

The International Community from the Perspective of Eastern Thought (Part II) – Multipolarization of the International Order: the Nature & Influence of the Global South



Author Guo Sizhi

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In recent years, the landscape of international politics and the global economy has undergone significant transformation. The rise of emerging powers such as China has intensified US-China rivalry and accelerated the formation and confrontation of two major blocs – one democratic and the other authoritarian. In particular, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 brought the confrontation between authoritarian and democratic systems into sharp relief, lending increasing credibility to the notion of a “new Cold War”. Amid this environment, growing attention has been directed toward the actions and presence of the Global South, which does not neatly align with either of the two major blocs.

This paper examines how the values inherent in Eastern thought – namely “integration”, “harmony” and “diversity” – relate to the behavioral principles of Global South countries in contemporary international politics. It seeks to clarify the shared characteristics between Eastern thought and the diplomatic behavior of the Global South, particularly their rejection of binary confrontation, their acceptance of multiple coexisting value systems, and their flexible diplomatic posture.

The Limits of Dualistic Worldviews & the Emergence of Polarized Blocs

In recent years, as the United States and China have entered a period of intense confrontation and friction, the term “new Cold War” has become increasingly common and carries a growing sense of realism. With the rise of China, Russia, and other states, the sphere of influence of authoritarian regimes appears to be expanding in opposition to the Western democratic bloc. At the same time, the Western tendency to interpret global affairs through a dualistic lens has contributed to the perception of a new Cold War and the polarization of the international system into two opposing blocs.

For example, since the inauguration of the Joe Biden administration in the US in January 2021, international political dynamics have often been framed in terms of “democracy versus authoritarianism” (Yuzo Waki, *The Age of the Global South: The Multiplication of International Politics*, 2024).

Western countries, perceiving the rise of China, Russia, and other socialist or formerly socialist states as a challenge to democracy and the existing international order, have expressed strong concern and adopted a confrontational stance. The US characterizes China as “the only competitor with the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological capacity to challenge a stable and open international

system.”

First, the West views global politics through the lens of a confrontation between democracy and authoritarianism, identifying Russia and China as principal competitors. Second, regarding challenges to the international order, China is regarded as “the only country with the capability to mount a comprehensive challenge to a stable and open international order” and is seen as contesting existing norms and values.

Third, the US and other Western countries emphasize value-based diplomacy. By prioritizing universal values such as democracy and human rights, they seek to strengthen cooperation with like-minded allies in order to counter authoritarian states. Fourth, Western countries, particularly the US, harbor deep concerns about China's pursuit of technological supremacy. China's expanding power has heightened concerns in the West regarding its acquisition of advanced technologies – such as semiconductors and artificial intelligence – and their potential military applications. In response, the US and other Western countries have implemented measures including investment restrictions and export controls targeting China.

Finally, the US and other Western nations have become acutely aware of the vulnerabilities in their own supply chains. Viewing their economic dependence on China as a strategic risk, they have introduced tariffs and other policy tools to encourage the reshoring of supply chains. At the same time, they are strengthening cooperation with allied countries to diversify supply networks, particularly in critical mineral resources such as rare earth elements.

Of course, authoritarian states – notably China and Russia, as well as other socialist or formerly socialist countries – perceive Western civilization and the universal democratic values championed by the US and its allies as potential threats to their own political systems. Specifically, China and Russia harbor the following concerns regarding the Western bloc.

First, they fear for the stability of their political systems: the expansion of democracy and the emphasis on human rights are seen as factors that could undermine the stability of one-party rule or authoritarian governance. Second, they strongly oppose what they view as interference in their domestic affairs: Western attempts to intervene in other countries under the banner of democracy or human rights are often condemned as violations of sovereignty.

Third, they interpret ongoing tensions as a new Cold War: despite the end of the original Cold War, confrontation between authoritarian states such as China and Russia and the democratic bloc persists,

and is increasingly described as a renewed Cold War dynamic. The confrontation between the US and China, along with the broader “new Cold War” environment, has the potential to produce a wide range of negative consequences for the world. At present, the most significant impacts include heightened uncertainty in the global economy, disruptions to supply chains, and rising geopolitical tensions.

The rivalry between the major blocs – particularly the US and China – has already exerted negative effects on the global economy. Major international organizations have revised downward their forecasts for global economic growth in 2025 and 2026. Additional tariffs are expected to temporarily reduce global GDP by around 1.0%. Trade restrictions between the US and China have begun to fragment supply chains. Moreover, China has strengthened export controls on rare earth elements, other critical minerals, and dual-use items. These measures, often implemented as counteractions against rival states, are particularly consequential given China’s dominant share of global rare earth production, and are likely to have significant impacts on related industries.

Relationship Between Eastern Thought & Diplomatic Behavior of the Global South

Eastern thought is characterized by a distinctive worldview that does not reject heterogeneous values or entities but instead seeks to integrate them and achieve harmony. As exemplified by Confucianism’s Doctrine of the Mean, Buddhism’s concept of dependent origination, and Daoism’s principle of *wu wei* (non-action), Eastern thought does not assume conflict as a starting point; rather, it affirms the coexistence of multiple values within a shared space.

This intellectual foundation – emphasizing “integration”, “harmony” and “diversity” – resonates deeply with the behavioral patterns of Global South countries in contemporary international politics. Many states in the Global South avoid aligning themselves rigidly with any particular bloc, even as US–China rivalry intensifies. Countries such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, and South Africa do not rely exclusively on any single major power; instead, they maintain simultaneous relationships with multiple partners in order to maximize their national interests. This posture is not merely a form of realist balance of power diplomacy, but is grounded in a worldview that assumes the coexistence of multiple value systems.

The Eastern philosophical notion of “coexistence of heterogeneous elements” aligns closely with the Global South’s diplomatic

practices, such as non-alignment and multi-vector diplomacy. These countries tend not to accept binary frameworks – such as democracy versus authoritarianism or liberalism versus state-led development – at face value. Rather, they show a tendency to respect the diversity of national development models and historical backgrounds. This represents a more inclusive and flexible value orientation, distinct from the Western modern tradition that seeks to universalize a single set of values.

Furthermore, the Daoist concept of “fluidity” corresponds to the diplomatic flexibility exhibited by Global South states as they adjust their positions in response to changing international conditions. India’s “strategic autonomy” and ASEAN’s “multi-layered balancing diplomacy” exemplify an approach that prioritizes situational adjustment over fixed alliances. This mirrors the characteristics of Eastern thought, which seeks to avoid confrontation, pursue harmony, and manage multiple values simultaneously.

In sum, the Eastern values of integration, harmony, and diversity provide an important analytical lens for understanding the diplomatic behavior of the Global South. The presence of the Global South demonstrates that the international order cannot be adequately captured by a simple bipolar structure; instead, it embodies the possibility of a world in which multiple value systems coexist. In this sense, Eastern thought deserves renewed attention as a theoretical foundation for interpreting today’s increasingly multipolar international system.

The Global South as an Expression of Multipolarity Beyond the Two Major Blocs

As the confrontation between the US and China deepens, the group of countries referred to as the Global South has been gaining increasing prominence in world politics and the global economy. These states do not clearly align with either Washington or Beijing; rather, they pursue their own interests and have begun to influence the formation of a new international order. The term “Global South” generally refers to emerging and developing countries in regions such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Although the term lacks a strict definition, it is widely used because many of these countries are located in the Southern Hemisphere. It is often contrasted with “Global North”, which refers to economically advanced nations.

The Global South thus denotes a broad group of emerging and developing countries that do not fit neatly into the traditional categories of the “Western bloc” or the “Eastern bloc”. These countries, despite their diversity, share certain common

characteristics: many experienced colonial rule in the past, and in recent decades they have achieved notable economic growth. During the Cold War, what is now called the Global South was referred to as the “Third World”, denoting countries that belonged neither to the capitalist bloc nor the socialist bloc. The term was also used in the context of the North–South divide, symbolizing the economic disparities between the affluent “North” and the developing “South”.

In the contemporary era, marked by deepening global fragmentation due to US-China rivalry and the war in Ukraine, the Global South has drawn renewed attention as a group of states that maintain a neutral stance rather than aligning with either major bloc. Although the term Global South does not strictly correspond to geographic location, it broadly encompasses emerging and developing nations. In recent years, these countries have been particularly noted for maintaining neutrality amid the widening divide between democracies and authoritarian regimes. The Global South includes more than 120 countries across Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. Representative examples include India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Egypt, Iran, Brazil, and Argentina.

From an economic perspective, many Global South countries have achieved rapid growth and are gaining influence in international markets. Nations such as India, Brazil, and South Africa have shown remarkable economic development. It is projected that by 2050, the combined nominal GDP of the Global South will surpass that of the US and China.

In terms of population, the Global South is experiencing rapid demographic expansion. According to United Nations projections, the population of the Global South – currently around 7.0 billion – is expected to reach approximately 8.3 to 8.4 billion by 2050, accounting for nearly two-thirds of the world’s population (*Table*).

Many Global South countries, such as India, avoid being drawn into the orbit of any particular major power. They prioritize securing their own national security and economic interests, moving pragmatically between the two major blocs. The Global South is increasing its international presence not by aligning with the US-led Western bloc or the China-Russia axis, but by maintaining an autonomous and flexible position.

Characteristics & Influence of the Global South

Many countries in the Global South are reluctant to make a “zero-sum choice” between the US and China. Instead, they seek to extract support from both sides in ways that maximize their own national

TABLE

Global South population (2026; 2050 approx.)

Unit: billion

Region	2026	2050
Asia	4.94	5.2–5.3
Africa	1.55	2.5
Latin America/Caribbean	0.46	0.6
Total	6.95	8.3–8.4

Source: UN World Population Projections

interests. Much like the “Third World” during the Cold War, the Global South often avoids aligning itself with either major bloc. This stance reflects a strategic calculation: by maintaining autonomy, these countries can draw benefits from both camps.

For example, in the UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia over the war in Ukraine, many Global South countries – including India – abstained. This has been interpreted as a “dual strategy”, allowing them to import inexpensive Russian energy while maintaining economic ties with Western nations. Some Global South countries also harbor dissatisfaction with the US-led international order, and they do not necessarily welcome being forced to choose between Washington and Beijing. Moreover, US protectionist policies and deviations from internationally agreed norms of the “rule of law” have contributed to distrust and political frustration toward Washington.

Many Global South countries, like India, are increasingly inclined toward strategic autonomy. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for instance, has emphasized “strategic autonomy” by engaging with multiple major powers – including both the US and China – without leaning too heavily toward any single one, thereby safeguarding India’s security and economic interests.

The Global South is expanding its influence as a significant actor in the international community and is drawing global attention.

Political Influence

In the political arena, Global South countries sometimes adopt positions in the UN General Assembly that align with neither the Western bloc nor China and Russia, based on the principle of one country, one vote. As noted earlier, many Global South states abstained from the UN resolution condemning Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Their diplomacy prioritizes national interests, and historical experiences of colonialism and anti-Western sentiment have strengthened resistance to having advanced countries’ values

imposed upon them. This often manifests as “balancing diplomacy”, in which they leverage great-power rivalry to maximize economic and diplomatic benefits from both sides.

Influence on International Frameworks

India, which positions itself as a leader of the Global South, hosted the “Voice of the Global South Summit” as the G20 chair in 2023, leading discussions on global issues such as climate change and development financing. In November 2023, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution – proposed by Nigeria and other Global South countries – to shift international tax cooperation to a UN framework. This was hailed as a historic victory, transferring decision-making authority over international tax rules from “rich-country clubs” like the G20 to the universally representative United Nations.

Economic Influence

Economically, the Global South has become a major engine of global growth. According to the IMF, the Global South accounts for roughly 40% of global GDP and about 70% of the world’s population – a share expected to continue rising. By 2050, the nominal GDP of the Global South is projected to surpass that of both the US and China.

As emerging markets, these countries attract international businesses with their rapid economic growth and vast consumer bases. Japanese companies, too, are expanding investments in Global South economies, particularly in fast-growing countries such as India and Vietnam. Their pursuit of strategic interests may offer new insights for achieving balance in the international system. The Global South is not merely a bystander in US-China rivalry; it is an active player contributing to the transformation of the global order.

Harmony & Integration

Through “balancing diplomacy, Global South countries seek economic and technological benefits from both the US and China. This approach helps prevent further escalation of great-power tensions and preserves diplomatic flexibility. Their neutral stance often contributes to easing overall international tensions.

Strengthening Multilateralism

The Global South plays a key role in reinforcing multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations and BRICS. By doing so, they help prevent the international order from becoming overly dominated by any single powerful state and promote a global system

that reflects diverse values and interests.

Presenting Unique Development Models

The Global South is pursuing development models distinct from Western-style modernization or China’s state capitalism. These alternative models offer the international community a broader set of choices and encourage countries to pursue development paths suited to their own cultural and social contexts.

Such trends in the Global South reduce the risk of the international system being dominated by a single ideology or power and open the way toward a more flexible, multipolar order in which diverse values can coexist.

Resource Supply & Global Markets

The Global South is also increasingly important as a supplier of strategic resources essential for energy transitions and digitalization, including oil, cobalt, lithium, and nickel. Ensuring stable access to these resources has prompted countries around the world to seek strategic partnerships with Global South nations.

Their influence on global trade and supply chains is also growing. Trade agreements and economic partnerships among Global South countries strengthen regional economic ties and expand their role in global supply chains. For advanced economies such as Japan, the Global South is an indispensable partner in building resilient supply chains for critical minerals.

Climate Change Leadership

The Global South is both a victim of climate change and an essential actor in addressing it. Many climate-related natural disasters occur in Global South countries. Although their historical responsibility for emissions is limited, they recognize the necessity of climate action and actively participate in global efforts. For example, Brazil has taken the lead in establishing the Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) and the Bioeconomy Initiative (GIB) in 2023, demonstrating the Global South’s commitment to advancing climate solutions through their own frameworks. **JS**

Dr. Guo Sizhi is specially appointed professor at Teikyo University Okinaga Research Institute, and consulting fellow at the Japan Economic Foundation (JEF). He specializes in the international economy, the energy economy, and the Chinese economy. His current research focuses on the transformation of the international political and economic order, new energy, and economic security toward carbon neutrality, and decarbonization technology innovation. He is the author of numerous books, including *A History of the Industrial Revolution: The Transition of the International Order as Seen Through Innovation* and *The Decarbonizing Industrial Revolution*.