

Reviews

Ascending Order: Rising Powers and the Politics of Status in International Institutions, Rohan Mukherjee (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 280 pp., cloth \$99.99, eBook \$99.99.

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Over the past twenty years, the discipline of international relations has been centrally preoccupied with the rise of China and the fate of the liberal international order (LIO). Uncertainty abounds about how an increasingly powerful China will engage with the United States and whether it will continue to embrace the principles of multilateralism and international law that underlie the current international order. These concerns reflect a deep-seated anxiety among many American and European scholars about the future of the international order, which has been built around and sustained by the power and interests of a select group of Western states. Consequently, there has been a flood of publications and commentaries on the rise of China and the changing international order that shows few signs of receding.

Rohan Mukherjee's recent book *Ascending Order: Rising Powers and the Politics of Status in International Institutions* is a critical contribution to this burgeoning literature. Mukherjee develops a theory he terms "institutional status theory" (IST) that goes beyond the realist focus on material capabilities and security interests, and explores how concerns related to great-power status and the legitimacy of

international institutions shape the relationship between rising powers and international orders. His theory builds on insights from social identity theory to develop a framework that explains the variety of ways a rising power might engage with an existing international order. Central to this theory are the judgments a rising power makes about the legitimacy of existing institutions at the core of the international order. The degree to which a state perceives these institutions to be procedurally fair (that is, as making decisions in consultation with interested parties and that are relatively unbiased) and institutionally open (that is, as having opportunities for rising powers to enter leadership positions) will determine whether a rising power chooses to cooperate with or challenge that institution.

Some of the more interesting implications of Mukherjee's theoretical model occur when the judgments regarding legitimacy are mixed. He argues that when a rising power judges an institution to be procedurally fair but lacking in openness, it will seek to expand the membership criteria for leadership. Conversely, when an institution is judged to be institutionally open but procedurally unfair, the model

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expects rising powers will pursue a strategy focused on reframing the decision-making rules. These various strategic choices are driven not by the concerns related to security or survival emphasized by realist and material explanations, but by the desire of rising powers to be recognized as equals by other great powers in the international order. Status rather than security, in other words, is what rising powers want. Recognition of great power authority within international institutions, rather than through military competition, is then the central and underexamined way they seek to achieve it.

Mukherjee applies IST to three historical cases, each focusing on the behavior of different rising powers toward institutions that were central to the then-existing international security order. The first case examines the rise of the United States during the early- to mid-nineteenth century. Mukherjee explores how the United States sought to reconcile its growing desire for great power status with the Atlantic maritime order constructed and sustained by European great powers, particularly Great Britain. The second case explores Japan's relationship to the Washington system of the 1920s, which sought to limit naval power in the Pacific, and the third case focuses on India's changing attitudes toward the nuclear nonproliferation regime from the 1960s to the present. These rich historical case studies, which draw heavily on primary sources, provide convincing support for Mukherjee's theory. They also offer fascinating glimpses into the diplomatic maneuverings and foreign policy decision-making concerns that shaped the various strategies of engagement, resistance, and reform pursued by these rising powers. A final chapter, based primarily on secondary sources, applies IST to the contemporary case of

China to illustrate how it helps make sense of the different strategies of influence China has pursued through various international institutions.

This book is an important work of both theory and historical analysis that hopefully will have a significant impact on current debates about the rise of China and the fate of the LIO. Mukherjee's attention to states' desire for status and recognition of that status by other great powers enriches conversations about what rising powers want, which for too long have started from realist assumptions about the primacy of security and have focused too narrowly on military competition. His careful historical analysis further demonstrates that geopolitics plays out in a rich social and deeply institutionalized environment in which judgments of fairness and legitimacy matter as much as, if not more than, the balance of material capabilities. While power politics still matters in this world, it is a form of power inextricably tied to shared ideas of status and legitimacy, involving political contestation over institutional rules and processes rather than violent clashes on the battlefield.

An additional virtue of Mukherjee's analysis is his attention to the variety of strategies available to rising powers in their pursuit of status. Much of the debate about the rise of China, at least superficially, is focused on trying to predict whether China will accept or reject the core principles of the LIO. Politics is rarely so simple, however, and rising powers have before them a range of strategic options when deciding how to engage (or not) with international institutions and other great powers. These strategic choices, moreover, are driven not by the structural imperatives of anarchy but by socially contingent judgements about fairness, openness, and recognition. There is thus nothing

inevitable about a conflict between China and the United States, as some observers suggest. What matters is how the United States responds to China's rise and especially whether it extends the recognition of great-power status to China that it seeks through decision-making reform in major international institutions.

By bringing in the concept of legitimacy and status to discussions of great-power rivalry, Mukherjee joins a new wave of literature that explores the social dynamics of great-power competition, such as Michelle Murray's *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations* and Stacie E. Goddard's *When Right Makes Might*. Foregrounding legitimacy also raises deeper questions about the role that perceptions of justice play in the constitution of the international order. Mukherjee views concerns about justice and legitimacy as important insofar as they shape the desire for status and recognition, but in all three of his historical cases we see some evidence that the rising powers were critical of key institutions. This was not simply because the institutions denied them standing as great powers but also because they rested upon

what these states saw as unjust principles. And, it was easy to find injustices, from the conservative, monarchical principles of the Congress system in the nineteenth century, to the racial discrimination toward nonwhite peoples in the 1920s, to the "nuclear apartheid" created through the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Rising powers, in other words, may seek a just international order as much as they seek security and status, and it is the denial or deferral of this desire for justice by established powers that can spark great power conflict and war. In raising these questions, *Ascending Order* has the potential to spark a deeper debate about the rise of China and the future of international order; a debate that is informed more by notions of justice, fairness, and legitimacy than by security concerns and the balance of military power.

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War: A Genealogy of Western Ideas and Practices, Beatrice Heuser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 448 pp., cloth \$45, eBook \$44.99.

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Beatrice Heuser has written a tour-de-force intellectual history of war in the Western world. The driving claim of *War: A Genealogy of Western Ideas and Practices* is that to

understand war, we need to grasp the evolution of the ideas surrounding war, which involves moving away from the standard binaries that can be found in various