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## REASONS FOR THE FALL OF THE LIBER INTERNATIONAL ORDER FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WORLD POLITICS

In recent years, the gradual fall of the liberal international order, once heralded as the “end of history”, has become an indisputable fact. The world politics aims to explain changes in the nature and foundational systems of international relations, as well as global and domestic politics. Examining the decline of the liberal international order through the paradigm of world politics can comprehensively elucidate the factors affecting the development of both international relations and domestic politics simultaneously, thereby theoretically unifying the two fields. This paper examines the decline of the liberal international order from the perspective of world politics and posits that its decline is attributable to both internal and external reasons: Internally, the economic foundations, rule enforcement, and value propositions of the liberal international order harbor “the seeds of its own destruction”; externally, the influence of developing countries on the traditional value chain, the revisionist foreign policy of major powers, and the politics of striving for recognition have accelerated the decline of the liberal international order. Ultimately, this paper concludes that the decline of the liberal international order is inevitable and, with the waning of the unipolar pattern, the world order is destined to evolve towards a more equitable and fair direction.

**Key words:** liberal international order, world politics, value chain, internal causes, external causes, equality.

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### Әлемдік саясат тұрғысынан либералды халықаралық тәртіптің құлдырау себептері

Соңғы жылдары бір кездері «тарихтың соңы» деп жарияланған либералды халықаралық тәртіптің біртіндеп құлдырауы даусыз факт болды. Әлемдік саясат халықаралық қатынастардың табиғаты мен іргелі жүйелерінің, сондай-ақ жаһандық және ішкі саясаттың өзгеруін түсіндіруге тырысады. Әлемдік саясат парадигмасы арқылы либералды халықаралық тәртіптің құлдырауын зерттеу халықаралық қатынастардың да, ішкі саясаттың да дамуына әсер ететін факторларды жан-жақты түсіндіре алады, осылайша екі саланы теориялық тұрғыдан біріктіреді. Бұл мақалада әлемдік саясат тұрғысынан либералды халықаралық тәртіптің құлдырауы қарастырылады және оның құлдырауын ішкі және сыртқы себептермен түсіндіруге болады деп тұжырымдайды: ішінде экономикалық негіздер, ережелерді сақтау және либералды халықаралық тәртіптің құндылық ұсыныстары «өзінің жойылуының тұқымын» ерітеді; сыртынан дамушы елдердің дәстүрлі құру тізбегіне әсері ірі державалардың ревизионистік сыртқы саясаты және тануға ұмтылу саясаты либералды халықаралық тәртіптің құлдырауын тездетті. Бұл мақалада либералды халықаралық тәртіптің құлдырауы сөзсіз және бір полярлы модельдің жойылуымен әлемдік тәртіп неғұрлым әділ және тең бағытта дамуға мәжбүр болады деген қорытынды жасалады.

**Түйін сөздер:** либералды халықаралық тәртіп, әлемдік саясат, құн тізбегі, ішкі себептер, сыртқы себептер, теңдік.

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### Причины упадка либерального международного порядка в контексте мировой политики

В последние годы постепенное падение либерального международного порядка, когда-то объявленное «концом истории», стало неоспоримым фактом. Мировая политика стремится объяснить изменения в природе и основополагающих системах международных отношений, а также глобальной и внутренней политики. Изучение упадка либерального международного порядка через парадигму мировой политики может всесторонне прояснить факторы, влияющие на развитие как международных отношений, так и внутренней политики одновременно, тем самым теоретически объединяя две области. В этой статье рассматривается упадок либерального международного порядка с точки зрения мировой политики и утверждается, что его упадок можно объяснить как внутренними, так и внешними причинами: внутри экономические основы, обеспечение соблюдения правил и ценностные предложения либерального международного порядка таят в себе «семена его собственного разрушения»; снаружи влияние развивающихся стран на традиционную цепочку создания стоимости, ревизионистская внешняя политика крупных держав и политика стремления к признанию ускорили упадок либерального международного порядка.

В данной статье делается вывод о том, что упадок либерального международного порядка неизбежен, и с угасанием однополярной модели мировой порядок обречен на развитие в более справедливом и равноправном направлении.

**Ключевые слова:** либеральный международный порядок, мировая политика, цепочка создания стоимости, внутренние причины, внешние причины, равенство.

#### Introduction

“The essence of supreme virtue lies in following the Tao alone. Tao, in its nature, is both vague and intangible.(kongdezhirong, weidaoshicong, daoziweiwu, huanghuanghuhu).” (Wang, 2008) The world develops according to its own law, namely “Tao.” Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar system, the liberal international order—dominated by the US and the West, grounded in Western ideals, rule-based, and bolstered by plural international mechanisms—has progressively secured a dominant position within the international community, thereby attaining the “Tao” status of the global order. Yet, amidst a century of profound changes, the emergence of domestic economic nationalism in the US and the West, coupled with the widespread adoption of revisionist foreign policies, has prompted a diminishing willingness on their part to lead in international affairs. Shifting towards policies characterized by “America First” and “Western priority,” the US and the West have resorted to actions such as treaty withdrawals, organization exits, trade protectionism, and even warfare. Consequently, “the liberal international order, spearheaded by the US, has faced a significant crisis concerning its legitimacy, value alignment, leadership accountability, and efficacy in tackling global challenges”

(Flaherty & Rogowski, 2021; Mearsheimer, 2019; Glaser, 2019). Moreover, the global spread of the novel coronavirus and the impacts of the Russia-Ukraine military conflict and the Palestine-Israel military conflict on shared international security have highlighted the liberal international order’s limitations and conservative approach when addressing global issues.

Why did the liberal international order, once regarded as the “end of history”, encounter many challenges on a global scale? Is the dilemma of the liberal international order caused by its own structural defects or by external factors? The international community has made more in-depth research on the topic of “why the liberal international order has fallen”, but most studies have approached this topic from the perspective of international relations. The theory of international relations is an explanation of the interaction among countries and its results... It cannot fully answer the reasons and mechanisms behind the changes in the international order. This paper argues that the decline of the liberal international order is the outcome of the combined effect of internal and external factors. In order to explain the causes and mechanisms of the decline of the liberal international order in a more macro and comprehensive way and to form a complete chain of explanations, it is necessary for us to systematically reflect on the root causes, direct causes and mechanisms of

the decline of the liberal international order from the perspective of world politics.

### Materials and methods

This study adopted literature analysis and comparative analysis methods.

Literature analysis method – This study adopts the theory of political realism, combined with the theories of Mearsheimer and Polanyi, to point out the internal and external factors of the decline of the liberal international order.

Comparative analysis method – This study compares the liberal international order with a more fair and equal international order, and concludes the inevitability and scientific of establishing a new international order.

### Literature review

The international order is the specific norms, systems, and patterns formed by national actors in international exchanges and interactions. Its content includes not only the principles and norms of resource allocation in the international dimension, but also the decision-making, coordination procedures and power allocation at the national level. Professor Yan Xuetong, a Chinese scholar, pointed out that the overall change of the international order is the result of the change of its constituent elements. Therefore, the discussion on the reasons for the decline of the liberal international order should be carried out from the comprehensive role of the elements at both the international and domestic levels.

#### *1. Limitations of existing theories on the study of international order*

The current theory on the change of international order is based on the two core assumptions of anarchy and state centrism in the international community, which belong to the research methodology of international relations. The specific interpretation methods of the changes in the international order are mainly manifested in two ways, that is, the interpretation method with “hegemonic countries as the core” and the interpretation method with the elements of the international order as the core.

Based on political realism, hegemonic order theorists believe that the international order is a concrete manifestation of the regional and global distribution of power. “Order is actually a rule formulated and agreed to be observed by major powers” (Mearsheimer, 2019). Therefore, the stability of hegemony is the stability of the international

order. This theory contains two core propositions: “first, the order in world politics is created by the dominant state; second, the maintenance of international order requires the existence of hegemonic countries.” (Keohane, 2012) Based on this logic, hegemonic order theorists believe that the change of international order is the result of the change of the strength and will of hegemonic countries. Specifically, when the hegemonic power weakens or the hegemonic power lacks the will to rule, the international order will lack stability, or even decline, and then affect the cooperation among countries. This theory has a broad market in the international community. For example, Robert Gilpin attributed the change of the international order to “the rise and fall of those dominant countries or empires that rule a particular international order” (Gilpin, 2019). Similarly, John Mearsheimer, a master of international relations, pointed out that “the liberal international order can only be realized in the unipolar structure (led by the US)”. When the rise of China and the revival of Russia led to the end of the unipolar structure of the US, “the liberal international order is over” (Mearsheimer, 2019). These scholars believe that there is a direct correlation between hegemonic countries or empires and the international order. The change of the international order is essentially the process of emerging powers replacing old empires, and historical experience also confirms this assertion to some extent. For example, the disintegration of the Soviet Union directly led to the end of the bipolar system. Although the hegemonic order theory establishes the relationship between the international structure and the stability of the international system, and has a certain explanatory power to some extent. However, simplifying the dynamics of the international order to the changes of the hegemonic countries’ own changes cannot fully answer the reasons and mechanisms of the changes of the international order. Taking the liberal international order as an example, Mearsheimer believes that the unipolar structure of the US is the premise for the establishment of the liberal international order. After the decline of the US, the liberal international order will inevitably come to an end. But why only the US can establish and maintain a liberal international order? Why does the US establish a liberal international order rather than other types of international order? How does the US affect the liberal international order? These issues are the key issues of the international order theory, but the hegemonic order theory cannot fully respond to these issues.

The constituent elements theory holds that the international order is the result of the distribution of

power, interests, and ideas among the major actors in the international community, especially the great powers, the overall change of the international order is the result of the change of its constituent elements, so we can judge whether the international order has changed by observing the change of its constituent elements. In the view of the constituent elements theorists, the elements that affect the changes of the international order are complex, such as “national values”, “national strategy”, “international morality”, “international law and international organizations”, and so on. Although the theory of constituent elements provides a broader space for explaining the changes of international order, it still harbors the following two limitations. Firstly, some of the elements proposed by the constituent elements theorists are essentially the constituent elements of the international order, and their explanatory power focuses on the construction dimension of the international order rather than the change dimension of the international order; Secondly, the method of analyzing the changes of the international order with multiple elements often applies to the specific and one-way interpretation path. Due to the lack of a more systematic and comprehensive framework, it struggles to distinguish which is more important of the various elements, or the interaction between the various elements. The theory of constituent elements itself also recognizes that various elements are the basis for the construction of the international order. If various relevant elements cannot be integrated into a specific framework, it is inevitable that there will be a situation of prioritizing one aspect at the expense of another when analyzing the international order. Moreover, when analyzing the changes of the international order, it is necessary to understand and analyze the underlying reasons behind the changes in the distribution of power, interests, and ideas, to form a complete logical chain to explain the changes of the international order. However, the constituent elements theory evidently lacks such capability. Based on this, to explain the reasons and mechanisms of the changes of the international order more macroscopically and comprehensively, we need to explore the reasons and mechanisms of the changes of the international order from a new perspective.

## ***2. The perspective of world politics***

The above points out the defects of hegemonic order theory and constituent elements theory, which are the mainstream research paradigm of *relations*, in explaining the changes of international order. The decline and change of the international order is an extremely complex issue. The change of the interna-

tional order should cover the changes of inter state relations and international systems, and the causal relationship between inter state relations and international systems can examine many influencing factors. Therefore, this paper introduces the perspective of world politics to analyze the changes of the international order.

The perspective of world politics is a comprehensive and broad perspective, because “world politics is an all-round concept including various regions, countries, various international relations, social movements and private organizations engaged in transnational activities” (Rosenau, 2001). World politics not only analyzes the changes of the international order from the international level, but also deeply analyzes the impact of domestic politics on international politics. What it seeks is a force or action unit that can connect and integrate the world in the sense of the earth. Furthermore, as a theoretical paradigm, world politics does not merely link various problem areas together or study how international relations and domestic politics interact. Instead, it examines which factors can affect the development of international relations and domestic politics simultaneously, aiming to truly unify international relations and domestic politics in theory. The research perspective of world politics is not limited to the international level, distinguishing the theory of world politics from the theory of international relations, which takes the country as the center and thus becomes a more comprehensive and scientific research perspective.

Analyzing the decline of the liberal international order from the perspective of world politics is a systematic and holistic analysis path. By analyzing the decline of the liberal international order from the perspective of world politics, we can not only understand the way in which the changes of the international power pattern and the international concept pattern shape and change the liberal international order, but also understand the fundamental causes and mechanisms of shaping the international power pattern and concept pattern. This paper argues that the unfairness of the economic foundation of the liberal international order is the internal cause and root cause of its decline; The economic rise of developing countries and the awakening of national consciousness have led to changes in the power pattern and ideological trend pattern of world politics. Various political thoughts, such as “the global South” and “equitable development”, have shaped the international order and domestic order through international and domestic political struggles, which are the external cause and direct driving force for the



decline of the liberal international order.

## Results and discussion

### 1. *Internal cause*

The internal cause is the fundamental reason for the change and development of things, that is, the basic and root force for the decline of the liberal international order. In the 1990s, American scholar Ikenberry called the post Cold War international order – “liberal international order”. Since the New York Times first adopted this idea in 2012, the idea of “liberal international order” has been widely accepted and popular. Mearsheimer, the master of international relations, believes that the liberal international order has been in crisis since 2019 (Mearsheimer, 2019), which is rooted in the “seeds of its own destruction” (Mearsheimer, 2019) contained in the liberal international order itself. Because Mearsheimer believes that the foundation of the liberal international order is the dominance of the US in the international order, Mearsheimer attributed the decline of the liberal international order to the decline of American hegemony, which undoubtedly falls into the nest of the hegemonic order theory. Then it cannot explain why the liberal international order has declined, or why the liberal international order dominated by the US has declined. This paper argues that Mearsheimer’s assertion is correct, that is, the liberal international order itself contains the “seeds of its own destruction”, but this seed is not due to the rise and fall of the US, but the economic order maintained by the liberal international system is unjust.

#### *The unfairness of economic foundation*

Mearsheimer pointed out that one of the foundations of establishing an liberal international order is “to establish an open and inclusive international economic order, maximize free trade and cultivate an unrestricted capital market” (Mearsheimer, 2019). This can be seen from a series of international economic organizations established by the US after the Cold War – the WTO is a typical example – and the free trade policy strongly advocated by the US. However, why should the establishment of an liberal international order be based on free trade? After China became the world factory, why did the US and the West turn to economic nationalism and implement trade protection and deglobalization policies? The fundamental reason is that the liberal international order maintains the unjust economic order established since the era of arrogant navigation. Only by maintaining this

economic order can the US and the west be in the “center” position of the world economic order and lay the economic foundation for maintaining their hegemonic position.

Since the era of navigation, with the deepening of economic globalization and international trade, different regions and cultures have been involved in a system of mutual communication and meeting different needs. It is in the continuous trade that products from different regions and cultures have formed comparative advantages, thus promoting the common growth of wealth in the continuous trade. However, in the process of such trade, due to different property values, the distribution of wealth in trade will also be different, and wealth will gradually flow to regions with higher value products. In particular, with the goods traded from natural products to industrial manufactures, the inequality of wealth distribution caused by trade continues to expand among different regions and industries, thus forming a hierarchical chain from natural raw materials to industrial products with different technological content, which is what we call the “industrial chain”. Wallerstein pointed out that “the industrial chain formed according to the different content of science and technology means that the distribution of commercial trade profits is different. It is precisely this difference in the distribution of profits and wealth that leads to the formation of a rich – poor, strong – weak, center – periphery imperial hierarchy in the global geographical space in the process of human integration”. (Wallerstein, 1998) Wallerstein emphasizes the important role of science and technology in the world system, and believes that the “center periphery” structure in the world system is based on the industrial development promoted by science and technology. Because the power of science and technology is extremely powerful, with science, in the field of man-made manufacturing, people can have the ability to turn the foul and rotten into the rare and ethereal, thus changing the way of life in the past. It is science and technology that enables human beings to have the great power to transform nature, constantly change the world, and create a new world, so as to gather human life in a new world from the scattered communities, nations, countries, and civilizations confined to the geographical and natural environment. As a result, the center of the world economy tends to shift with the transfer of scientific and technological innovation centers and trade centers in the global geographical space. For example, the center of the world economy has moved from Venice to the Netherlands and Britain, and then to the US after World War II.

The reason why the liberal international order emphasizes the importance of free trade is that the US and the West occupy a “center” position in the world economic structure and have monopoly advantages over core industries such as finances, technology and manufacturing. Only by bringing as many countries into this economic order as possible, can the US and the West have a broader market for raw materials and commodity sales to stimulate the great development of their own economy.

To sum up, the “center – periphery” economic structure is based on the absolute superiority of developed countries in science and technology, economy and finance. However, in the digital age, the convenience of information provides convenient conditions for countries to learn from the advanced technology and experience of developed countries. In addition, a large number of international students go to developed countries to study every year. Taking the US as an example, “the number of international students enrolled in top 30 universities in the US is about 30000 per year” (2023) which provides conditions for developing countries to study and catch up with the US and the West. However, when developing countries gradually achieve scientific and technological progress and industrial upgrading, and move closer to or even replace the status of the US and the West from the “periphery” zone to the “center” zone, the economic foundation of the liberal order will be in danger of implosion.

*The “governance by rules” led by Western rules maintains an unjust economic order*

The rule of rules is an important representation of Marx Weber’s formal rationality. Formal rational law constructs ‘stable expectation’, which is the secret of wealth. Specifically, regularization, institutionalization and orderliness are important ways to improve efficiency. First, in a highly dependent world, economic trade between countries is frequent, and the establishment of rule of law can effectively improve the efficiency of economic activities. For example, since the 1960s, countries around the world have signed more than 3000 bilateral investment agreements and free trade agreements, which have greatly promoted the development of the international economy; Secondly, the rule of rules requires the rules to have the highest authority, and the rules are equally applicable to all activities, giving the rules justice in form. In addition, as Mearsheimer pointed out, “these rules often benefit the weaker countries in the system” (Mearsheimer, 2019) which also increases the attraction of “rule of law” to developing countries. For example, the

“reverse consistency” rule established in the WTO’s understanding on dispute settlement rules and procedures makes it impossible for large trading countries to obstruct the WTO’s dispute settlement body from hearing disputes with small trading countries. These advantages of rule of rules have prompted many developing countries to actively join and maintain the concept of rule of rules put forward by western countries.

In fact, the existing international rules mostly reflect and safeguard the economic interests of developed countries, and governance by rules tends to benefit developed countries more effectively.

First, in the rule making dimension, the international rules in the liberal international order mainly reflect the will of the US and western developed countries. Because international rules often appear in the form of bilateral or multilateral agreements, and there will be multiple equilibrium problems in the process of agreement formulation. As the realist scholar Krasner believes, “the distribution of national strength can better explain the essence of institutional arrangements” (Krasner, 1991). In other words, in the process of formulating the statute, the stronger countries have stronger ability to shape the rules, while the preferences or interests of the weaker countries are often difficult to be fully reflected. For example, the US aims to curb the overseas corruption of its own enterprises and enhance its overseas law enforcement ability to maintain its economic advantage. Therefore, the US not only promulgated the overseas anti – corruption act in its own country, but also actively promoted the internationalization of the act, making it a convention accepted by the international community. But other countries soon realized that this was a legal trap: the US has a huge judicial institution and global judicial action capacity, and the internationalization of combating corruption means giving the judicial institution of the US the power to enforce the law extraterritorially. Therefore, this initiative of the US was rejected by most countries at the UN Conference, and the International Chamber of Commerce also rejected the proposal of the US. However, the US used its influence to actively lobby the organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD), which is under its control. Finally, in 1997, the organization passed the Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions, which can be said to essentially replicate the entire content of the US’ Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. The internationalization of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act shows that even bills that explicitly reflect the interests of the US and are

opposed by most countries can be internationalized under its pressure and become international treaties, let alone those with “superficial” justice.

Secondly, in the field of law enforcement, many international law practices show that when rules are not in line with their own interests, powerful countries either ignore the rules or rewrite the rules. As Mearsheimer said, “the rules that are the cornerstone of order are formulated and agreed to be observed by the great powers because they believe that it is in their interests to abide by these rules... It is no surprise that the great powers formulate these rules to meet their own interests. When the rules are not in the immediate interests of the leading countries, these countries either ignore the rules or rewrite the rules”. (Mearsheimer, 2019) The most typical example is the Iraq war launched by the US in 2003. Before launching the war, George Bush, the then president of the US, made several statements: “even if the invasion of the US violates international law, the US will take necessary measures to ensure the security of our country... I will not wait for danger.”(Bush, 2022) For another example, in order to curb China’s dominant position in international trade, the US, together with Japan and the European Union, has begun to discuss the formulation of rules outside the WTO system for subsidies, public institutions, state-owned enterprises, technology transfer and “market-oriented conditions” in general. The US is aware that the current WTO rules are no longer effective in curbing China’s foreign trade, they tried to rewrite the rules to set up new trade barriers and investment barriers against China.

The rule of rules, which is dominated by Western rules, is based on the West and, more accurately, on the absolute military superiority of the US. In legal theory, the implementation of law is guaranteed by the compulsory force of the state, so as to establish a stable expectation. Similarly, the rules formulated by the West also need to be supported by its strong military strength. For example, in 2003, the US bypassed the Security Council to unilaterally launch the war in Iraq because it suspected that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, in violation of the nuclear non – proliferation treaty signed in 1968. In addition, the rules formulated by the US and the West also reflect the interests of developing countries to a certain extent. When the new rules are only to safeguard the interests of hegemonic countries and their military strength declines, the governance by rules based on Western rules will face the danger of implosion.

### *One sided values of “freedom” and “democracy”*

According to Mearsheimer, one of the preconditions for the emergence of the liberal international order is that the “free and democratic” US will become a unipolar leading the world. “Unipolar will expand its ideology in breadth and depth, and reshape the world according to its own vision. Since there are no major powers that need to win the war, the leading countries can carry out their missions without regard”. (Mearsheimer, 2019) David Lake, Lisa Martin and Thomas Risse believe that the values of “freedom” and “democracy” are mainly embodied in “sovereign equality, human rights protection, political rights, individual equality, freedom of belief” (Lake, Martin & Risse, 2021), etc. Freedom and democracy are important achievements of the development of human civilization and the condensation of the value of the rule of law. The values of “freedom” and “democracy” are undoubtedly legitimate. However, the values of freedom and democracy promoted by the US and the West are one-sided and premised on safeguarding the interests of the US and the West.

First, the values of “freedom and democracy” can promote the expansion of the market economy and give legitimacy to the expansion. Polanyi put forward the concept of “double movement” in his book the great transformation: the political and economic origins of our times, He believes that: “Classical liberal economics such as Adam Smith has established a market economy system based on division of labor and exchange to achieve self-regulation... However, the operation of such a market economy system increasingly requires the establishment of a ‘market society’ to adapt to it, so as to free everyone from the original social community order and place themselves in an atomized market society... Let the operation of this social community be subject to the logic of the market economy”. (Polanyi, 2007) The values of freedom and democracy have such a function. It advocates freedom of belief and individual freedom. People can freely choose economic production and behavior. Therefore, primitive and isolated countries and regions have gradually been involved in the world market dominated by the US and the west, and become a part of the world market economy. It can be said that the global free trade system, the free constitutional state and the liberal international order mentioned in the liberalism theory are all built in the process of “de – embedding” promoted by the market economy. However, because the US and the

West have unparalleled advantages in finance, science and technology, and capital, when the people of developing countries “de – embedding” from the original community, they will inevitably become vassals of the free trade system. If the value of “freedom” deconstructs the cohesion of the traditional community value system from the logic of the bottom people and justifies the expansion of the market economy dominated by the US and the west, then the value of “democracy” deconstructs the cohesion of the traditional community value system from the logic of the high-level political elites. Because in the era of globalization, the democratic transformation of any country is inevitably affected or even dominated by international political forces. For example, in the democratic elections in Ukraine in 2004, although Yanukovich, who was close to Russia, won the election, Yushchenko, who was close to the west, clashed with Yanukovich in parliament with the support of opposition forces in the US and the west, and Ukrainian political situation was in turmoil. The legal basis of democratic revolution lies in starting from higher values and completely disagreeing with the rule of law order and political order that produce political authority. In other words, under the influence of the US and western international forces, if the democratically elected government does not conform to the interests of the US and the West, the US and the West will use international influence or the value of “human rights above sovereignty” to overthrow the government.

Secondly, the values of “freedom” and “democracy” promoted by the US and the West are one-sided and based on “America first” and “Western priority”. Mr. Marx once pointed out: “in democracy... Every link is actually only the link of the whole people”. (Marx, 2002) In other words, democracy and freedom are the freedom and democracy of all people, not just the freedom and democracy of some people or some countries. In 2014, Rand Corporation pointed out that “the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the out of the EU of the United Kingdom, the election of Donald Trump as president of the US, and the rise of the extreme right-wing parties in Europe all indicate that the international order is facing more serious risks than before 2014.” Even American scholar Ikenberry also pointed out that “western countries, which boast themselves as the model of world development, are facing the deadlock of increasing inequality, economic stagnation, financial crisis and political polarization at home, and the international order, systems, norms and decision-making procedures at the international level are also facing unprecedented challenges,

such as frequent retreat and failure of international governance.”(Ikenberry, 2019) One of the reasons for this situation is that the values of “freedom” and “democracy” promoted by the US and the West are not real values of “freedom” and “democracy”, but one-sided values based on “American priority” and “Western priority” – more directly, “capital priority”. When the values of “politics of recognition”, real “freedom” and “democracy” are accepted by the international community, the one-sided values of “freedom” and “democracy” pursued by the Western political elite are bound to face the risk of disintegration.

## ***2. External factors promote the decline of the order***

The external cause works through the internal cause, that is, influenced by factors such as technological revolution, politics of recognition and industrial transfer, the international balance of power has undergone a fundamental change. As the balance of power changes, countries in the international system will try to project the world political thoughts they support into the international order. This process is the international political struggle among countries. The international struggle is the direct driving force for the decline of the liberal international order.

### *Scientific and technological progress in various countries*

Mearsheimer believes that the unipolar order of the US is the fundamental premise for the establishment and maintenance of the liberal international order. However, with the development of society, science and technology, as the primary productive force, plays an increasingly important role in the competition of comprehensive national strength. After the cold war, the US has an absolute advantage in the field of science and technology. However, with the deepening of economic globalization, the diffusion of science and technology is increasingly enhanced and rapid. At the moment when the fourth scientific and technological revolution is booming, many small and medium-sized countries can even occupy a place in the scientific and technological revolution. For example, in the new technological revolution, chips play a decisive role, while the lithography machine manufactured by ASME company in the Netherlands occupies more than nine layers of the world market share and has a near monopoly position. The US is also aware of the core role of technological competition in international competition, and the US has lagged behind some countries in some technical fields, so it has taken many measures



to suppress the scientific and technological progress of other countries. For example, the Trump administration in the US launched a crackdown on science and technology to China, and the Biden administration raised the competition in science and technology with China to an unprecedented level after taking office. For example, in 2023, the US and India held a meeting on “key and emerging technology initiatives” with the help of bilateral platforms, “and hope the ‘key and emerging technology initiatives’ will help the US and India compete with China in military equipment, semiconductors and artificial intelligence.”(Hunnicut, 2023) Moreover, in view of China’s world leading position in many fields of science and technology, the US united its allies and partners to build the so-called “democratic science and technology alliance” to curb China’s scientific and technological progress, which highlights the intention of the US to try to dominate the global key technology fields. A series of US policies not only reflect the important role of science and technology in modern international competition, but also reflect the gradual loss of US monopoly on advanced science and technology. This shows that in the post Cold War era when science and technology is the primary productive force, Fukuyama’s proposition of “the end of history” has not appeared, and the world order is evolving towards the trend of equality and multipolarity. China, the EU and other countries and regions can also occupy a place and play a role in the world order.

#### *Industrial transfer promotes economic development in developing countries*

The French scholar Braudel clearly pointed out in his book the dynamics of capitalism: “this is a group of privileged groups engaged in the operation and calculation that ordinary people do not know, and the most complex art is performed here. This is a monopoly world that obtains the maximum profit through financial transactions and investment”. (Braudel, 1997) Capital has the nature of chasing profits. In the era of scientific and technological progress gradually creating huge wealth, the technological composition of real economic capital continues to improve, and the profit margin of capital decreases accordingly. And in the financial field and capital market, although there are high risks, there are opportunities to obtain high returns through high leverage operations and other speculative activities, so capital with risky nature is attracted to concentrate in the financial field and capital market. While capital expands globally and flows into the financial and capital markets, and promotes transnational

corporations in developed countries to optimize the allocation of global resources, its economic contraction has also caused “industrial hollowing out” in developed countries.

With the transfer of real industries from developed countries to developing countries with lower costs, industrial transfer has promoted the economic rise of developing countries, and also promoted the transformation of the balance of power among countries. However, the development of the financial industry depends on the real economy. When developed countries transfer large-scale capital to the financial industry, because a country’s economic aggregate is fixed, its investment in the real economy is bound to shrink. Therefore, after the de-industrialization and large-scale overseas investment in the US and the West, their domestic investment in real industries has declined, and their economic prosperity is only a short-term prosperity. On the contrary, the scientific research investment of developing countries in the real industry has made rapid progress. For example, according to the statistical bulletin on national science and technology investment in 2022 issued by the National Bureau of statistics, China’s total R&D expenditure has exceeded 3 trillion yuan, an increase of 10.1% over 2021. It took eight years for China’s scientific research investment to increase from 1 trillion to 2 trillion, and only four years to increase from 2 trillion to 3 trillion, which fully reflects China’s strategy of focusing on scientific and technological innovation. Science and technology is the primary productive force, and the increase in investment in science and technology must be accompanied by rapid economic growth. Since the reform and opening up, China has taken advantage of the industrial transfer opportunity of developed countries to develop its economy. “In 2020, China has become the world’s largest manufacturing country, with the added value of manufacturing equivalent to 27% of its GDP, and the proportion of US manufacturing in GDP fell from 25.1% in 1970 to 11.8% in 2015.”(WB, 2021) According to the statistics of the International Monetary Fund, China’s GDP has increased at an average annual rate of 9.5% since the reform and opening up, and its share in the world’s GDP has also increased from 1.7% in 1980 to 18% in 2022. During this period, China not only became the world’s second- largest economy but also actively carried out industrial upgrading. For example, China’s “high-tech manufacturing industry accounts for 15.5% of the added value of industries above Designated Size, and the equipment manufacturing industry accounts for 31.8% of the added value of industries above designated size. The output of new

energy vehicles and photovoltaic has remained the world's first for many years. The transformation and upgrading of traditional industries have accelerated, and 45 national advanced manufacturing clusters have been cultivated." China has gradually become an economic power with scientific and technological innovation, which shows that the economic foundation of the liberal international order formed in history – "center – periphery" economic structure – has gradually declined.

*The value pursuits of comprehensive "freedom" and "democracy" have emerged*

"Liberal democracy" has always been a powerful weapon for the US and the western world to implement the liberal international order. However, the one-sided values of freedom and democracy promoted by the US and the West have not only encountered the crisis of domestic internal governance, but also encountered setbacks at the international level.

First, at the domestic level, the US and the West have one-sided emphasis on economic and capital liberalization. Under the guidance of the "Washington consensus", the US and Western countries strongly advocated that the state should reduce its intervention in the market, which led to the disappearance of embedded liberalism. The consequences of the decline of embedded liberalism and the rise of neoliberal political economy are that the country's ability to deal with global economic problems has been greatly weakened, and the lack of restricted economic freedom has allowed the unrestricted free flow of capital, resulting in the concentration of social wealth in a small number of capital manipulation classes, and the pace of income growth and life improvement of the middle class and below is very small or no progress. Taking the US as an example, American scholar Stokes made statistics on the income distribution of American citizens after the cold war. He pointed out: "the data show that there are two main beneficiaries of globalization, one is the Asian economies that have rapidly realized industrialization after the cold war, and the other is the richest person in the world. In this 1% composition, Americans account for half (the rest are mainly from Western Europe, Japan and Oceania), and control the main wealth. Multinational corporations, financial institutions and high-tech sectors in the US earn wealth around the world. The traditional 'blue collar' without higher education has become the outcast of globalization, with increased unemployment and income inequality". (Stokes, 2018) According to the calculation of economists Saez and Zucman, in 1970, the top 1% of the rich in the US had less

than 25% of the wealth in the US, and by 2020, the proportion had risen to 40%, while the latter 90% had only 30% of the wealth in the US. In the case of extremely uneven income levels, the internal governance crisis in the US has emerged. Populism and racism have become important social and even political issues. The "occupy Wall Street" and "impact on Capitol Hill" are the significant signs of political tearing, xenophobia, political polarization and populism flooding in the US.

Secondly, at the international level, the revisionist foreign policy of "American priority" has led to differences between Israel and the US and the western "Democratic Alliance". The international order of "freedom and democracy" emphasizes rule governance, and national sovereignty is equal in form. However, the US foreign policy has always adhered to the conservative position. For example, Robert Kagan, an American strategist, said: "Europe is moving away from power. In other words, Europe is abandoning power and entering a world of self-discipline through laws, rules, transnational negotiations and cooperation... At the same time, the US is in a historical dilemma and is using power in a Hobbesian world of anarchy... In this world, international law and rules are unreliable... Americans are like from Mars, while Europeans are from Venus. They have few common views and less mutual understanding". (Kagan, 2004) Based on political realism, the US believes that the end of the cold war does not mean that international competition does not exist, and military strength is still the most important. Therefore, after the end of the Warsaw Pact Alliance, the US still retains NATO as the backbone to maintain the "liberal Leviathan" of the US, as pointed out in the US "founding a free world under the rule of law: American national security in the 21st century": "Reviving and expanding NATO and maintaining the military superiority and military capabilities of liberal countries are an important part of ensuring the security of the US". (Kagan, 2004) Moreover, the US has repeatedly violated international rules, such as launching the Kosovo war and the Iraq war by bypassing the UN and constantly pursuing its hegemonic policy through war. In addition, the US also wantonly intervened in other countries' domestic affairs to safeguard its own interests on the grounds of "human rights above sovereignty" and "humanitarian intervention", which also led to Singapore's ambassador to the United Nations angrily pointed out: "The biggest paradox of the 21st century is that this undemocratic world order is actually maintained by the most democratic nation state – the western countries". (Coker, 2016) The

president of Zimbabwe also accused: “the US has no moral right to interfere with other countries on the grounds of safeguarding democracy”. (Democracy under Siege, 2021) The revisionist foreign policy of the US, which ignores international rules and is keen on military conquest, has led the European Union to believe that the US has deviated from the “liberal democracy”. For example, scholar Loch Johnson criticized the US’ foreign policy. He believed that the current foreign policy of the US is full of the characteristics of “isolationism, unilateralism, presidential imperialism, arrogance...” (Johnson, 2003), which also led to the gradual deviation of the values between the EU and the US, French President Macron has repeatedly stressed that the European Union should be independent and independent from the US.

*The international order tends to be equal*

Because there is no world government in the international community, and each country is arranged equally like the atom, but the comprehensive national strength and strength of each country are different, David Laker believes that there is a hierarchy in the international community. He pointed out: “the inequality of status between sovereign states is specifically manifested in the subordination of affiliated states to the dominant state, and the hierarchical system of sovereign states is a continuous variable, which is defined according to the authority of the ruler over the ruled. The greater the scope of the ruler’s legitimate regulation of the behavior of affiliated States, the more hierarchical their relationship will be”. (Laker, 2013) For example, the relationship between the US and Japan and South Korea is like this. Japan and South Korea are forced to act as pawns of the “Indo Pacific strategy” of the US in exchange for the political support and security commitments of the US. In other words, the order is just the “liberal hegemonic order” (Ikenberry, 2011) of the US. However, with the economic rise of developing countries, sovereign states have tried to get rid of the status of “center” countries’ affiliated countries and strive for independence and recognition.

The politics of recognition is a political struggle in which a sovereign state wants others to treat itself as independent. A sovereign state “has the legal status of a sovereign legal person when it is recognized, and is no longer regarded as an appendage of others” (Vinter, 2003). The political struggle for recognition has multiple manifestations, such as nationalism, democracy, individualism and liberalism. The collapse of the colonial system after World War II and a series of Russian policies close to the West

after the collapse of the Soviet Union are typical examples of striving for recognition.

As pointed out above, the liberal international order is an unequal order dominated by the US and the West to maintain its “center” economic status. With the development of its economy and the strengthening of its national strength, developing countries or third world countries also need to express their voice in the international community and hope to be recognized by the international community, especially the major powers. For example, after the G7 led by the US put forward the initiative of “the most powerful country bears special responsibility in maintaining the rule-based international system and international law” at the G7 summit in 2021, that immediately attracted the attention of Russia. Russia believed that the US was trying to replace international law with “rules”, and it is an attempt to “replace the universal international legal framework that requires consensus among countries with unilateral and illegitimate actions” (Lavrov, 2019). Russia, South Africa, Dominica, Mexico, Marshall Islands, Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries oppose the initiative of the US to maintain the “center” economic status of the US and western developed countries, but strongly advocate that the international order should be centered on the UN and based on the principle of sovereign equality in the Charter of the United Nations.

China is also one of the countries pursuing international recognition. After the Opium War, China gradually became a semi colonial and semi feudal country. In order to gain recognition from the international community, China has actively integrated into the international community since the reform and opening up. For example, China joined the NPT (Nuclear non Proliferation Treaty) in 1992, and then signed CTBT (Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty) and the Paris Agreement on climate change. At the same time, China has also joined some international organizations, such as the IMF and WB. The most symbolic is China’s accession to the WTO in 2001, which shows that China has taken a positive position and is trying to develop itself by participating in the international system and strive for recognition by the international community. When China’s economic strength has been strengthened, in order to promote the common development of the world, the Chinese government has put forward the concept of “a community with a shared future for mankind”, hoping to reform the existing unjust international order and provide an international environment for the common development of the international community.

The “community with a shared future for mankind” aims to pursue national interests while taking into account the reasonable concerns of other countries, and promote the common development of all countries in the pursuit of national development. In other words, China pursues equal recognition not only for itself, but also for all third world countries in the world. In order to build a fair and equal international order, China has actively issued national policies to promote the economic development of the third world countries. In 2013, China proposed the “B&R” plan, and then established the AIIB and the ADB to actively provide financial and technical support for the infrastructure and economic development of the third world countries. China has not attempted to subvert the current international order, because any drastic change in the international order will lead to international turbulence and endanger the security of people around the world. China hopes to promote the development of third world countries, but rejects the initiative of “improving and improving the existing international order” that any country is regarded as an affiliate of other countries.

### Conclusion

The arrival of the unipolar moment after the Cold War enabled the US to lead the West to establish an order to maintain the “center” economic status of the US and the West. However, this international order did not escape the traditional great power politics and realism, making it a relatively complex composite.

The liberal international order is an international order maintained by the unipolar order of the US, based on the “center-periphery” international economic structure, guaranteed by the rules dominated by the West, and justified by Western ideology. Under the influence of the scientific and technological revolution and globalization, as well as the external effects of industrial transfer from developed countries, the rise of the economies of the Third World countries has gradually eroded the economic foundation of the liberal international order. The old liberal international order was not without merit. The formal equality and democratization it advocated also promoted the cultural consciousness of developing countries, which in turn spurred the rise of political movements in pursuit

of recognition and equality, thereby challenging the legitimacy of the freedom and democracy values advocated by the US.

The contrast of power among countries and the continuous change of political thoughts have a direct impact on the attitude of countries towards the current unequal international order. Political thoughts based on the Charter of the United Nations, such as “a community with a shared future for mankind,” “a new international economic order,” “sovereign equality,” “non-interference in internal affairs,” and “prohibition of the use of force,” have been deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. The political thought of pursuing equality and independence has become the most attractive political thought in the 21st century.

The decline of the liberal international order is a historical inevitability. However, this does not mean that the liberal international order will soon come to an end. The US, as the only superpower, still has the ability to influence the world, including the capacity to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries with its own strength, such as the Afghanistan War and interference in Taiwan initiated by the US. In addition, although the externalities of industrial transfer from “center” countries have promoted the rapid rise of “peripheral” emerging markets, causing a series of changes in the strength comparison between countries, the essence of industrial transfer from developed countries is to transfer industrial capital to developing countries with lower labor or resource costs, to expand consumer markets and obtain higher profits. Thus, at least in the short term, it maintains the control of the US and the West over the world market. However, the legitimacy crisis and value identity crisis of the liberal international order have become indisputable facts. The internal and external challenges facing the liberal international order indicate that the hierarchical and liberal hegemonic order that upholds the economic interests of the “center” country is no longer popular, and the trend of international order development is indeed towards equality. Moreover, globalization and China’s assistance to emerging countries have established a relatively solid economic foundation for an equal and equitable new international order. The construction of rules based on the United Nations Charter by countries around the world will inevitably become a trend in the international order in the future.



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