**4.4 Emerging Power Structures in International Relations: EU and China**

**Introduction**

The rise of large and rapidly growing nations is having a significant impact on the global order as their expanding influence reshapes the structure of power in the international system. These emerging powers are increasingly asserting themselves as major actors on the global scene. An emerging power or rising power is a term used as recognition of the rising, primarily influence of a nation—or union of nations—which has steadily increased their presence in global affairs. Such a power aspires to have a [more powerful position](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Power_in_international_relations) or role in [international relations](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_relations), either [regionally](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional_power) or [globally](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_power), and possess sufficient resources and levels of development that such goals are potentially achievable. There is no standard or agreed method to decide which states are emerging powers.

However a fundamental characteristic of an emerging power is that it is also an [emerging economy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerging_markets), being that economic development is necessary and preliminary to political and military emergence. It has been argued that while a country may be an emerging power, it is above anything else an emerging economy with only the potential or hope of increasing their global influence. This is because of several limiting factors, largely the seven dimensions of state power; geography, population, economy, resources, military, diplomacy and national identity.

The term “emerging powers” is a broad and somewhat vague category or shorthand for countries that are thought to be in the process of increasing their economic (and political) power faster than the rest. To be described as an emerging power, a country usually needs to be large (both regarding geographic extension and population, though not always, as the case of Japan shows) and poorer on a per capita basis than industrialized countries, though there is no clear definition of when a country ceases to “emerge.”

Since emerging power status is desirable and implies an optimistic outlook, governments have an interest in depicting themselves as such. In the same way, investment banks are keen to identify emerging markets with above-average growth potential for their clients. One important part of the literature on emerging powers looks at international power transition in history, and how the arrival of new great powers changes global dynamics. Another, currently larger and more visible part, looks at contemporary emerging powers. For the latter, predictions and estimates about future growth (which are often too rosy) matter greatly. Yet the question of which country qualifies as an emerging power is always contested and in flux. The difficulty in predicting the future explains why some analyses in this realm often lack serious empirical and theoretical scholarship.

The concept of emerging powers is not new: Brazil, for instance, was seen as an emerging power in the 1970s. Still, the term gained new prominence in the first decade of the 21st century, when large markets at the periphery of the global economy continuously grew above average, leading to a shift of power away from established powers toward the developing world. The BRICs grouping (consisting of Brazil, Russia, India, and China), created in 2001 and called BRICS (with a capital “S” since South Africa’s accession in 2010), came to symbolize a narrative that seemed distant in the 1990s but appeared to make sense in the mid-2000s: a momentous shift of power from the United States and Europe toward emerging powers. The history of the BRICS grouping can be divided into three phases.

In the first phase (2001–2007), “BRIC” (then still without South Africa) stood for little more than an investment category invented by Goldman Sachs. The second phase (2008–2014) saw, contrary to general expectations, the emergence of the BRICS as a political platform, though of a largely informal nature. In 2015, the transition to a third phase began, marked by a process of institutionalization and the launch of the BRICS’s New Development Bank and around numerous meetings between government representatives, the most visible being the yearly presidential summit.

The literature on emerging powers is wide and highly diverse in terms of structure, scope, and focus. In addition to more academic work, a large quantity of former policymakers and journalists write about the subject, often in a more speculative and forward-looking fashion. Many analyses deal with emerging powers as one cohesive group, others focus on specific emerging powers (most frequently China, followed by India). These include interesting analyses of the social transformation ongoing in emerging powers. Additionally, within the realm of international relations, works on emerging powers usually focus on the foreign policies of specific countries, questions of global public goods (such as climate change or security) or norms (e.g., democracy and human rights), and global order in more general terms. Traditionally, only [great powers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_power) or [superpowers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superpower) have succeeded in all seven dimensions of state power. In present time, The [Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa,](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BRICS) European Union, Canada etc. are often cited as being emerging powers.

**European Union as Emerging Power:**

The [**European Union**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Union) (EU) has been called an [emerging superpower](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Potential_superpowers) by scholars and academics like T. R. Reid, Andrew Reding, [Andrew Moravcsik](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andrew_Moravcsik), [Mark Leonard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mark_Leonard_(director)), [Jeremy Rifkin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremy_Rifkin), [John McCormick](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McCormick_(political_scientist)) and some politicians such as [Romano Prodi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romano_Prodi) and [Tony Blair](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Blair). They believe that the EU is a superpower, or will become one, in the 21st century – while noting that the concept of "superpower" has changed to one of [soft power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_power) rather than the hard (military) superpowers of the 20th century. [John McCormick](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_McCormick_(political_scientist)) believes that the EU has already achieved superpower status, based on the size and global reach of its economy and on its global political influence. He argues that the nature of power has changed since the [Cold War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cold_War)-driven definition of superpower was developed, and that military power is no longer essential to great power; he argues that control of the means of production is more important than control of the means of destruction, and contrasts the threatening [hard power](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hard_power) of the United States with the opportunities offered by the soft power wielded by the European Union.

Robert J. Guttman wrote in 2001 that the very definition of the term superpower has changed and in the 21st century, it does not only refer to states with military power, but also to groups such as the European Union, with strong market economics, young, highly educated workers savvy in high technology, and a global vision. [Friis Arne Petersen](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Friis_Arne_Petersen&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Friis Arne Petersen (page does not exist)), the Danish ambassador to the US, has expressed similar views. He conceded that the EU is a "special kind of superpower," one that has yet to establish a unified military force that exerts itself even close to the same level as many of its individual members.

Although no single analytical framework suffices for understanding power in international politics, it is important to be able to understand what difference alternative theories of power make. First, power can be seen in terms of its sources: military, economic and normative. Second, it can be conceived in terms of resources, perceptions, and inter-subjective understandings. Third, in addition to resources, effective power also depends on strategy and will to use power. Fourth, the assumption that the more powerful party is always able to impose its will might be mistaken. Because power depends on context, there are many instances where it is unreasonable to expect that the EU could influence Russia, regardless of the former’s resources or strategic skill. The European Union has tried to boost its role as a global actor. Some member states and political actors have resisted what they see as overly ambitious plans for the EU’s international role, and other global powers have shown mixed attitudes towards any accretion of the EU’s international influence. As Antoine Mégie and Frédéric Mérand note in their introduction to this special issue, scholars and commentators have diverse and often disparate views on the present influence and the future development of the EU. The optimists maintain that the Union already contributes significantly to many international developments, and believe that it will become a new superpower.

**China as an Emerging Power:**

Several recent events have provoked the latest announcements of China’s looming ascent to superpower stature and have suggested that these long-held expectations are, at long last, coming true. In October 2003, China launched its first human into space, joining the United States and the former Soviet Union as the only countries to have done so. American media have recently taken notice of China’s efforts to expand and diversify its access to sources of oil in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and unsettlingly close to home Canada. The world’s industrial economies, including the United States, have inferred from the giant sucking sound created by lost manufacturing jobs and from the flood of Chinese exports into their markets that China is becoming the world’s manufacturing hub. Meanwhile, analysts ponder the implications for global security of China’s military modernization effort, now two decades long, and its promise to develop a “revolution in military affairs with Chinese characteristics.”

The expanding range of China’s economic interactions has provoked the most recent attention to China as an emerging superpower. American media have taken note recently of Chinese diplomacy in search of long-term sources of oil, while the growth of the PRC’s oil imports has had impact on gasoline prices that American consumers notice at the pump. Beijing’s purchase of U.S. Treasury bonds that finance the Bush budget deficits, American campaign season pressures on Beijing to appreciate the renminbi against the dollar, and Lenovo’s purchase of IBM’s personal computer division underscore China’s enormous trade surplus with the United States, now the largest of any American trade partner, including Japan. China’s leading place in heavy industries like steel and shipbuilding reflects the dramatic advances that China’s economy has made in the past two decades. The ubiquity of Chinese products serving lower income consumers at Walmart and of Chinese-made clothing in high-end department stores underscores how much China’s low labour costs are making it the manufacturing hub of the world, contributing to the hollowing out of the traditional American manufacturing base.

For another thing, China has indeed become an important trading nation, but it still ranks well behind other major economies. In 2003, China ranked ninth, supplying 3.5 percent of the world’s exports. It may soon overtake Canada and Italy as the next largest exporter (3.75 and 3.9 percent respectively). But it has some way to go before it rivals France (5.2 percent), Japan (6.3 percent), Britain (6.7 percent), and Germany (8.8 percent). By comparison, the United States in 2003 accounted for 14.7 percent of the world’s export volume, and the European Union together accounted for 16.8 percent. While Chinese acquisition of foreign assets has attracted attention recently, its overall foreign investment is negligible in comparison with other major economies. Although Shanghai has made great strides to recoup its pre-revolutionary international importance, China is nowhere close to becoming a world financial center, nor is the renminbi, which in recent years has become convertible on current account but is still not on capital account, likely to establish itself as the standard of foreign exchange anytime soon.

China’s economic successes are impressive enough and deserve attention. They reflect China’s late entry into the international economy China was effectively shut out of interactions in the international economy until 1971 and the revision of its development policies and the role of the international economy in them begun by Deng Xiaoping in 1978. Over the two decades after 1978, China’s economic growth rates approached 10 percent annually.

Since 1985, China has pursued a concerted program of military modernization that has attracted attention and, since the mid-1990s, generated controversy. Since 1989, defense allocations in China’s public state budget have risen at double-digit rates. China is developing a new generation of strategic and tactical missiles, some of which are deployed on the Chinese coast facing Taiwan. China is building a much more capable navy and has bought advanced aircraft from Russia.

Undeniably, China’s political influence has grown over the past 3 decades. In part, this rise in political influence simply reflects the reversal in its position in the international order. For the first two decades of its existence, the PRC was an outsider, shut out of the international political and economic community by effective American containment policies of embargo and ostracism.

Upon entry into the United Nations in 1971, Beijing at last acquired legitimate standing in the international community and could begin to use the instruments of conventional diplomacy and access to the international economy to pursue its national interests abroad. China’s international prestige and political influence grew as Deng Xiaoping’s reforms in the 1980s transformed China’s economy and its relationship to the world. But it suffered dramatically as a consequence of the brutal suppression of the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations and of the revolutions in Eastern Europe in the same year, and of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, making the PRC appear a reactionary political fossil in the perceived tide of democratization elsewhere. Since then, it has worked to translate its continued economic success into political influence and to overcome international perceptions of it as an atrocious abuser of human rights.

By all of these measures, China is not now a superpower, nor is it likely to emerge as one soon. It is establishing itself as a great power, on par with Great Britain, Russia, Japan, and, perhaps, India. China is today a serious player in the regional politics of Asia, but also is just one of several. At a broader level, in global affairs, its stature and power are growing, but in most respects it remains a regional power, complementing the cast of other great powers under the overarching dominance, however momentary, of the United States.