberalism? Currently, based on the consensus between China and Russia on global governance, the future world order is unlikely to have a unified set of values. Realism will provide the best characterisation of a multipolar world order.

Some argue that conservatism is becoming the dominant trend globally and that the emerging world order will be a conservative one. However, conservatism is not a homogeneous value system abstracted across different civilisations. From a conceptual and logical perspective, conservatism emphasises a return to an order built upon family, community, and ethnic identity. It does not recognise transnational identity communities, which is also the primary reason why nationalism and conservatism appear to converge on the surface. Ethnicity-based conservatism is, in essence, a form of nationalism aimed at defending against external threats and safeguarding the interests of one’s own ethnic group. To ensure its protection, the group relies on the state as an apparatus of coercive power, which elevates this conservatism to the level of state conservatism.

Russia exhibits conservative tendencies in its domestic politics. Many scholars consider ‘Putinism’ to encompass elements of both progressive and realist conservatism. Can the ideas and ideology advocated by Putinism gain recognition from the West or the Global South? The answer is clearly no. Therefore, when dealing with the Global South, Putin’s rhetoric is primarily framed in pragmatic terms, including opposition to hegemony, promoting economic development, and providing political and military assistance.

China's vision for the global order, as articulated by Chinese philosopher Zhao Tingyang, is based on the concept of *tianxia* (all-under-heaven), with 'benevolence' (仁) as its moral core. Ideas such as a 'community with a shared future for mankind', the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, the Global Civilisation Initiative, and 'modernisation with Chinese characteristics' are all rooted in this moral value of benevolence. But can these concepts be articulated, characterised, and accepted within Western political discourse? The answer is equally clear: they cannot. Therefore, China adheres to realism, advocating dialogue among civilisations and inclusive development, without insisting that the future world order be based on any single, unified set of values.

### **iii. China-Russia Strategic Cooperation Will Be Shaped by Triangular Dynamics with the US**

A defining characteristic and principle of great power diplomacy is independence and autonomy. In other words, major powers can rely on themselves while smaller states must choose sides. The China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination in the new era upholds the principles of non-alliance, non-confrontation, and non-targeting of third parties, remaining free from external interference.<sup>7</sup> This reflects independent diplomacy and the pursuit of each side's strategic interests. China-Russia strategic cooperation in global governance will also adhere to these principles.

If the content and nature of China-Russia strategic cooperation in global governance are defined across bilateral, regional, multilateral, and international levels, a clearer framework can be established. First, the high level of political trust and comprehensive cooperation at the bilateral level have created favourable conditions for the security, development, and social stability of both China and Russia. This serves as a model for major-power relations and provides a cornerstone of security and stability in a turbulent world. Second, at the regional and multilateral levels, China and Russia cooperate within multilateral organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), BRICS, and the G20, as well as through initiatives like the Belt and

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<sup>7</sup> Editor's note: The use of the term 'non-alliance' here is distinct from the concept of non-alignment. Non-alliance in this context refers to the refusal to form military alliances.

Road Initiative (BRI), the Eurasian Economic Union, the Greater Eurasian Partnership, and Russia's proposed new Eurasian security order. Third, at the global level, China-Russia cooperation primarily aims to advance the world order toward greater multipolarity, justice, rationality, and democratisation. The consensus and propositions suggest that anti-hegemony and multipolarity are the starting points, while establishing a just, rational, and democratic international order is the ultimate goal. Cooperation focuses on jointly addressing climate change, enhancing public health security, tackling terrorism and cybersecurity challenges, and upholding multilateralism and economic openness.

However, while cooperation remains the priority, competition for influence also exists – this reflects the independent diplomatic, regional, and global strategic interests of major powers. Therefore, there are limits to China-Russia cooperation in global governance and the development of a new global order. The two countries achieve the highest quality of cooperation at the bilateral level and share considerable consensus on governance at the international level. However, their cooperation at the regional level contains elements of competition. This is a characteristic of realist international politics where cooperation between major powers must set aside ideological and value-based factors to make decisions based on practical interests. Fostering greater common interests and limiting the scope and intensity of mutual competition are the fundamental conditions for achieving stable and high-quality interstate cooperation.

Realist international political cooperation also means that China-Russia strategic cooperation will inevitably be affected by third parties. China and Russia adhere to the principles of 'no alliance, no confrontation, and not targeting any third party', and their relations are not subject to third-party interference. However, this does not mean that third parties will not influence China-Russia relations, especially when the third party is a powerful international force. If Russia-US relations ease, Russia's international strategic space and environment will improve, which in turn reduces the value of China-Russia global strategic coordination for Russia. Conversely, if China-US relations deteriorate – such as when Trump launched a trade war against China – Russia's importance to both China and the US will rise, allowing

Russia to benefit as a bystander. How should the influence of third parties be managed? This requires distinguishing between strategic interests and tactical interests in trilateral relations. For example, while Russia believes that the current easing of relations with the US can facilitate exchanges in the name of tactical interests, it knows that strategic mutual trust between itself and the US is impossible. This comparison helps to better understand the high level of political mutual trust and shared strategic interests that form the cornerstone of China-Russia relations.



# The Fission of the Global Ideological Spectrum and 21st-Century Re-Globalisation



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Since the twentieth century, modern political ideologies across the world have been mapped onto a left-right binary spectrum. This is a highly simplified abstraction, but it has effectively encapsulated the structure of political orientations and struggles both within and between almost every country and region for more than a century. An undergraduate in political science could place the political ideologies and values of all parties and regimes on this spectrum, thereby determining identity, establishing political alignments, and devising strategies for struggle. However, over the past two decades, as post-Cold War globalisation has declined from its peak, this ideological spectrum has fractured. The once-clear structure has become blurred, and political forces – both between nations and within them – have detached from the traditional left-right framework.

This article, after briefly outlining the structure of the traditional left-right ideological spectrum, seeks to analyse

and interpret the processes and driving forces behind this fragmentation, as well as the emerging post-fission ideological ecology. It aims to observe and explore an emerging new ideological spectrum and propose some ideas regarding the 21st-century world order that China is helping to reshape.

## **From October Revolution to World Anti-Fascist War: The Grand Narrative of Left and Right**

The October Revolution inaugurated the grand narrative of the 20th-century ideological spectrum. The ‘Left’ embodied the communist ideal, socialist institutions, and the internationalist worldview championed by the Soviet Union. Although it had been underpinned by more than half a century of Marxist thought, this ‘Left’ arose abruptly as a political force and product of the great October Revolution. The ‘Right’, as a counterforce, evolved over thirty years, beginning with the confrontation of capitalism and feudalism against the Soviet Union and ultimately culminating in fascism, which, with state capitalism as its economic foundation, came to occupy the far-right end of the spectrum.

Within this global grand narrative, the United States and certain Western European countries occupied an intermediate position: they opposed the communism of the left while also resisting the fascism of the right. Their domestic politics unfolded within a small ‘left-right’ narrative – namely, the struggle between the leftist camp influenced by the Soviet Union and representing labour interests, and the rightist camp upholding capitalism and representing the interests of capital. In this smaller narrative, post-war US politics shifted leftward; domestic policy eventually settled on Roosevelt’s New Deal which protected labour, while the US allied with the Soviet Union to wage a decisive war against fascism.<sup>1</sup>

During the same period, China’s politics were positioned in an intermediate zone, but with a right-leaning tendency. Following the failure of Kuomintang-Communist alliance, the Kuomintang emerged as a political force firmly defending the interests of the dominant feudal and capitalist classes.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Polenberg, *The Era of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

Domestically, the Kuomintang government employed fascist methods to suppress the Communist Party of China (CPC). However, because it had to confront Japanese aggression and rely on US support, it was unable to pursue a fascist path internationally.

At that time, the vast majority of colonised and imperialised nations in Africa, Latin America, and Asia generally leaned to the left. Their leftist stance was primarily reflected in their anti-colonial and anti-imperialist positions, as well as in their struggle for national independence, with Marxism-Leninism serving as a critical ideological weapon against colonialism and imperialism.<sup>2</sup> From that era onwards, the notion of sovereignty transcended the left-right divide. Political forces in anti-colonial countries and regions engaged in left-wing struggles united against imperialism by fighting for sovereignty on a global scale. In the West, in opposition to predominantly leftist internationalism, far-right nationalism (including fascism) and right-wing sovereigntist factions emerged. In the United States, the political forces that opposed participation in the Great War and the World Anti-Fascist War and resisted joining the League of Nations belonged to the latter category.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, the left-right struggles of this era centred on the social upheavals set in motion by the Industrial Revolution and its disruptive impact across multiple dimensions. Within industrialised countries, the dominance of capital led to severe inequality, leaving large segments of the population without secure livelihoods. Internationally, the early industrialised Western powers engaged in unprecedented global plunder through force. Simply put, the right sought to protect the vested interests of capital and the state, while the left fought for the rights of workers and for the independence and liberation of peoples who had been plundered and colonised.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sanjay Seth, 'Lenin's Formulation of Marxism: The Colonial Question as a National Question', *History of Political Thought* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 99–128.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Mittelstadt, a historian at Rutgers University in the United States, conducted the research project titled 'Sovereignty and Subversion: The Global Agenda of the Grassroots Right', which offers an in-depth study of Western right-wing sovereignty movements. Her op-ed in *The New York Times* presents a systematic overview of the American right-wing sovereignty movement. See: 'Why Does Trump Threaten America's Allies? Hint: It Starts in 1919', *The New York Times*, 2 February 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Jake Altman, *Socialism before Sanders: The 1930s Moment from Romance to Revisionism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

China's left-right politics at that time mirrored this global pattern, characterised by the fusion of the communist revolution with the struggle for national independence – a combination that became a foundational element of modern China's state-building and has profoundly influenced its future trajectory.

## **The Cold War: Socialism or Capitalism?**

After World Anti-Fascist War, the world swiftly entered a Cold War marked by confrontation between the two major camps led by the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively. The ideological spectrum between left and right became particularly clear in this period. During the half-century-long Cold War, the Warsaw Pact bloc, led by the Soviet Union, and the NATO-based Western bloc, led by the United States, shaped a distinct global left-right landscape. Many developing countries in the Third World chose sides, while some remained neutral. For instance, the Philippines and Argentina aligned with the right, whereas most African nations leaned towards the left. In this global landscape, the left was represented by socialism and internationalism led by the Soviet Union, while the right was represented by capitalism and 'sovereignty' led by the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Within these two blocs, political dynamics oscillated along a smaller left-right spectrum. In the West, the 'left' encompassed welfare-state politics within a capitalist framework, featuring high taxation, robust welfare systems, and labour protections, while the right represented a politics of protecting capitalist interests through low taxation and limited government. In the Soviet bloc, the left meant strict adherence to socialism and a planned economy, while the right was represented by advocates for introducing elements of a market economy within the socialist framework.

During the Cold War, China's international stance straddled the ideological spectrum, encompassing both left and right. From the founding of the People's Republic of China to the Cultural Revolution, China was clearly left-leaning,

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<sup>5</sup> This notion of sovereignty differs from the 'sovereignty faction' discussed earlier. It refers to a doctrine of national sovereignty promoted by the United States after the World Anti-Fascist War, in opposition to Soviet internationalism. A representative strategist of this thinking was Hans Morgenthau. See: 'The Problem of Sovereignty Reconsidered', *Columbia Law Review* 48, no. 3 (April 1948): 341–365.

embracing a planned economy, internationalism, and opposition to revisionism. After the 1970s, however, China grew increasingly estranged from the Soviet Union, established diplomatic relations with the United States, and began to adopt the market economy framework led by the West. This was viewed as a rightward shift in many analytical frameworks. Some scholars have even classified Deng Xiaoping's economic policies as a form of neoliberalism.<sup>6</sup>

## The Post-Cold War Era and Globalisation

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the global left-right landscape underwent profound changes. The grand left-right divide at the international level essentially disappeared, and the Western-dominated right of the Cold War era established an ideological unipolar hegemony on a global scale. The entire ideological framework of liberalism and neoliberalism transcended the traditional left-right divide, evolving into so-called 'universal values' and the 'end of history' thesis. Many scholars refer to this period as the 'unipolar moment'.<sup>7</sup> This ideological framework repackaged the philosophical concepts of Europe's Enlightenment into a contemporary ideological complex of political, economic, and geopolitical ideologies which were aggressively promoted worldwide. This complex includes several core elements: the individual is the fundamental atomic unit of human society, endowed with inalienable rights; multi-party elections and the separation of powers with checks and balances are the only legitimate political systems; an independent judiciary, detached from politics, is the only legitimate legal framework; and the capitalist market economy is regarded as the sole effective economic system for the world. Within this framework, rights such as freedom of speech and the press, as well as racial, gender, and sexual orientation identities – and even the choice of gender identity – are viewed as tools and expressions of the ongoing expansion of individual sovereignty. The essence of liberal ideology lies in its claim to universality: liberals believe their values transcend all cultures, religions, nations, and even history, and that these values must ultimately be accepted by

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<sup>6</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Hal Brands, *Making the Unipolar Moment: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Rise of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cornell University Press, 2016).

all of humanity and embedded in every country's political system, economic structures, and social institutions.

The universalisation of an ideology rooted in fundamentalist liberalism, combined with neoliberal economic policies, became the overarching narrative dominating the world during this unipolar moment. The ideological spectrum effectively detached from the traditional left-right divide and the political orientation of parties and states came to depend on the degree of their alignment with this liberal grand narrative. Internationally, the United States stood at the most extreme end of liberalism, while the opposite extreme consisted of states such as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Islamic Republic of Iran that rejected liberalism entirely. There were also cases like Russia, which swung from a full embrace of liberalism during the Boris Yeltsin era to resistance during the Vladimir Putin era. On the domestic front, political parties across countries selected elements from the 'menu' of liberalism and neoliberalism according to their interests and positions. For example, the Democratic Party in the United States leaned culturally towards identity politics and championed the continuous expansion of rights related to race, gender, and sexual orientation, thereby advancing individual rights. For this reason, they were labelled as left-wing liberals; however, this 'left' had fundamentally diverged from the definition of 'left' in the 20th-century ideological spectrum. Economically, the Democratic Party moved ever closer to the Republican Party's neoliberal agenda, while both parties increasingly tilted towards the interests of capital. This orientation was termed right-wing conservatism, but it too had departed from the 'right' of the 20th-century ideological spectrum. In international politics, both the Democratic Party's liberal interventionists and the Republican Party's neoconservatives advocated the use of political, economic, and even military means to universalise liberalism.

In this era, China once again occupied an intermediate position. Economically, it embraced and advanced a market economy; politically, culturally, and geopolitically, it rejected liberalism and resisted neoliberalism in the economic domain. As a result, China's market economy is defined as a socialist market economy, its political system as a people's democracy led by the CPC, its rule of law as integrated with politics, and its culture as one that prioritises national sovereignty and collective interests over individualism. In the post-Cold War era, China rejected adherence to liberalism and neoliberalism while absorb-

ing aspects of Western market economics, thereby becoming deeply integrated into globalisation and emerging as one of its most significant driving forces. In international affairs, China upheld the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and firmly resisted the universalisation of Western liberalism.<sup>8</sup>

## The Ideological Fission Caused by the Transition to a Multipolar World

From the 2008 financial crisis that erupted in the United States and reverberated worldwide to Donald Trump's first term as president, globalisation in the West experienced a profound transformation, leading to an ideological fracture on a global scale. The wave of globalisation, which began in the early 1990s after the Cold War, peaked with China's accession to the World Trade Organisation in 2001 and started to recede with Trump's election in 2016. While this wave of globalisation was primarily led by the United States, which formulated the rules, it manifested through global trade and financial integration. Globalisation's underlying driving force carried a distinctly ideological dimension. At its core were the liberal political outlook and its economic offshoot, neoliberalism.<sup>9</sup> China fundamentally rejected this ideological core; yet, it fully integrated into globalisation at the economic-structural level and, by adhering to the framework of globalisation, became an important participant and leader in the process.

Globalisation generated immense economic value: China vaulted to become the world's largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity, while the overall wealth of the United States and the broader West also grew substantially. However, most countries and regions in the developing world saw limit-

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<sup>8</sup> Editor's note: The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were first outlined in the 1954 Sino-Indian Agreement, known in Hindi as Panchsheel. These principles include: mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, equality and co-operation for mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence.

<sup>9</sup> In September 1993, Anthony Lake, then Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, delivered a speech titled 'From Containment to Enlargement', which marked a strategic shift in US foreign policy from the Cold War-era doctrine of containment to a more proactive strategy of enlargement. This new approach emphasised support for liberal democracy and market economies and aimed to shape a world order aligned with US values and interests through economic power and multilateral cooperation. See: 'Remarks of Anthony Lake: Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs: From Containment to Enlargement', *Johns Hopkins University*, 26 September 1993.

ed benefits. More critically, the gains from globalisation were distributed in an extremely unequal manner within the US and across the West. Elite interest groups captured the lion's share of newly created wealth, while the middle and lower classes bore the heavy economic and social costs of deindustrialisation. At the same time, the cultural disruptions stemming from globalisation and liberal ideology inflicted severe damage on the social fabric of Western societies, undermining the political stability and social consensus established in the West after the World Anti-Fascist War.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, US and NATO-led military alliances forcefully intervened in the political and economic affairs of numerous countries and regions. These interventions ranged from economic measures via Western-controlled international institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund) to orchestrating colour revolutions and even wars. Such large-scale coercive interventions were driven both by strategic interests and ideological imperatives, culminating in what British historian Paul Kennedy has termed 'imperial overstretch'.<sup>11</sup> This overstretch imposed enormous structural costs on the US and the West as a whole, deepening their internal social and political fractures.

Against this backdrop, the relatively stable left-right ideological spectrum of the 20th century underwent significant fission.

## United States

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the grand left-right spectrum essentially disappeared within the United States and the broader West. The former right became the entirety of the political spectrum, within which a smaller left-right ideological divide encompassed all political

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<sup>10</sup> The following works analyse the internal disruptions that globalisation has caused within Western societies: Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Harvard University Press, 2014); Charles Murray, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960–2010* (Forum Books, 2013); Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Simon and Schuster, 2000); J. D. Vance, *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis* (HarperCollins, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> British historian Paul Kennedy proposed the theory of 'imperial overstretch', arguing that hegemonic states in history often declined due to an imbalance between external commitments and internal resources. He warned that the United States might follow a similar trajectory. This perspective sparked intense debate among strategists and politicians in the United States during the final years of the Cold War. See: Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (Vintage, 1988).

debates. On this narrower spectrum, differences in economic and foreign policy diminished considerably. Economically, the left, represented by the Democratic Party, had, since the era of President Bill Clinton, largely abandoned labour interests and tilted towards neoliberalism – advocating for small government, reduced welfare, protection of capital, and free trade. At the socio-economic level, both parties sided with capitalist interests and promoted the deindustrialisation of the United States. Regarding immigration policy, both parties generally supported immigrant rights and adopted relatively lenient stances on illegal immigration, differing only in degree. In foreign affairs, the Democratic Party largely abandoned the dovish path previously associated with the left by advancing liberal interventionist policies, including the use of military force. Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair were representative politicians of this so-called ‘Third Way’ or ‘Middle Way’, with the former launching military interventions in Yugoslavia and the latter strongly supporting the Iraq War.<sup>12</sup>

The right was represented by the Republican Party which originated neoliberal economic policies. They supported small government, low taxes, limited welfare, the protection of capital, and free trade even more strongly than the Democrats. In foreign affairs, their policy orientation is guided by neoconservatism, which is essentially in the same vein as the Democratic Party’s liberal interventionist policies.<sup>13</sup> Under this shared political direction, during the twenty-four years of the presidencies of Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama, colour revolutions and military conflicts persisted without pause, and defence spending rose steadily.

Within this smaller left-right spectrum, the differences between the left-leaning Democrats and the right-leaning Republicans were concentrated more in cultural values, racial politics, and environmental or climate policies. The two sides clashed sharply on values: Democrats insisted on the legalisation of abortion, while Republicans sought to restrict it; Democrats aimed to regulate private gun ownership, while Republicans viewed gun rights as constitutionally guaranteed. Democrats advocated for so-called multiculturalism, advancing

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<sup>12</sup> Flavio Romano, *Clinton and Blair: The Political Economy of the Third Way* (Routledge, 2005); Hubert Zimmermann, *The End of the Age of Military Intervention: Liberal Interventionism and Global Order Since the End of the Cold War* (Routledge, 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Justin Vaïsse, ‘Neoconservatism and American Foreign Policy’, *Brookings Institution*, 3 August 2010.

identity politics for ethnic and sexual minorities. In policy, they implemented what is known as proactive affirmative action, continually demanding preferential treatment for ethnic minorities and sexual minority groups in school admissions and the job market. Over years of evolution, these political propositions have developed into what is known as ‘wokeism’. Most Republicans oppose these identity-based political agendas and advocate for the preservation of a more classical form of individualism. It is worth noting that the identity politics championed by Democrats is not collectivism but rather a manifestation of amplified individualism – aimed at helping individuals within certain identity groups overcome traditional social values seen as barriers to personal development. The ideological lineage of wokeism stems from an extreme form of modern liberalism.<sup>14</sup> On environmental and climate issues, Democrats typically advocate for stricter regulation of businesses and more stringent environmental laws, while Republicans tend to favour free markets and fewer business restrictions.

This small left-right framework was completely shattered in 2016. At one end of the new spectrum is the entirely new ideology represented by the ‘Make America Great Again’ (MAGA) movement, and at the other is the liberal ideology that spanned the centre-left and centre-right throughout the post-Cold War era. Many media outlets categorise the Trump-led MAGA movement as right-wing or even far-right. Although some of MAGA’s political stances – such as opposing the legalisation of abortion – align with the right in the old small left-right spectrum, this classification is misplaced. Many of MAGA’s core political positions, such as trade protectionism and reindustrialisation, are in fact closer to the left in the Cold War left-right spectrum.

The ideological turbulence caused by MAGA was starkly revealed in the political alignments during the 2024 presidential election. Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris received and welcomed the endorsement of former Republican Vice President Dick Cheney, while Cheney’s daughter, Liz Cheney, a Republican congresswoman, actively campaigned for Harris. Cheney has long been a right-wing politician deeply despised by the Democratic Party. Many establishment figures entrenched in the Republican Party, including George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush, have strongly opposed

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<sup>14</sup> Eric Kaufmann, ‘Left-Modernist Extremism’, in *The Palgrave Handbook of Left-Wing Extremism*, vol. 2, ed. Jens Rydgren (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2023), 295–311.

Trump and the MAGA movement since 2016. Contemporary Western academia, political elites, and mainstream media often label MAGA and its European counterparts as ‘populism’. However, the definition of populism here remains vague. This is essentially a negative label applied by the Western establishment to brand a movement that is fundamentally challenging the foundations of liberal ideology as mere ignorance and anti-intellectualism.

The true significance of MAGA extends far beyond what is termed populism; it is dismantling the old small left-right framework and may be creating a new grand political spectrum in the US – and potentially across the entire Western world. In political discourse and theoretical terminology, revolutionary forces are often placed on the left, while conservative forces are placed on the right. Since MAGA is clearly an anti-establishment movement, with its opposing force being the relatively conservative establishment that seeks to preserve the liberal order, it could tentatively be positioned on the left of this emerging political spectrum. Meanwhile, the liberal establishment within both the Republican and Democratic parties could be positioned on the right.

The MAGA faction has now entered the White House, gained majorities in both chambers of Congress, and has a majority of Supreme Court justices who lean toward its political stance. Their domestic policy orientation runs counter to the bipartisan consensus that has taken shape over decades across the small left-right spectrum. In terms of cultural values, the MAGA faction has overturned the mainstream politics of recent decades, swiftly and assertively dismantling numerous woke policies across government and society and attempting to culturally reinstate traditional Christian values. It is also enforcing more stringent anti-immigration measures. In social and economic governance, the MAGA faction embraces a pronounced form of libertarianism, with Elon Musk being a representative figure. It is crucial to note that libertarianism and liberalism are fundamentally different – and in many respects even oppositional. Libertarian freedom is a freedom devoid of liberal values; it is amoral.<sup>15</sup> In foreign policy, the MAGA faction has rapidly and comprehensively discarded the liberal establishment’s entire policy framework. Perhaps the most significant short-term shift is the move from staunchly supporting Ukraine against Russia to largely accepting Russia’s narrative of the conflict, bypass-

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<sup>15</sup> Samuel Freeman, ‘Illiberal Libertarians: Why Libertarianism Is Not a Liberal View’, *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 30, no. 2 (April 2001): 105–151.

ing Europe and Ukraine to pursue negotiations for a ceasefire and moving toward rapprochement with Russia. MAGA's foreign policy vision appears to combine isolationism with expansionism. While this may seem contradictory, it need not be. The MAGA faction's political trajectory is likely to resemble Theodore Roosevelt-style hardline expansionism, but this time focused on the Western Hemisphere, primarily driven by realist interests with little ideological content. There is a substantial likelihood of reduced US military presence in the Western Pacific and even Europe. Moreover, MAGA's libertarian tendencies are sharply reducing the ideological component of US foreign policy; interventions in other countries' internal affairs on the grounds of 'universal values' are likely to diminish significantly. Within the first hundred days of his administration, Trump dismantled several major institutions that had driven ideological propaganda for 'colour revolutions' abroad for decades.<sup>16</sup>

The most significant developments lie in the ideological domain. The formation of the MAGA movement is rooted in deep social, economic, and historical conditions. During the post-Cold War era, liberal political forces gained dominance within both the Republican and Democratic parties, seizing control of the power mechanisms of the US political system and societal discourse. Their promotion of capitalist globalisation, extreme individualist woke politics, and the global propagation of universal values eroded the internal cohesion of US society, resulting in an internal division unprecedented in nearly a century. Looking back over the ideological trends within the US over the past two decades, the real fault line does not lie between traditional Democratic and Republican politics but between the forces defending the post-Cold War liberal order and the collective backlash of groups disadvantaged by that order. The latter now appears to have taken control of the Republican Party, while the Democratic Party remains firmly in the grip of the liberal establishment. Liberals within the Republican Party are now either silent or openly aligning with the Democrats.

The same applies at the international level. Vice President J. D. Vance's speech at the Munich Security Conference<sup>17</sup> and the late-February confrontation

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<sup>16</sup> Tyler Pager, 'Trump Orders Gutting of 7 Agencies, Including Voice of America's Parent', *The New York Times*, 15 March 2025.

<sup>17</sup> J. D. Vance, 'Remarks by the Vice President at the Munich Security Conference', *Office of the Vice President of the United States*, 14 February, 2025.

between Trump, Vance, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House clarified that the US position on the global ideological spectrum has undergone a qualitative rupture, placing it in direct opposition to forces that support the liberal ideological order. The illiberal political forces that had been marginalised in Europe during the post-Cold War era – such as President Viktor Orbán in Hungary and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) – have suddenly found a powerful new standard-bearer. The US is now abandoning the bipartisan consensus of liberal interventionism and neoconservatism that defined the post-Cold War small left-right spectrum, repositioning itself as a proponent of illiberal realism. This shift is exemplified by the tariff-based trade wars launched by the Trump administration. In the past, establishment-driven economic offensives against China were ideologically framed. For example, the Biden administration placed great emphasis on uniting liberal countries that share US values to jointly contain China's economic rise. In contrast, Trump's tariff wars target all countries, including liberal Western allies, with a pragmatism where interests override ideology. On the ideological spectrum of US foreign policy, the new divide can be described as follows: on the left, the illiberal realist 'revolutionary' faction, and on the right, the liberal conservative establishment faction.

The MAGA movement's impact on China is undoubtedly profound. Given the central role of US-China relations in shaping the 21st-century global order, its implications for the world are enormous. At present, US policy toward China is undergoing a rapid shift – from the Biden administration's comprehensive strategy of ideological, political, economic, and military alignment aimed at containment to a more unilateral economic confrontation driven by US interests. Whether this shift will persist remains to be seen. China's current approach appears to be measured counteraction while closely observing the evolving situation.

## Europe

A similar ideological fission that occurred in the US is unfolding in Europe, albeit with varying intensity and for both overlapping and distinct reasons. Intellectually, many European nations have been reflecting on liberalism for years. Europe's welfare state model has served as a partial counterbalance to

the inequality and fragmentation caused by US-style capitalism. However, in many social and cultural domains, the EU's transnational politics and the large influx of immigrants – especially from Muslim-majority countries – are also reshaping the original political fault lines within European nations.<sup>18</sup> Some countries have moved ahead of the US MAGA movement in seizing power and reshaping their socio-ideological structures, with Hungary and Poland being prominent examples and Italy potentially following suit. In major European nations, anti-liberal and illiberal political forces are steadily gaining ground. France's National Rally, Germany's AfD, and the political forces that emerged from Brexit in the United Kingdom command significant popular support and have the potential to seize national leadership. Similar trends are visible in several medium-sized states such as the Netherlands' Party for Freedom, Slovakia's Direction – Social Democracy, Austria's Freedom Party of Austria, as well as Romania, where Călin Georgescu (who was barred from running for the May 2025 elections) and George Simion (who won the first round of the election) have garnered notable influence. It is worth noting that the path to power for Europe's anti-liberal and illiberal forces differs from that in the US, where the MAGA movement rose to power by taking over the Republican Party. In contrast, in Europe, these forces are often building new parties from the bottom up – a factor that may result in greater resistance faced by illiberal and anti-liberal forces in Europe.

Due to Europe's diversity and number of countries, there has not yet emerged a political movement or organisation comparable to MAGA that spans the entire continent. For the time being, we may borrow Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's term 'illiberalism' to describe this political force that may be in the process of subverting Europe's liberal ideology and institutional framework.<sup>19</sup> Despite operating within very different domestic political environments, these parties share highly similar stances on many political and policy issues. They are united in calling for stricter immigration policies; for them,

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<sup>18</sup> Since the 2008 global financial crisis, Europe has seen a surge of political and intellectual works reflecting on liberalism, expressing concern over multiculturalism, globalisation, and the erosion of national identity. For example, French right-wing commentator Éric Zemmour harshly criticised liberalism and immigration policy in *La France n'a pas dit son dernier mot* (2021). Former German Bundesbank board member Thilo Sarrazin argued in *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (2010) that large-scale Muslim immigration would undermine Germany's culture, education, and social cohesion.

<sup>19</sup> On 26 July 2014, at the 25th Bálványos Summer Free University and Student Camp, Viktor Orbán introduced the concept of 'illiberalism', stating that Hungary was building an illiberal state. He cited countries such as Singapore and China as successful models that had achieved economic development without being liberal states.

immigration is not merely an economic issue but, more importantly, a matter of culture and identity. The perceived dilution and erosion of European culture and society caused by large-scale Muslim immigration has been a critical source of illiberal thought in Europe for decades. At the same time, these parties reject wokeism, which largely originates in the US, insisting that Europe must uphold its Christian cultural foundations. This sense of crisis stemming from the perceived erosion of Western culture has led to an interesting phenomenon: some liberal political forces in European countries have, at least formally, diverged from the US brand of identity-based liberalism when it comes to so-called multiculturalism. Some even advocate for enforcing societal secularism through legal measures, such as France's legislation banning Muslim women from wearing face veils in public.

Meanwhile, the determination of European illiberals to preserve cultural authenticity has made most illiberal parties and organisations across various countries oppose the expansion of the EU's political power and the liberal ideology behind it, advocating instead for the preservation of national sovereignty, cultural integrity, and social structures. In foreign affairs outside the EU, the most significant common ground among Europe's illiberal forces is their pro-Russian stance. With the exception of Italy and Poland, nearly all illiberal parties advocate rapprochement with Russia and, to varying degrees, oppose continued support for Ukraine.

Trump's re-election in 2024 has provided a strong boost to illiberal thought and politics in Europe. Whether these forces will be able to capitalise on this momentum to expand their influence and capture more governments in the coming years – or whether they will instead be constrained by the negative impact of the Trump administration's interest-driven 'America First' policies – remains to be seen.

For China, Europe's illiberal ideology and politics have a longer history than in the US, offering valuable points of reference. A clear pattern is that several major illiberal parties and states are particularly friendly towards China. Hungary stands out as the most pro-China government in Europe, and Serbia shares a similar orientation. Germany's AfD has also maintained a consistently positive stance toward China over the years. Of course, there are illiberal parties that are more hawkish on China, such as those in Poland and Italy, but even

these have not been more hardline than the liberal regimes – including the EU itself – toward China. Likewise, some traditional liberal governments have been relatively moderate, such as Spain, which maintains a strong relationship with China.

## Russia and Other Western Illiberal Forces

In the ongoing fission and evolution of the global ideological spectrum, Russia is unquestionably a central player. If we were to place countries on the emerging grand left-right spectrum, Russia would undoubtedly fall on the far-left end among the anti-liberal revolutionary forces. In the global transformation of the ideological spectrum, Russia stands out as the worthiest subject of study and analysis. In the post-Cold War era, Russia has experienced one of the most complete cycles of national transformation. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's ideology tilted wholly toward Western liberalism: its political system, economic structure, and socio-cultural values were comprehensively modelled on those of the West. Economically, Russia's neoliberalism has gone even further than that of the US. However, during Yeltsin's decade in power, the Russian state suffered a dramatic decline, slipping from a global superpower to something close to a failed state. Even so, when Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency in 2000, he initially continued along the path of Westernisation, even expressing Russia's willingness to join NATO.<sup>20</sup>

Yet, Russia stands in sharp contrast to the other former Soviet states. While some smaller Eastern European countries fully embraced liberalism and were subsequently economically, culturally, and structurally absorbed into the Western order, Russia's size and historical trajectory made such swift integration unfeasible. What cannot be integrated must be guarded against. In the more than two decades following the Cold War, the West abandoned the posture

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<sup>20</sup> Following the 9/11 attacks, Vladimir Putin swiftly declared in a televised address his support for the US-led anti-terror coalition. He expressed Russia's willingness to assist the Northern Alliance, permit US military access to Central Asia, and signalled interest in securing American concessions on trade and security in exchange for counterterrorism cooperation. These included lifting Cold War-era trade restrictions, debt restructuring, accession to the World Trade Organisation, and – most crucially – a postponement or cancellation of NATO's eastward expansion. Putin even left open the possibility of Russia eventually joining NATO. See: Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution* (Scribner, 2005), 83–84.

and promises made to not expand NATO after the end of the Cold War.<sup>21</sup> Instead, NATO expanded eastward to include most former Warsaw Pact countries and many former Soviet republics, thereby pressing up against Russia's borders.

At the same time, Russia's own situation underwent significant changes. Putin led Russia to a broad economic and social recovery through the centralisation of power and by effectively leveraging the rise in energy prices brought about by global economic growth. Russia's international status correspondingly improved. During this process of collapse and recovery, Russia's elites and various social strata began to reflect on the comprehensive Westernisation that followed the Cold War.<sup>22</sup> Politically, Russia could not immediately break through the liberal constitution established after the end of the Cold War. However, Putin's administration used various legal mechanisms to bypass the liberal intent of the constitution and achieve the illiberal political outcomes that Russia required. The most striking example is Putin's continued hold on power through the strategic swapping of presidential and prime ministerial roles with Medvedev. Socially, Putin consolidated the once highly fragmented liberal civil society which had been in opposition to the government and re-shaped it into a relatively unified social structure. The media has also gradually shifted from its previous liberal orientation to an ecosystem largely aligned with the state's overall interests. The economic dimension is relatively complex. In the decade following the Cold War, privatisation led to Russia's economy becoming controlled by Western capital and oligarchs, effectively transforming it into an extreme neoliberal economy. After coming to power, Putin eliminated oligarchs with political ambitions, consolidated those willing to develop under the authority of the state, and rebuilt several state-owned enterprises,

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<sup>21</sup> In 1990, then US Secretary of State Baker made an informal assurance to Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO would not expand 'one inch eastward'. In the decades that followed, however, NATO expanded steadily and initiated 'intensive dialogues' with Ukraine and Georgia, bringing military borders closer to Russia's doorstep. To many Russian elites, this was a fundamental violation of the postwar European security consensus. The resulting strategic squeeze intensified Russia's sense of insecurity. See: Timothy J. Colton, *Russia: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 121–125.

<sup>22</sup> For example, Alexander Dugin, a leading figure of 'neo-Eurasianism', argued that Russian civilisation is distinct from both East and West and should be founded on the values of state, nation, and religion to resist Western cultural and political encroachment. Yevgeny Primakov promoted the idea of a 'multipolar world', emphasising that Russia should act as an independent great power in international affairs, rather than follow a US-led unipolar order. See: Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, vol. 1 (Arktos, 2012); Yevgeny Primakov, *Russian Crossroads: Toward the New Millennium* (Yale University Press, 2008).

primarily in the energy sector.<sup>23</sup> Russia's economy recovered relatively rapidly during Putin's first two terms.

In terms of cultural values, the Putin era witnessed the re-establishment of Russia's core traditional culture. Russian Orthodox Christianity has come to shape a comprehensive sense of identity across all aspects of the country's political and social structures. From the collapse of Soviet ideology, through a phase of wholesale liberal transformation, to a return to its thousand-year-old religious and cultural traditions – and building sustainable social cohesion on this foundation – Russia has achieved a remarkable transformation. In terms of cultural values, Russia has become an ideologically emblematic state for non-liberal and anti-liberal forces across the world. Many of Russia's 'anti-woke' policies strongly resonate with non-liberals in the West.<sup>24</sup> Non-liberal political movements in various European countries generally regard Russia as an ideological ally, a sentiment shared by numerous anti-liberal institutions and anti-woke figures in the US as well.<sup>25</sup>

From NATO's plan for continued eastward expansion in 2008 to the Crimea conflict in 2014, the tensions between Russia and the US-led Western military alliance reached a boiling point during the Ukraine conflict in 2022, culminating in a complete rupture. Building on its political, economic, and cultural foundations, this break with the West has made Russia the world's foremost non-liberal or anti-liberal power, occupying a distinct and pivotal position on the emerging new grand left-right ideological spectrum and continuing to shape its evolution worldwide.

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<sup>23</sup> David M. Kotz and Fred Weir, *Russia's Path from Gorbachev to Putin: The Demise of the Soviet System and the New Russia* [《从戈尔巴乔夫到普京的俄罗斯道路：苏联体制的终结和新俄罗斯》], trans. Li Xiuhui [李秀慧译], (China Renmin University Press [中国人民大学出版社], 2015).

<sup>24</sup> In his 2013 speech at the Valdai Discussion Club, Putin explicitly criticised European countries for 'rejecting their roots, including Christian values' and emphasised that Russia must defend values that have developed over millennia. In the same year, Russia passed an anti-LGBTQ law, which banned 'promoting non-traditional sexual relations' to minors. In 2023, Russia implemented a full ban on legal gender change for transgender people and imposed restrictions on related medical interventions.

<sup>25</sup> For example, Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene of the MAGA camp publicly praised Russia as 'a staunch defender of Christianity'. Former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn also repeatedly lauded Putin in public speeches for 'defending God and family'. In 2024, prominent US media personality Tucker Carlson travelled to Moscow to interview Putin in person, further amplifying Russia's symbolic role as an 'anti-woke culture ally'. See: 'Marjorie Taylor Greene Applauds Russia for "Protecting Christianity"', *Newsweek*, 8 April 2024; 'Mike Flynn Lauds President Putin's Words on "Family & God as Strong Values West is Destroying"', *Sputnik*, 23 February 2023; 'Interview to Tucker Carlson – President of Russia', *Kremlin.ru*, 8 February 2024.

Ideologically, Hungary is now the country most closely aligned with Russia. Under Viktor Orbán's leadership, Hungary has undergone a comprehensive political, cultural, and social transformation, laying claim to a model of governance and an ideological identity characterised as illiberal democracy.<sup>26</sup> With the continued rise of the MAGA movement, non-liberal forces in Western societies are likely to emerge in greater numbers, and some may gain political power. This will further promote and solidify the formation of the new grand left-right ideological spectrum at a practical level.

The trajectory of Russia's ideological evolution and development has profound implications for China, and vice versa. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequences of its wholesale liberalisation deeply influenced China's political and intellectual circles. China's engagement with globalisation after the 1990s – while maintaining Communist Party leadership and the ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics – was, to a large extent, shaped by lessons drawn from the Soviet and Russian experiences. Over the past decade, China and Russia have stood united in resisting the unipolar dominance of Western liberal ideology despite their own differences in ideology and political systems. The close partnership forged between China and Russia in the post-Cold War era, together with China's remarkable developmental success, has provided Russia with a powerful example for its own reflection on liberalisation.<sup>27</sup>

## The Global South

The Global South encompasses the vast majority of countries and regions outside the Western nations and Japan. It includes the poorest African states, the wealthiest West Asian oil powers, military powers such as Russia, and, of course, the two major developing countries, China and India. The Global South is highly diverse, with vast differences in culture, religion, history, eth-

<sup>26</sup> Zsuzsanna Szelényi, *Tainted Democracy: Viktor Orbán and the Subversion of Hungary* (Hurst Publishers, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> Sergei Glazyev, then economic advisor to the Russian president, argued that China's success – characterised by state-led development, long-term industrial policy, and a global strategy centred on the Belt and Road Initiative – offered a viable institutional model for Russia. In a speech at the Moscow Economic Forum, he emphasised that China's experience in channelling credit to the real economy and curbing financial bubbles is worth emulating as Russia pursues its own modernisation. See: Sergei Glazyev, *Leaping into the Future: China and Russia in the New World Tech-Economic Paradigm*, (Royal Collins Publishing Company, 2023); 'МЭФ-2023: № 2. «Китай. Опыт модернизации для России»', *Moscow Economic Forum*, 2023.

nicity, economic foundations, and social structures. Ideologically, many countries in the Global South were once caught within the 20th-century left-right political spectrum for various reasons. Some were former Western colonies, heavily influenced by Western political systems. Others took sides during the Cold War, adopting either the Soviet Union's leftist ideology or the capitalist systems and values of the US and the West. Most importantly, after the Cold War, most developing countries embraced the 'end of history' thesis, transplanting Western liberal political systems wholesale into their own countries – many even copying constitutions verbatim.<sup>28</sup> This led to the artificial replication of the Western 'small left-right' spectrum in many Global South nations.

As this post-Cold War 'small left-right' spectrum rapidly collapses, the trajectory of the Global South deserves close attention. Most Global South countries will gradually disengage from liberal ideology and shift toward the non-liberal and anti-liberal side of the new grand left-right spectrum. There are two main reasons for this. First, most Global South countries inherently lack the ideological 'genes' of liberalism; their liberal values and systems were transplanted rather than homegrown. Many of these countries' cultures and values are fundamentally anti-liberal. The Islamic world is a striking example: countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, despite their close economic and security ties with the United States, have successfully resisted liberal politics and values at the ideological level. Most Islamic countries – such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Turkey – are likely moving in a non-liberal or even anti-liberal direction. The second reason is that the post-Cold War embrace of liberal ideology and institutions yielded disappointing results and unsatisfactory economic development. In stark contrast, China, which rejected liberalism, has emerged as the winner of globalisation – a fact whose significance has become increasingly clear.<sup>29</sup>

The ideological relationship between China and the Global South has evolved through three eras. After the founding of the People's Republic, China actively participated in and helped lead Third World political thought. Beginning with the Bandung Conference, China was a core member of the Non-Aligned

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<sup>28</sup> Eric Li, *Party Life: Chinese Governance and the World Beyond Liberalism* (Springer Nature, 2023), 18–21.

<sup>29</sup> Li, *Party Life: Chinese Governance and the World Beyond Liberalism*, 37–45.

Movement. Although its stance differed from that of the Soviet Union within the Cold War framework, China's orientation was clearly leftist and socialist. In the post-Cold War era, China became ideologically estranged from the former leftist Third World countries while economically integrating into the Western-led globalised economy. Politically, however, China rejected the liberal ideology that the West sought to universalise, while the vast majority of developing countries adopted liberalism and implemented political systems based on it. Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, China's relationship with the Global South has entered a third stage. Through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Three Global Initiatives, and the vision of a Community with a Shared Future for Humanity, China and the broader Global South are shaping an entirely new era of political thought – one that will be inherently non-liberal and transcend the 20th-century left-right spectrum.

## **The New Grand Ideological Spectrum: Liberalism versus Illiberalism**

Across global media, academia, political circles, and even corporate and financial sectors, a new grand left-right ideological spectrum appears to be emerging. The right consists of the universalist liberal unipolar camp, while the left is composed of non-liberal and anti-liberal multipolar forces. On the ideological front, right-wing representatives continue to uphold the liberal unipolar structure of the post-Cold War era and persist in promoting the universalisation of liberal ideology and political systems worldwide. The most influential political forces within this camp are the still-powerful US establishment, followed by the other Five Eyes countries, US allies in the Pacific, and mainstream political forces within the European Union. The left, by contrast, consists of a broad camp of diverse illiberal and anti-liberal governments and political forces. While the internal differences within the right lie mainly in degrees, the left exhibits a much greater diversity. What unites the right is a shared interest in maintaining liberalism's ideological dominance in the world, albeit to varying extents. What unites the left, on the other hand, is a shared interest in rejecting liberal unipolar hegemony – though their visions for the future differ.

The differences within the right can be broadly categorised into two camps: the universalist hardliners and the advocates for multipolar coexistence. The for-

mer Biden administration and the EU's mainstream political forces are aligned with the universalist hardliners, as evidenced by their stance toward China. In recent years, the US, the Five Eyes alliance, NATO, Australia, the EU establishment, and certain EU member states have increasingly positioned China as a strategic competitor or adversary. In their policy documents, beyond highlighting conflicts of interest with China, they consistently cite ideology as one of the primary criteria for designating China as an adversary.<sup>30</sup> When calling on allies to unite in containing China – whether for trade-related or military interests – they routinely invoke shared values as a key rallying cry. The multipolar coexistence advocates are the moderates within the right. While they believe in liberal values and support policies and laws based on liberal ideology domestically, they take a more moderate approach toward universalising liberalism. They oppose the aggressive imposition of liberal ideology on other nations through economic or military means and instead favour peaceful coexistence with non-liberal countries and societies. Spain's Sánchez government, France's left-wing party led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, New Zealand within the Five Eyes group, and US Asia-Pacific allies such as South Korea and Japan can, to varying degrees, be classified as advocates of multipolar coexistence. Argentina's right-wing Milei administration is ideologically aligned with extreme liberalism – particularly in its embrace of radical neoliberal economic policies. While initially highly antagonistic toward China, it has adopted a relatively more moderate stance after taking office and can likely be classified as part of the multipolar coexistence camp.

The left wing of the new grand left-right spectrum is also fragmented and can tentatively be categorised into three main groups: anti-liberal political forces emerging within the West, major powers that have undergone their own transformations, and explorers seeking new paths of progress. The first group consists of the US MAGA movement and various non-liberal and anti-liberal governments and parties in Europe. The second group comprises China and Russia. The third group includes the majority of developing countries in the

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30 For example, the National Security Strategy of the United States (2022) stated that China is 'the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to advance that objective'. In 2019, the European Commission published *EU-China: A Strategic Outlook*, which for the first time labelled China a systemic rival and competitor attempting to promote alternative models of governance.

Global South. The differences among these three groups lie in the distinct driving forces behind their non-liberal or anti-liberal orientations.

The first group includes the continually emerging anti-liberal political forces within the US and various European countries. Their ideological struggle targets their own liberal establishment elites, and they believe that the liberal global order established by these elites has betrayed the interests of their own people and sold out national sovereignty for the benefit of their own class. Economically, they generally oppose neoliberalism, arguing that extreme market fundamentalism has hollowed out domestic industries, concentrated wealth in the hands of a tiny elite, and eroded social structures. At the same time, they feel that the liberal values of the elite have evolved into extreme wokeism and immigration policies that promote openness to foreign cultures, leading to the erosion of traditional national cultures.

In the second group, China and Russia have had fundamentally different experiences under the liberal order. China achieved rapid development within the framework of Western-led globalisation while preserving its political system. Russia, by contrast, adopted Western political systems but suffered severe, near-fatal blows to its economy and security. China is seeking to build on its success and continue developing but it faces dual obstructions from the US and the West. Liberal political forces view China as an ideological and strategic adversary while anti-liberal political forces see China as a rival primarily due to economic interests. Trump's trade war was primarily driven by the latter. Russia, having learnt from its experience, has ideologically parted ways with liberalism, becoming the epicentre of global anti-liberal ideology and a primary target of the Western establishment. This conflict is irreconcilable and leaves no room for compromise. However, the Western anti-liberal forces in the first group do not have fundamental ideological disputes with Russia; in many areas, they even share commonalities. While their interests are not fully aligned with Russia's, they are not entirely opposed either. This tacit ideological understanding and the space for compromise on interests are clearly reflected in the current positions of the US and Russia on the conflict in Ukraine. However,

whether their relationship will move toward compromise or further conflict remains to be seen.<sup>31</sup>

The third group, composed of developing countries in the Global South, is both large and highly diverse. Most of these countries saw disappointing developmental outcomes following the adoption of liberal political systems after the Cold War. Many nations in Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America span the traditional left-right political spectrum, yet their development has been constrained by the liberal political framework. As a result, they are all exploring new ideas and alternative models. Examples include South Africa's government, rooted in the traditional left; and Asian countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and India, each with unique cultural and religious traditions. All are experimenting with non-liberal governance approaches within the frameworks of their post-Cold War liberal political systems. Additionally, some countries that have outright rejected liberal ideology and political systems – such as major Islamic states like Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as traditionally leftist countries like Venezuela – are also actively exploring and experimenting with ideologies and institutions suited to their survival and development in the post-grand left-right spectrum era.

Despite their vast internal diversity, the countries within this group share a common feature: a refusal to accept a universal ideology, political system, or unipolar global order imposed upon them or transplanted from outside. This rejection of universality and unipolarity defines a new illiberal bloc within the Global South – one that can be positioned on the left of the new ideological spectrum.

## **Multipolarism and 21st Century Re-Globalisation**

The world is undergoing a profound transformation marked by fragmentation on all fronts. Observing the present and predicting the future is as difficult as viewing the Big Dipper from due south. I propose a hypothesis: the global ideological spectrum is in transition. The left and right wings of the new

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<sup>31</sup> From an ideological perspective, the Trump administration aligned its narrative more closely with Russia and, in pursuit of strategic interests, was willing to sacrifice Ukraine in exchange for détente with Moscow. However, liberal establishment forces within the United States and the European Union strongly opposed this position.

spectrum are divided by their differing visions for the future of the world order. The left seeks a multipolar world order (multipolarism) while the right aims to preserve a unipolar world order (unipolarism). The ideological core of unipolarism is liberalism, which encompasses the full set of liberal values along with their claims to universality and singularity. The left, by contrast, is extremely diverse, encompassing all ideologies and values beyond liberalism, as well as certain political forces that hold liberal values but reject their universalisation. The left includes both anti-liberal and non-liberal elements; the latter merely oppose the universal and monolithic nature of liberalism. The ideologies of the left are highly varied, rooted in different religious, cultural, and political traditions. Their interests also differ greatly and sometimes even clash. Nevertheless, their greatest common denominator is opposition to liberal unipolarity. We can attempt to locate all nations, political parties, or other forms of political power on this new left-right spectrum.

Within this framework, the tension between multipolarism and unipolarism will constitute the primary contradiction in the first half of the 21st century. Historically and in practice, China is destined to be a major force in favour of multipolarism. At the practical level, the past few decades of globalisation have been built on an ideological foundation of liberalism. However, today's unipolar model of globalisation has become unsustainable. Interestingly, it is the Trump-led MAGA administration in the United States that is now working hardest to dismantle the unipolar world order, believing that unipolarity does not serve the interests of the populace it represents. While MAGA regards China as a rival, the world it envisions is also multipolar, much like China's vision. MAGA promotes a multipolar world through de-globalisation, which, however, conflicts with China's objectives.

China and the overwhelming majority of countries in the Global South must continue to develop, which requires further enhancing connectivity. Meanwhile, humanity faces existential global challenges – including climate change, nuclear proliferation, artificial intelligence, and others – which require cooperation among nations. Under the current wave of de-globalisation promoted by the US and the West, China and the Global South must champion a re-globalisation grounded in a multipolar ideological narrative, seeking both sustained development and solutions to humanity's existential crises. Historically, China has been both the originator and advocate of a multipolar world

order. In March 1990, Deng Xiaoping became the first political leader in the world to formally introduce the concept of ‘multipolarity’.<sup>32</sup> At a time when the global order was transitioning from bipolarity to unipolarity, Deng’s vision of a multipolar world was remarkably farsighted. Since then, the pursuit of multipolarity has become a cornerstone of China’s international political theory and strategy.<sup>33</sup> In 1997, a new global order based on multipolarity was formally introduced to the world stage through a joint Sino-Russian statement.<sup>34</sup>

Fast forward thirty years and China has proposed major global initiatives that concretise and strategise the vision for a multipolar world across three key dimensions: development, security, and civilisation.<sup>35</sup> These initiatives articulate China’s vision of an inclusive and pluralistic multipolarism, which stands in stark contrast and opposition to the liberal unipolar world. They represent the only viable path for humanity to sustain development and overcome existential crises. China is also the most capable nation today of actively leading the construction of a multipolar order. Its experience of successfully engaging in globalisation while maintaining its own political system and path offers valuable lessons for many nations in the Global South. In modern times, China combined communist ideology with the struggle for national liberation to achieve the founding of the modern state. In contemporary times, it has further integrated Marxism and the market economy with traditional Chinese culture.<sup>36</sup> This represents a key embodiment and example of the pluralistic foundations

<sup>32</sup> Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, vol. 3 [《邓小平文选》第三卷] (People’s Publishing House [人民出版社], 1993), 353.

<sup>33</sup> Yu Sui, ‘We Must Uphold the Central Committee’s Theory of World Multipolarisation’ [‘必须维护党中央的世界多极化理论’], *China Strategic Review* [《中国战略观察》], no. 3–4 (2022).

<sup>34</sup> Joint Statement of the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation on World Multipolarisation and the Establishment of a New International Order [《中华人民共和国和俄罗斯联邦关于世界多极化和建立国际新秩序的联合声明》], 23 April 1997.

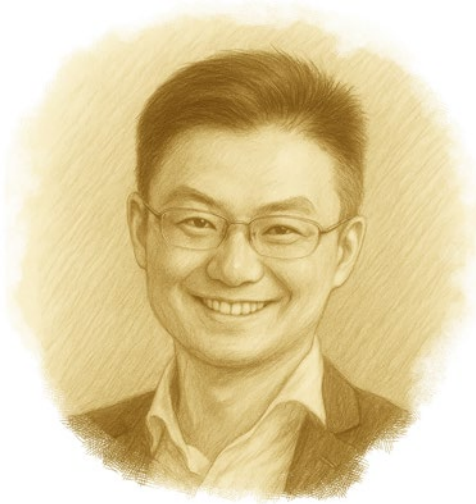
<sup>35</sup> In the Global Development Initiative, China emphasises principles such as ‘development first’ and ‘technology for all’, aiming to restructure the global centre–periphery model and reduce developing countries’ dependence on a single financial and technological system. The Global Security Initiative advances concepts like ‘common security’, ‘indivisible security’, and ‘regional leadership’, with the goal of promoting multicentric and coordinated global governance. Meanwhile, the Global Civilisation Initiative advocates civilisational diversity and equality, criticises value exportation, cultural hegemony, and ideological demarcation; and seeks to break the liberal paradigm’s monopoly over global discourse. Together, the three initiatives constitute a trinitarian vision of global governance with Chinese characteristics, reflecting a vision of international order centred on decentralisation, multipolarity, and de-ideologisation.

<sup>36</sup> In his speech marking the centenary of the founding of the CPC, President Xi Jinping proposed a major theoretical proposition: to integrate the basic principles of Marxism with China’s concrete realities and with fine traditional Chinese culture – a formulation known as the Two Integrations.

needed for re-globalisation. To achieve the vision of a multipolar world order, China's strategic interest lies in uniting all forces that can be united ideologically. Contradictions are inevitable among multipolar states and political forces, and they will undergo phases of tension, conflict, and compromise. However, the principal contradiction in today's world is between multipolarism and unipolarism. Only the victory of multipolarism can achieve a 21st-century re-globalisation – aligned with the long-term interests of both China and the world – and pave the way for building a community with a shared future for humanity.



# Towards a World Order without Hegemony: A Proposal from the Global South



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In 1994, Marxist political economist Chen Qiren taught a specialised course on global economic development to young doctoral students in the Department of International Politics at Fudan University.<sup>1</sup> China was still in the early phase of Reform and Opening-Up and the recent decline of the Cold War had ushered in an era of heightened triumphalism in the United States. This political hubris was accompanied by the global expansion of neoliberal economic policies. At such a crucial juncture, the question of where the world economy was headed also induced an epochal confusion about China's own path of economic development. By contrast, the US, steeped in a triumphalist mood, exuded unparalleled intellectual confidence. Western economists, such as Milton Friedman, Paul Samuelson, and

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: Chen Qiren (1924–2017) was a Marxist political economist from Xinhui, Guangdong Province, who taught at Fudan University and made major contributions to the study of imperialism and colonial political economy. He authored 25 monographs and over 150 articles, and led a National Social Science Fund project on Marxist international political economy. In 2012, he received the Shanghai Academic Contribution Award in Philosophy and Social Sciences.

Joseph Schumpeter, quickly became the focus of intense study among Chinese intellectuals and students.

In the historical context of the late twentieth century, the slogan of ‘looking to the West’ expressed the Chinese people’s genuine aspiration for modern technologies and material progress, peace and stability, and better living standards. It also reflected the bold resolve of the early Reform and Opening-Up era – a pragmatic and unconventional willingness to explore all practical and theoretical possibilities in the quest for modernisation. Amid the turbulent tides of the times, what lay ahead was not a well-trodden path mapped out by predecessors, but an open doorway shrouded in darkness. We could dimly perceive figures ahead holding torches and beckoning us forward but had no inkling whether the space separating us from them contained chasms or avenues, pitfalls or smooth paths, a sea of blood or a green pasture. How to move forward and what would be encountered along the way were matters that required self-reflection.

In this era of profound and uncertain changes, the teleological questions of *why* and *for whom* we develop were just as critical as the directional and strategic questions of *how* and *where* to develop. It was Chen Qiren’s relentless inquiry into these two teleological questions that led him, amid the great transformations of the early Reform and Opening-Up, to argue that the ‘works on development economics’ available in bookstores were, by their nature, ‘not the kind of the textbooks I was looking for’. Chen pointed out that when applied to the unique challenges faced by ‘nationally independent states’, Western development economics suffered from a ‘methodological deficiency’. This universal knowledge only studied ‘quantitative and functional relationships in economic relations without addressing the relations of production’. It failed to distinguish between different relations of production in ‘history and in real life,’ nor did it grasp how concrete, complex relations of production constrain abstract economic laws.<sup>2</sup>

The realisation that knowledge of development originating in the advanced Western countries cannot be adapted to the practices of developing countries is not a novel insight that appeared out of thin air but the outcome of a long historical process in which the Third World sought autonomous development.

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<sup>2</sup> Chen Qiren, *Research on World Economic Development* (Shanghai People’s Publishing House, 2002), 298.

On 10 April 1974, in his speech to a special session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Deng Xiaoping emphasised the Third World's common task of 'opposing colonialism, neo-colonialism and great-power hegemonism, developing the national economies, and building their respective countries'. The purpose of such development was to change 'the present extremely unequal international economic relations'.<sup>3</sup> The political independence won by the former colonies and semi-colonies in the aftermath of the World Anti-Fascist War fundamentally transformed the existing international political order which had taken shape alongside the emergence of the world market. At the level of international law, empires as political entities had formally exited the historical stage. Yet the global economic structure, relations of production, and attendant cultural, legal, and social orders formed during imperialist expansion persisted despite the formal exit of empires. On the contrary, imperialism, as an epistemological framework, remained deeply entrenched in the existing structure of the world market whose foundation lies in how 'big industry has brought all the people of the Earth into contact with each other' and 'merged all local markets into one world market'.<sup>4</sup>

This imperialist epistemology emphasises the importance of hegemony in sustaining order, balance, and stability. Derived from European historical experience, this model of imperial order seeks to maintain peace through unipolar hegemonic monopoly or hegemonic alliances with balance-of-power mechanisms, and manages other countries and regions via various forms of interventionism.<sup>5</sup> This model has failed to bring peace to the world. On the contrary, the old hegemonic order has proliferated the Hobbesian trap of mutual fear between nations – destructive cycles of trade competition experienced in European history have been projected on to the entire world.

Interconnected but highly uneven economic development formed the material foundation of the old order. Fuelled by a sense of panic over finite resources, the old order's epistemology regards monopolising limited resources as a fundamental imperative for survival. Such resources include not only the

<sup>3</sup> Deng Xiaoping, 'Speech at the Sixth Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly', *People's Daily*, 11 April 1974.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Engels, *The Principles of Communism*, vol. 1, *Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975), 81–97.

<sup>5</sup> See A. F. Pollard, 'The Balance of Power', *Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1923): 51–64.

natural endowments but also the foundational conditions affecting agricultural production, such as soil fertility and climatic environment. The core of the old order's conception of land and wealth was to possess as many of these naturally finite resources as possible. Within this framework, it was assumed that one could not alter the fundamental limitation of natural resources. Consequently, the acquisition of wealth was viewed as an absolute zero-sum game: one party's gain necessarily entailed another's loss. All political-economic discourse under the old order correspondingly revolved around the rationalisation of unequal distribution. In other words, this hegemony-centric conception of order can be understood as a philosophy rooted in finitude and inequality.

An alternative epistemology believes in human agency. Cooperation and mutual assistance among people can not only maximise the utility of limited resources, but also *transform* the world into a space more suitable for harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature over a long historical process. This transformation encompasses two dimensions. The first is the material dimension: advancements in agricultural technology, the invention and discovery of new energy sources, and the exploration and innovations in engineering and science, all of which underpin the essential foundations of human survival and development. The second is at the level of social organisation: a spiritual quest – corresponding to material progress – to continuously explore organisational forms that are more inclusive and effective, better adapted to the survival of large-scale communities, better able to ensure the universal benefits of material progress, guarantee the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature, and liberate humanity from the shackles of resource finitude and the trap of unequal development.

These contrasting epistemologies give rise to two fundamentally different approaches to understanding the international order. The hegemony-centred conception of order, premised on finite resources, sees competition as its foundational principle, treats *order* as a political resource amenable to monopolisation, and regards great powers as the sole leaders of the international order, with the aim of expanding their own material and political monopolies, all based on preserving the unequal status quo. This perspective is plainly evident in Western anxiety surrounding challenges to the US-led 'rules-based order'.

The alternative conception of order finds concrete expression in the practice of resistance against the great-power monopolies. This resistance also comprises two dimensions. Politically, the independence movements of former colonial and semi-colonial nations after the World Anti-Fascist War constituted resistance to great-power monopolies. Economically, modernisation through delinking from dependency served as the material bedrock for securing political independence. Neither of these practical dimensions can be adequately theorised by a hegemony-centric epistemology. In fact, dissatisfaction with Western modernisation theories was closely intertwined with frustration at the economic and political monopolies of the great powers. The United Nations platform became an important platform for the vast number of countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to express this dissatisfaction and attempt to change this monopolistic structure.

At the same UNGA session where Deng Xiaoping delivered his speech, the *Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order* was adopted. The declaration stressed that the new order ‘shall be founded on justice, sovereign equality, mutual interdependence, common interests and cooperation among all nations’, with the objectives of ‘rectifying inequalities and existing injustices, enabling the elimination of the widening gap between developed and developing countries,’ while ensuring that equality and peaceful development are bequeathed to future generations. To attain these objectives, the declaration stipulated that countries shall have the right to integrate and develop their resources through nationalisation to guarantee benefits for their own people; formerly colonial and semi-colonial countries may claim compensation from their former colonial powers; the activities of transnational corporations must be regulated to ensure they contribute to the economic development of host nations; and the international monetary system should facilitate the development of developing countries.<sup>6</sup>

The emergence of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) was the outcome of the sustained struggle for sovereignty by former colonial and semi-colonial nations. These struggles took place largely beyond the United Nations framework, manifesting in localised anti-colonial and anti-hegemonic armed resistance, alongside regional initiatives of trade cooperation and mutual

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 3201 (S-VI), Declaration on the Establishment of a New International Economic Order, A/RES/3201(S-VI) (1 May 1974).

assistance. At the international level, the contradictions between the United States and the Soviet Union – and the competing models of international order they embodied – constituted the basic geopolitical precondition for these struggles. The contradictions between the US and the USSR included not only an arms race but also a competition to expand their respective international influence.

During the early Cold War, ‘trade wars’ took the form of the US establishing trade alliances while imposing embargoes and containment measures against the USSR. In 1949, the US enacted the Export Control Act which mandated an embargo on all products that might contribute to the USSR’s military and economic development. From 1949 to 1994, through the Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (COCOM) – an informal, secretive international alliance – the US enforced embargoes and trade restrictions against the USSR and the entire socialist bloc. Under the pretext of ‘the countering of communist economic penetration’, the US passed the 1962 Trade Expansion Act which severely restricted imports of ‘products of any country or area dominated or controlled by international communism’.<sup>7</sup>

The trade wars of this era garnered broad support from US political and business elites. It safeguarded the economic and technological superiority of the Western states while undermining the hopes of developing countries to achieve economic autonomy through diversified trade circulation. In containing the USSR and its efforts to forge international trade relations, the US and its allies further ensnared developing nations in unequal, dependent relationships. The trade war waged by the Trump administration today has revived almost the same script as that of the Cold War era.

Under these pressures, politically independent nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America began to demand genuine freedom to trade at the United Nations. At the plenary sessions of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964, Che Guevara stressed that ‘the right of all peoples to unrestricted freedom of trade’ must be established, and that all signatory countries should ‘refrain from restraining trade in any manner,

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Mastanduno, *Economic Containment, CoCom and the Politics of East-West Trade* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 63.

direct or indirect'.<sup>8</sup> The UNCTAD was formally established with the mission of advancing 'trade liberalisation'.<sup>9</sup> Its primary target of contention was the United States, which was then pursuing a trade war. The first Secretary-General of UNCTAD was Raúl Prebisch of Argentina, who emphasised that the body's mission should be 'to promote international trade... particularly trade between countries at different stages of development, between developing countries and between countries with different systems of economic and social organisation'.<sup>10</sup> This stance stood in sharp contrast to the US-led embargo against the socialist bloc at the time.

The attempt to establish a New International Economic Order was just one in a series of historical efforts by Asian, African, and Latin American nations to pursue genuine development. In the resolutions adopted at the 1955 Bandung Conference, diverse attempts at order-building with profound implications for international law could already be seen. The resolutions reached among Asian and African countries on political, economic, cultural, and educational matters embody the basic spirit of mutual assistance and cooperation. Through solidarity movements, fragmented Asian and African nations united to resist pressure from major powers and strengthen their internal economic resilience. Through cooperation and exchange, they aimed to deepen understanding among their peoples and achieve decolonisation and liberation on cultural and educational fronts. The final communiqué of Bandung Conference, with its call for 'fuller economic, cultural, and political cooperation', asserted that true decolonisation and independence could only be achieved through solidarity and mutual assistance. With regard to economic cooperation, the communiqué explicitly stated that 'proposals with regard to economic cooperation within the participating countries do not preclude either the desirability or the need for cooperation with countries outside the region, including the investment of foreign capital'.<sup>11</sup> It is evident that from at least the Bandung Conference onwards, the dual orientation of South-South cooperation and North-South dialogue had already taken shape, conceived as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

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8 Ernesto Che Guevara, 'On Development', 25 March 1964.

9 UNCTAD, *Proceedings*, I: 26, 27, 32, 41.

10 UNCTAD, *Proceedings*, I: 15.

11 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 'Final Communiqué of the Asia-Africa Conference' (24 April 1955).

This understanding is rooted in a clear recognition of the basic developmental conditions of Asian and African nations. After gaining formal independence, former colonial and semi-colonial countries could not acquire substantive capacity for decolonised development overnight. Over the long history of colonial globalisation, colonial powers spent centuries constructing a relatively complete global colonial economic circuit centred on themselves. The circuit was primarily built on a land-based colonial economic model before the eighteenth century. The occupation of colonial territories and the transformation of production fundamentally altered the natural landscapes, ecologies, and even demographic structures of the colonies. Africa and the Americas, transformed by the colonial economy, formed the basic framework of the international division of labour that exists today. Originally diverse local economic communities were converted into components with ‘comparative advantages’, organised under colonial metropolises to form parts of the world system. These components each served distinct roles: the Caribbean as a centre of sugar production; South America and Central Africa as suppliers of minerals; Southeast Asia and Oceania as producers of rubber and fertilisers; West and East Africa as exporters of cocoa and coffee; and Asia and Africa as reservoirs of labour. During this long process of colonial economic globalisation, earlier small-scale regional or local economic circuits were entirely dismantled. Moreover, the ecological foundations that once sustained these economic circuits were severely damaged by large-scale plantations, the slave trade, and resource extraction.

Another foundation underpinning this globalisation was oceanic shipping. As the scale of the colonial land economy continued to expand, trade between different colonial settlements and between colonial powers and other major economies worldwide – including China – further impacted the land-based fiscal models of colonial nations. From the eighteenth century onwards, early mercantilist thinking, grounded in land-based finance and focused on the export of labour products in exchange for precious metals, was gradually supplanted by a new mercantilism that placed greater emphasis on economic exchange and the flow of imports and exports. In contrast to the earlier view that wealth was created through land-based production, the new theory stressed that trade itself could generate wealth. As the scale of trade flows expanded, the speed of wealth accumulation among the emerging commercial bourgeoisie in the core nations accelerated. This large-scale, rapid accumulation of capital

provided the essential primitive capital for Britain's Industrial Revolution. Such accumulation did not arise out of nothing; it was built upon the fundamental structure of the international division of labour established by the colonial land-based economy. At this juncture, a corporate global system began to take form, with industrialised metropolises as headquarters and colonies and semi-colonies as its departments.

The highly organised structure underpinning this corporate global system evolved over the long history of imperialist globalisation. By the mid-twentieth century – during the decolonisation movements of Asia, Africa, and Latin America – the newly independent states were confronted with a tightly organised colonial apparatus of military, bureaucracy, and education, together with a highly developed economic and financial system. In the face of such hegemonic power, the only way out for nations seeking independence was to unite to form larger communities. They needed to build self-sufficient domestic communities as swiftly as possible through regional circulation, international aid from friendly nations, and forms of engagement that did not completely decouple from the former metropolises – all to enable the shift from formal equality to substantive equity. This entailed reducing their high dependence on industrialised Global North nations – the former colonisers – across economic, cultural, and governance spheres.

The national liberation movements across Asia, Africa, and Latin America were also movements of regional solidarity. The international order, institutions, and legal principles envisaged in this process placed the empowerment and development of states at the centre. This empowerment operates at two levels: First, organisational empowerment at the domestic level. Many underdeveloped countries faced significant constraints in natural resources, fiscal capacity, and human capital, which severely limited their nation-building efforts. At this stage, modern political parties and relevant organisations were crucial for mobilising scarce social resources. Second, cooperative empowerment at the international level. Imperialism and hegemony, as systemic forms of oppression, could not be overcome through blind decoupling or by the isolated efforts of any single nation – collective struggle and mutual cooperation among underdeveloped countries was therefore critical. Such cooperation and mutual assistance were premised on non-interference in internal affairs and the voluntary and autonomous participation by all nations. Supporting 'oppressed

peoples and other developing countries in their just struggles to win and safeguard their independence and develop their economies' is explicitly recognised in China's constitution, Mao Zedong identified non-interference and mutual assistance as the hallmarks of 'true internationalism'.<sup>12</sup> This principle of non-interference in international order comes from both China's own historical experience and the collective historical experience of the Global South.

Whether referring to today's Global South, the former Third World, or the earlier Tricontinental, these terms all encapsulate oppressed people's dissatisfaction with the hegemonic order and their aspiration to end dependence and achieve modernisation through solidarity and mutual assistance. In contrast to the hegemon-centred perspective, the Global South affirms the agency of the governed and the oppressed. The Global South does not represent a 'subaltern' viewpoint, in the sense of late twentieth-century Western post-colonial academia, rather it represents the historical and theoretical significance of the concrete practices of resistance, struggle, and exploration. Within this long historical continuity, China's relentless exploration for a path to modernisation, as part of this diverse practice and as a form of resistance to the hegemonic order, thereby acquires true theoretical universality. The aim of such anti-hegemonic practice is to construct an order free from hegemony.

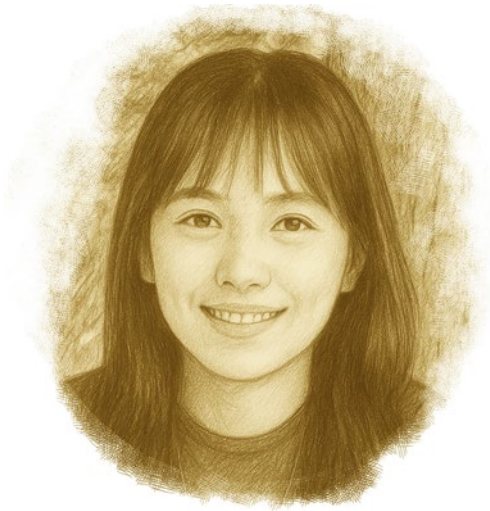
A philosophy of practice is the only way to understand the Global South. This means that when the goal is to establish a non-hegemonic order, all attempts become transitional steps toward that future. It is precisely through conscious engagement in this transition that the Global South can truly assert its agency. In the movement towards a Global South order, all the subjects united by this historical process, in turn, imbue the Global South with meaning. This is the significance of discussing the Global South today, and the fundamental purpose of such discussions is to dismantle the structure that produces the challenges facing the Global South.

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<sup>12</sup> The State Council, 'Constitution of the People's Republic of China', The People's Republic of China; Central Committee of the Communist Party of China Literature Research Office, *Chronology of Mao Zedong (1949-1976)* Vol. 5 (Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2013), 212.



## Review: A Collective Path to Rural Revitalisation



**Grace Cao (曹心悦)** is the project manager of *Wenhua Zongheng* and a Chinese-English interpreter. She holds a master's degree in translation and interpreting from China Foreign Affairs University. Her work focuses on international communication and exchanges across the Global South, in particular cross-cultural understanding and linguistics.

Capitalist globalisation has profoundly transformed the global food system since the 19th century. This has pushed much of the world's peasantry into crisis. In most underdeveloped countries, land privatisation and integration into global markets have eroded food sovereignty and trapped rural communities in cycles of dispossession and debt. What some scholars term the 'corporate food regime' has systematically undermined millions of livelihoods while concentrating agricultural power in corporate hands.

Against this backdrop of systemic crisis, China's experience with collective land ownership presents a compelling alternative. Rather than representing a relic of the past, China's collective model has supported rural revitalisation and ensured national food security, offering a viable path forward for rural development.

*Rural Chronicles: Why the New Collective Economy Works* (乡村纪事：新型集体经济为什么行) by Yan Hairong, Gao Ming, and Ding Ling emerges as a crucial intervention from China into these debates. Based on years of meticulous fieldwork across seven distinct case

studies, Tsinghua University professor Yan Hairong and her research team demonstrate a people-centred, collective path to rural development that stands in sharp contrast to the neoliberal model. It serves as a materialist rebuttal to the prevailing narrative of the demise of the small peasant – an ideology that promotes the movement of peasants to cities and the drain of wealth from the countryside, leaving only specialised large households and leading enterprises as agricultural actors.

## **Confronting the Agrarian Question in Contemporary China**

*Rural Chronicles* addresses a critical challenge born from over four decades of China's Household Responsibility System: the polarisation and atomisation of rural areas that left individual peasants acutely vulnerable to market volatility and the intervention of capital. To understand the significance of the collective path documented in *Rural Chronicles*, one must first grasp the deeper structural contradictions within China's current land system.

China operates a dual land ownership system: urban land is owned by the state and rural land is owned by collectives. The 1978 Household Responsibility System, introduced to address the problems of economic development at the time, established individual contracting rights while maintaining the framework of collective ownership. This system has since evolved into a 'three-rights separation structure' – collective ownership, household contracting rights, and management rights.

The fundamental contradiction lies in how this separation undermines collective agency. According to Lu Xinyu, collective land ownership was originally designed to serve community protective functions, allowing villages to adjust land distribution according to demographic changes and ensuring that the land belongs to those who work it. When management rights become tradable commodities, village collectives lose control over how external capital invests in and utilises community land. Smallholder agricultural operations yield lower economic returns from land-based production. Meanwhile, as urban-rural income disparities continue to expand, rural populations increasingly move to

the cities for employment, resulting in the widespread abandonment of agricultural land.<sup>1</sup>

One response to this crisis is transferring land to leading enterprises or external capital for scaled agriculture. This is essentially a market-based solution to agricultural modernisation. Critics argue that this constitutes de facto land privatisation and dispossesses peasants of land-use rights while dismantling collective economies. From this context, the authors of *Rural Chronicles* pose the fundamental question: under marketised conditions, how can new collective economies develop that transcend both the vulnerabilities of atomised peasants and the risks of capital-dominated reorganisation? The alternative path of strengthening smallholder-led village collectives forms the core proposition of *Rural Chronicles*. The authors argue that sustainable rural revitalisation requires reactivating village collectives as the intrinsic force for development, enabling peasants to reclaim their agency in the modernisation process, and building a bulwark against predatory capital.

The political significance of this work is underscored by China's recent legislative developments. *The Law of the People's Republic of China on Rural Collective Economic Organisations* was passed in June 2024, four months before the publication of the book, and came into effect in May 2025.<sup>2</sup> This legislation legally codifies core principles such as the inalienable collective ownership of rural land and the necessity of democratic management by villagers. The law provides a legal framework to protect collectives from both internal control by a few individuals and external control by capital. This ensures that development is driven from within the communities of over 900 million Chinese peasants.

## Pillars of the New Village Collectives

The strength of *Rural Chronicles* lies in its rich, granular detail which moves beyond abstract theory to the living practice of socialist construction. Across its

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<sup>1</sup> Lu Xinyu, 'Exploring a Path to a Rural Market Economy with Chinese Characteristics Based on the Collective Economy' [依托集体经济探索中国特色农村市场经济之路], *Economic Herald* [经济导刊], no. 2 (2018): 67–68.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Law of the People's Republic of China on Rural Collective Economic Organisations' [中华人民共和国农村集体经济组织法], the State Council of People's Republic of China, 29 June, 2024, [https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202406/content\\_6960131.htm](https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202406/content_6960131.htm).

diverse case studies, the book provides an anatomy of how the new collective economy resolves key contradictions in China's rural development.

The book elucidates the indispensable role of the grassroots organisation of the Communist Party of China as a political vanguard. This leadership operates not by coercion but through the original aspiration of 'serving the people' – a practice that mobilises the grassroots communities and builds trust. In Tangyue Village, Party Secretary Zuo Wenxue committed to leading village-wide prosperity rather than individual enrichment despite personal business successes. When facing fundraising challenges, eleven village committee cadres took personal loans from the credit union to obtain funds for the collective. This pattern of 'party members taking the lead' appears consistently across case studies – in Daba Village, Guizhou Province, cadres first trialled risky cash crops to prove viability; in Tugudong Village, Henan Province, the party secretary personally secured a loan of 30,000 yuan and promised to absorb losses if ventures failed.

Crucially, this leadership operates on the principle of the mass line rather than top-down directives. Villages have set up various mechanisms for participation in decision-making. Tangyue Village employs a representative system with one elected villager per fifteen households participating in collective decisions. Gacuo Collective implements circular supervision where production group leaders supervise the members, village cadres supervise the group leaders, and masses supervise the cadres. Cadres and the institutions are dialectically interrelated. Gacuo Collective's 189 management rules are all formulated and updated through a village-wide People's Congress that is held every one or two years, ensuring the regulations reflect the will of the community.

*Rural Chronicles* demonstrates how collective ownership serves as the economic foundation for effective rural development. By reintegrating fragmented land and labour, as Tangyue and Daba villages did, collectives achieve economies of scale that enable unified procurement, production, and sales while strengthening their capacity to negotiate with larger market actors. This foundation is crucial not only for market leverage but also for introducing and popularising advanced agricultural technologies – thus fostering the application of 'new

quality productive forces'.<sup>3</sup> In Tugudong, the collective engages with private capital from a position of strength rooted in land ownership. Even when private enterprises are contracted to operate on village land, the system maintains a collective orientation because the collective has ultimate ownership of the land and is entitled to a portion of the surplus generated by these enterprises via rent and management fees.

These cases demonstrate how village collectives actively navigate relationships with external forces – government, capital, and enterprises – to develop strategic partnerships while maintaining collective autonomy. Rather than passive recipients of external intervention, these collectives exercise agency in structuring collaborations that serve their developmental goals. The income generated from the collectives is used to fund public welfare projects including pensions, social support through wedding and funeral committees, reading societies, and elderly associations. This ensures that the benefits of development are shared and helps build a resilient rural society that is essential to the broader project of Chinese modernisation.

*Rural Chronicles* also illuminates fundamental contradictions within collective rural development that threaten sustainability: dangerous over-reliance on individual leaders (evident in Xinqi Village's difficulties after the former party secretary's retirement), concentration of decision-making within small collectives of cadres without enough mass participation and unsustainable debt accumulation – with Daba and Xinqi carrying 48 million yuan and 70-80 million yuan in obligations, respectively. While the book identifies these critical problems, its theoretical analysis of systematic solutions is insufficient. Lu Xinyu once argued that socialism's advantage in rural reorganisation was its ability to directly inject party organisational resources to provide non-market support for rural restructuring. To ensure the sustainability of rural development after resources for poverty alleviation are withdrawn, the grassroots party

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<sup>3</sup> Cheng Enfu, Wang Junxi, 'On the Mechanisms and Paths through which New Quality Productive Forces Empower the High-Quality Development of the New Rural Collective Economy' [论新质生产力赋能新型农村集体经济高质量发展的机理与路径], *Journal of Hebei University of Economics and Business* [河北经贸大学学报], no. 3 (2025): 1–10.

organisations need to function as the primary agents and driving forces for rural social and economic reorganisation.<sup>4</sup>

## From Local Practice to Global Resonance

*Rural Chronicles* offers more than a detailed documentation of Chinese rural development – it provides insights relevant to global agrarian struggles, with examples of rising incomes, improved welfare, and renewed social cohesion in the villages studied. The principles of collective action find a compelling parallel in the agrarian struggles in Global South movements like Brazil’s Landless Workers’ Movement (MST). The book’s co-author, Yan Hairong, personally visited an MST encampment in northern Paraná in 2015. A detailed account of the movement can be found in the April 2024 dossier from Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *The Political Organisation of Brazil’s Landless Workers’ Movement (MST)*.<sup>5</sup> For four decades, the MST has organised peasants into cooperatives to build political consciousness and material power as part of their broader struggle for social transformation. Their settlements feature *agrovilas* (agrovillages) that bring households together to coordinate production and socialise domestic labour through collective kitchens and childcare circles.

MST is now drawing on China’s agrarian reform experience by establishing a Farming Agriculture Mechanisation Science and Technology Residence together with Chinese universities and enterprises. It is also introducing Chinese-made, small-scale agricultural machinery to serve family farmers in Brazil.<sup>6</sup> While the political contexts differ, the underlying lesson is resonant – the organisation of the peasantry into collective productive units is an essential

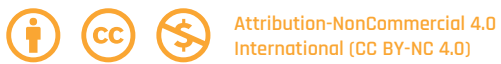
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<sup>4</sup> Lu Xinyu, *Rural and Revolution: Three Works on the Critique of Chinese Neoliberalism (Revised and Expanded Edition)* [乡村与革命：中国“新自由主义”批判三书（增订版）], (East China Normal University, 2024).

<sup>5</sup> Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, *The Political Organisation of Brazil’s Landless Workers’ Movement (MST)*, dossier no. 75, 16 April 2024, <https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-75-landless-workers-movement-brazil/-toc-section-1>.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Chinese Machines Arrive at UnB and Brazil-China Center for Family Farming Is Inaugurated’ [Máquinas chinesas chegam à UnB e Centro Brasil-China para Agricultura Familiar é inaugurado], Brasil de Fato, 30 November 2024, <https://www.brasildefato.com.br/2024/11/30/maquinas-chinesas-chegam-a-unb-e-centro-brasil-china-para-agricultura-familiar-e-inaugurado/>.

strategy for building people's power in the struggle for food sovereignty, agrarian reform, and social transformation. For scholars and activists engaged in agrarian struggles globally, the experiences in *Rural Chronicles*, read alongside the struggles of movements like the MST, provide invaluable political inspiration and strategic insight for the rural masses of the Global South.



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**WENHUA ZONGHENG** (文化纵横) is a leading journal of contemporary political and cultural thought in China. Founded in 2008, the journal publishes issues every two months, featuring articles by a wide array of intellectuals across the country and building a platform for discussion of different ideological positions and values in China's intellectual community. The publication is an important reference for debates and developments in Chinese thought, on matters ranging from China's ancient history and traditional culture to its current socialist practices and innovations, from the important cultural trends in contemporary Chinese social life to Chinese views and analyses of the world today. Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research and Dongsheng News have partnered with *Wenhua Zongheng* to publish an international edition of the journal, releasing multiple issues per year featuring a selection of articles that hold particular relevance for the Global South.

In Chinese, the word 'Wenhua' (文化) means 'culture' as well as 'civilization', while 'Zongheng' (纵横) literally means 'verticals and horizontals', but also alludes to the strategists who helped to first unify of China, roughly 2,000 years ago through diplomacy and alliances. It is impossible to translate the journal's title into English while retaining its historical meaning and significance, therefore, we have chosen to keep the pinyin romanisation of the title to remind our readers: China has a complex history and culture that is challenging to translate and navigate, and this project seeks to bridge this understanding.

文化纵横 tricontinental