

1 Introduction

In August 1993, as the shadow of the Cold War began its slow retreat, the United Nations (UN) Conference on Disarmament decided the time was ripe to negotiate a treaty banning nuclear tests once and for all. The end of superpower competition had led three of the five official nuclear powers – the United States (US), Russia, and Britain – to announce testing moratoriums, and nonnuclear states were eager for a universal ban.¹ The biggest potential spoiler was China. A “vocal outsider to the global nuclear order”² and a “latecomer to the nuclear club,”³ China had historically viewed test ban efforts as “ploys intended to monopolize nuclear weapons and solidify the larger nuclear powers’ advantages.”⁴

Beijing had strong security-driven reasons to oppose the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) negotiations, as they came to be known. Far from being the geopolitical behemoth it is today, China was a technological laggard compared to other nuclear powers. While the United States was developing advanced first strike and missile defense capabilities that no longer required nuclear testing, China’s nuclear forces were still transitioning from liquid-fueled siloed ballistic missiles to solid-fueled mobile missiles, a transition that required smaller and more efficient warhead designs, which required

¹ France and China were the other two official nuclear powers.

² Nicola Leveringhaus and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, “Between conformity and innovation: China’s and India’s quest for status as responsible nuclear powers,” *Review of International Studies*, 44:3 (2018), 482–503.

³ Nicola Horsburgh, *China and the Global Nuclear Order: From Estrangement to Active Engagement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 108.

⁴ Bates Gill, “Two steps forward, one step back: The dynamics of Chinese nonproliferation and arms control policy-making in an era of reform,” in David M. Lampton (ed.), *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform, 1978–2000* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 257–288.

further nuclear testing.⁵ Zou Yunhua, a senior colonel in the Chinese military and an official delegate at the negotiations, observed, “[T]he CTBT negotiations caught China in the middle of its nuclear weapons program, whereas the United States, Russia, and Britain had completed several development cycles.”⁶ Put simply, a test ban would make China vulnerable to nuclear coercion (the other nuclear holdout, France, was a US ally and did not face the same predicament).

Unsurprisingly, when negotiations began in Geneva in January 1994, China voiced a number of “treaty-killing positions” that were designed to both reduce the advantages of the established nuclear powers and to leave the door open to certain types of testing for the future reliability and safety of China’s limited weapons stockpile.⁷ Worse yet, China – and, to a lesser extent, France – kept testing nuclear weapons through the negotiation period, at more than double the rate of its average testing pace.⁸ In late 1995, when the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) set a deadline of September 1996 for a vote on the CTBT, it seemed that China would be the primary cause of deadlock.

Yet, starting in March 1996, China began making a series of concessions that took the world by surprise. Beijing dropped its insistence on maintaining the option of peaceful nuclear explosions, withdrew its proposed inclusion of No First Use and security assurances to non-nuclear states, compromised on the procedure for triggering on-site inspections, and, “in a drastic adjustment of its position,” agreed to states using their own technical assets to monitor treaty violations (giving the established powers a major advantage).⁹ On July 29, China conducted its last nuclear test and announced a moratorium. On September 24, China signed the CTBT.

What explains this type of cooperation, when a rising power that is clearly at a military and economic disadvantage compared to the great powers, willingly gives up the prospect of substantial relative gains for

⁵ Xiangli Sun, “Implications of a comprehensive test ban for China’s security policy,” Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University (June 1997), 8–9.

⁶ Yunhua Zou, “China and the CTBT negotiations,” Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University (December 1998), 4.

⁷ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Social States: China in International Institutions 1980–2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 104.

⁸ Gill, “Two steps forward,” 264. ⁹ Zou, “China and the CTBT,” 23.

the sake of international agreement? It is possible that India's decision to hold up the treaty gave China cover to make empty promises. However, China made its concessions a number of months before India turned spoiler.¹⁰ China may have also accepted losses in order to restrain Japan's future nuclear development. Japan, however, was one of the biggest votaries of disarmament and a strong treaty, and China's foremost concern was not Japan but US coercion, the potential for which was clearly demonstrated in the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 1995–1996.

The evidence instead overwhelmingly suggests that Chinese leaders were concerned about their country's status as a "responsible major power," a status that was increasingly threatened by a rising chorus of criticism from nuclear and nonnuclear powers alike in the course of the negotiations.¹¹ France's announcement of a testing moratorium in January 1996 left China particularly isolated among the P-5, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) that were also all officially nuclear powers. Against their state's material interests, Chinese leaders weighed their desire for "a legitimate seat at the table" in "a more representative [nuclear] order."¹² Ultimately, it made sense to sacrifice some amount of security in order to "play as an equal among the P-5."¹³ Recognition of China's major power identity via membership of the top ranks of the international order was worth preserving at some cost. According to Fan Jishe, a professor at the Central Party School of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), although China's military-scientific establishment was unhappy, "people who wanted to be part of the international community prevailed."¹⁴

Although China did not end up ratifying the treaty – nor did the United States – it has consistently supported test ban efforts ever since. This behavior fits with scholarly assessments of Beijing's approach to the global nuclear order as having shifted remarkably since the early

¹⁰ See Rebecca Johnson, "Unfinished business: The negotiation of the CTBT and the end of nuclear testing," United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, New York (2009), 90–91, 97–102, 126–141.

¹¹ Johnston, *Social States*, 113.

¹² Horsburgh, *China and the Global Nuclear Order*, 106.

¹³ Johnson, "Unfinished business," 122.

¹⁴ Quoted in Richard Salmons, "The role of status in Asia-Pacific international relations," unpublished PhD thesis, Australian National University (June 2018), 194.

1990s toward greater cooperation,¹⁵ including on critical issues such as the North Korean nuclear program.¹⁶ Indeed, since the end of the Cold War, China has cooperated with various parts of the US-led liberal international order (LIO), including the UNSC, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT; also known as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Group of 20 (G20). Cooperation has often been costly for China, for example, in terms of UN interventions disrupting its economic relationships in the Middle East or international nuclear weapons regimes affecting its military posture.

Cooperation was not China's only choice with regard to the CTBT. India provides the counterexample of a rising power that approached the negotiations "confident of ratifying a comprehensive test ban agreement" but ended up bitterly opposed to the final result.¹⁷ Like China, India preferred to link a test ban with disarmament and sought to place the onus on the established nuclear powers to reduce their existing nuclear stockpiles. The negotiations failed to deliver on both counts. The difference was that China was much closer to being treated as an equal member of the great-power club. China was part of the P-5 and an official nuclear weapon state as per the NPT; India was neither. When the dust settled, China's main delegate, Sha Zukang, observed that the treaty was "balanced as a whole."¹⁸ His Indian counterpart, Arundhati Ghose, denounced the CTBT as an "unequal treaty" that would "only succeed in perpetuating a discriminatory status quo."¹⁹ China sought to maintain the status of a responsible major power; India had nothing to lose.

Rising Powers and International Order

As the above example shows, rising powers care about status, or their position in a hierarchy, and are willing to pay significant costs for status relative to the great powers. The international order – the interconnected set of rules and institutions established by great powers

¹⁵ Gill, "Two steps forward," 257.

¹⁶ Horsburgh, *China and the Global Nuclear Order*, 120–146.

¹⁷ Karthik Nachiappan, *Does India Negotiate?* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019), 105.

¹⁸ Quoted in Zou, "China and the CTBT," 25.

¹⁹ Quoted in Nachiappan, *Does India Negotiate?* 127.

for managing conflict and cooperation – is a site of contestation over status, among other things. Rising powers draw inferences about their relative standing from the way they are treated by an international order’s core institutions. Some institutional configurations satisfy a rising state’s status ambitions and thereby induce cooperative behavior, while other configurations have the opposite effect. This book develops a novel theory, called Institutional Status Theory (IST), to explain the conditions under which rising powers will engage in different strategies to attain or maintain status in the international order.

China’s cooperative behavior in the post–Cold War order is puzzling for the bulk of international relations scholarship. Research on power shifts, or “predictable, long-run changes in relative capabilities,”²⁰ typically views rising powers as prone to dissatisfaction with the international order and likely to challenge it as soon as they are capable. Challenges “almost always” lead to war,²¹ because the great powers are unlikely to sit idly by while rising powers go about wrecking global governance. Yet there is no evidence that China and other countries such as India and Brazil are preparing an assault on the international order. If anything, they have signaled a desire to cooperate, conditional on greater *representation* in international institutions, or in Xi Jinping’s words, “a more just and equitable international system.”²²

A preoccupation with war in the literature has left much to be learned about how rising powers react to international order. The rise of a new power to prominence in world politics, a process that easily spans decades, is typically telescoped into the moment when it either challenges the established powers or is preempted by them in a military conflict. As a result of this narrow focus, we know a good deal about the regularity with which rising powers and great powers fight, but we know very little about why rising powers might be dissatisfied in the first place. Much of the answer lies in their experiences with international order, or the rules and institutions that they encounter early in their rise.

²⁰ Woosang Kim and James D. Morrow, “When do power shifts lead to war?” *American Journal of Political Science*, 36:4 (1992), 896–922.

²¹ Graham Allison, “The Thucydides trap,” *Foreign Policy*, 224 (May–June 2017), 80–81.

²² China Daily, “Full text: President Xi’s speech on China-US ties,” September 22, 2015.

This book shifts the analytical and empirical lens on power shifts to an earlier stage, well before war is in the picture. It poses two related questions. First, why might a rising power challenge the very international order that has enabled its rise? After all, “by definition, it is doing better than the established powers under *their* rules and institutional arrangements.”²³ Second, and conversely, why might a rising power accept a disadvantageous international order when it would be less costly to challenge or disregard it? Over the last decade, a handful of scholars have posed these two questions *separately*.²⁴ IST offers the most comprehensive and systematic answers to date. Whereas existing works focus mostly on conflict during power shifts, IST offers a single framework that explains a range of rising-power behaviors including conflict and cooperation. It does so by drawing on the growing international relations literature on status in world politics, as well as on insights from club theory in economics and social identity theory in psychology.

IST shows that rising powers will under certain conditions sacrifice their material interests for the sake of membership of the great-power club. Membership entails *symbolic equality* with the great powers, which is a type of status. Two variables influence the strategy a rising power will adopt to achieve its status goals: the *institutional openness* and the *procedural fairness* of an international order’s core institutions. A rising power is more likely to support an order whose core institutions are open to new powers joining their leadership ranks, and that treat the rising power in a fair manner. It is more likely to challenge an order that is lacking in these features.

Drawing on archival and other primary sources, I demonstrate the validity of IST in three historical cases: the United States in the British-led Atlantic system of the mid-nineteenth century, Japan in the Washington system of the interwar period, and India in the international order of the Cold War. In each case, status motivations

²³ Randall L. Schweller, “A tale of two realisms: Expanding the institutions debate,” *Mershon International Studies Review*, 41 (1997), 1–32.

²⁴ See Courtney J. Fung, *China and Intervention at the UN Security Council: Reconciling Status* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Johnston, *Social States*; Randall L. Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, “After unipolarity: China’s visions of international order in an era of U.S. decline,” *International Security*, 36:1 (2011), 41–72; Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

outweigh material factors in shaping the behavior of the rising power with regard to international order. In addition, I demonstrate the plausibility of IST as an explanation for the pattern of China's cooperation and resistance in the contemporary LIO.

Contemporary rising powers, such as China and India, broadly support the LIO because, on balance, it benefits them materially. However, their demands for representation cannot be taken lightly. IST makes this demand intelligible as a claim to symbolic equality with the great powers. Xi Jinping's goal of making "the Chinese nation stand rock-firm in the family of nations" says more about China's status ambitions than it does about China's material calculus.²⁵ Frustrated by a lack of recognition of their claims, Chinese leaders have in some areas begun to chip away at the legitimacy of the LIO, with potentially deep and damaging long-run consequences.

The rest of this chapter discusses existing approaches to power shifts, which are typically studied through the lens of revisionism. It shows that our knowledge so far of how rising powers navigate the rules and institutions of an international order is incomplete. It introduces IST as a way of addressing important gaps in the literature and discusses the method used to select historical cases for testing the theory. The chapter closes with an outline of the book and a brief discussion of IST's implications.

Existing Approaches to Power Shifts

Rising powers are of great consequence in the international order. As they rise, they obtain the means to challenge the rules and institutions that facilitate their emergence, potentially transforming the foundations of international cooperation and conflict. Understanding why and predicting when rising states will uphold or undermine international order is, therefore, of immense significance.

The existing literature on power shifts and international order frames the problem in terms of revisionism. Revisionist states "seek to change the distribution of goods (territory, status, markets, expansion of ideology, and the creation or change of international law and

²⁵ Xinhua and SCMP Reporters, "Transcript: Xi Jinping's speech at the unveiling of the new Chinese leadership," *South China Morning Post*, November 15, 2012.

institutions).”²⁶ By contrast, status quo states “prefer to keep things as they are.”²⁷ The literature generally assumes that “all rising powers have some revisionist intentions,” and what matters is “whether the challenger harbors limited or revolutionary aims.”²⁸ In fact, almost the entire theoretical canon on power shifts focuses on states whose aims become revolutionary as their power grows to the point of being able to challenge the great powers. Technically, therefore, the study of rising powers thus far has been the study of rising *great* powers, that is, states on the threshold of systemic influence. Given this focus, revisionist behavior is typically defined as expansionism, outright rejection of the international order, or the accumulation of power in a manner that triggers a security dilemma with established powers, often leading to war. By studying power shifts well before radical change is a realistic possibility, IST takes a wider view of rising-power strategies, which may include expansion and conflict but also include reform (a type of revisionism not commonly found in the literature) and cooperation (which is more than just the absence of revisionism).

Theories of revisionism or its absence can be categorized into those that assume material interests, such as wealth and security, on the part of actors and those that assume nonmaterial interests, such as status or recognition. Within each category, theories operate at two different levels of analysis: the state and the international order (individual-level theories of revisionism are less common). Some theories bridge the two levels but still privilege one over the other.

Material Interests

Theories that privilege material interests assume that revisionism is the result either of domestic groups pursuing their respective material interests or of states in the international order doing so. In the former category lie various theories of expansionism arising from domestic politics, going back to Jack Snyder’s seminal theory of political

²⁶ Jason W. Davidson, *The Origins of Revisionist and Status-Quo States* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 13.

²⁷ Jason W. Davidson, “The roots of revisionism: Fascist Italy, 1922–39,” *Security Studies*, 11:3 (2002), 125–159.

²⁸ Stacie E. Goddard, *When Right Makes Might: Rising Powers and World Order* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 4.

logrolling, strategic myths, and over-expansion.²⁹ For example, Jason Davidson argues that while external threats and opportunities do play a role in driving rising powers to revisionism, they only do so in the presence of powerful nationalist groups within the state that push for aggressive foreign policies.³⁰ Nationalist groups may also unilaterally instigate revisionism if they are domestically powerful and there are international opportunities available to exploit.³¹

Revisionism's absence can also be due to domestic factors, specifically the absence of powerful nationalist groups. In the US context, Fareed Zakaria argues that for most of the latter half of the nineteenth century, successive administrations that sought to expand abroad failed to raise the necessary economic resources and political support due to the fractious nature of power within the American polity.³² Jeffrey Meiser offers a similar argument to explain US restraint from the turn of the twentieth century till its entry into World War II.³³ Expansionists in the presidency, in Congress, and in the private sector were continually stymied by the “separation of powers, anti-imperialist norms, and a geographically decentralized electoral system.”³⁴

Materialist theories of revisionism at the international level are of two types: theories of hegemonic war and of hegemonic peace. The former lie in the domain of power transition theory, which assumes rising powers seek material goals and will axiomatically challenge an international order because it is designed to benefit the great powers.³⁵ Power transition theory finds that war is most likely when a dissatisfied rising power gets close to overtaking an established great power in terms of economic and military capabilities.³⁶ A rising power's satisfaction with the international order is tied to the extent to which it benefits materially from the order. Even prestige-related concerns are

²⁹ Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

³⁰ Davidson, “The roots,” 130. ³¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

³² Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

³³ Jeffrey W. Meiser, *Power and Restraint: The Rise of the United States 1898–1941* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, xvi.

³⁵ Douglas Lemke and William Reed, “Regime types and status quo evaluations: Power transition theory and the democratic peace,” *International Interactions*, 22:2 (1996), 143–164.

³⁶ Jonathan M. DiCicco, “Power transition theory and the essence of revisionism,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (September 2017).

Table 1.1. *Typology of theories of revisionism among rising powers*

LEVEL OF ANALYSIS	Domestic politics International order	DOMINANT MOTIVE OF ACTORS	
		Material interests Expansion/ restraint	Status/recognition Radical revisionism
		Hegemonic war/ peace	Identity management

only about “the reputation for power.”³⁷ In other words, prestige is a matter of other states getting out of a rising power’s way as it claims a greater share of benefits from the international order.³⁸

Theories of hegemonic peace argue that great powers often construct orders that preclude conflict. John Ikenberry argues that such “constitutional orders” are based on a simple bargain: “The leading state agrees to limits on its power – that is, it agrees to operate within an institutionalized political process according to a set of rules and principles – in exchange for the agreement by secondary groups or states to be willing participants in the order.”³⁹ Rising powers are thus assured that their material interests will be protected, and the leading state enjoys prolonged durable power. The typology in Table 1.1 summarizes materialist theories, as well as theories of status or recognition, which are discussed next.

Status/Recognition

Due to their materialist focus, theories of hegemonic war and peace are unable to fully explain why a rising power would challenge an order that benefits it,⁴⁰ especially when challenging means risking war with the great powers. In other words, what makes a rising power so

³⁷ Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 14.

³⁸ Daniel Markey, “Prestige and the origins of war: Returning to realism’s roots,” *Security Studies*, 8:4 (1999), 126–172.

³⁹ G. John Ikenberry, “Constitutional politics in international relations,” *European Journal of International Relations*, 4:2 (1998), 147–177.

⁴⁰ DiCicco, “Power transition theory,” 25.