

“It’s the hegemony, stupid”

Why a sophisticated *Power Transition Theory* needs *Liberal Hegemony*

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Paper prepared for presentation at the
SGIR 7th Pan-European International Relations Conference
September 9-11, 2010, Stockholm.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to establish a political framework to mitigate the crisis propensity of power transitions in the international system. One approach that focuses on this phenomenon is the *Power Transition Theory* originally established by A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler. This theory warns that situations in which a (declining) hegemon is approached by rising powers often escalate into conflict or even war. Specifically unsatisfied rising powers are expected to come into conflict with the dominant power and each other. The nature and origin of such dissatisfaction is not spelled out clearly, which remains one of the central weaknesses of the theory. Power Transition Theory, we argue, has only a limited view on the structure of the international order. It overlooks the possibility of ruling the system by consensus rather than by coercion, highlighted by *Liberal Hegemony Theory*. The concept of liberal hegemony by G. John Ikenberry is based on three criteria: “bonding, binding and institutionalized voice opportunities”. The partner states are thus part of the system and not mere subordinates. They can influence the institutional rules and do not have to fear the dominance of the hegemon. Merging Power Transition Theory with Liberal Hegemony Theory can reveal previously hidden opportunities to manage peaceful power transitions in ways that benefit all members of the international system. Through institutional binding and bonding the hegemon can control the rising powers. Through institutionalized voice opportunities the rising powers have the chance to influence the hegemon, even before they have reached the crucial state of power parity. In the light of the prolonged economic growth of countries like China and India that foreshadows an upcoming power transition, this finding might prove to be crucial for the thinking of future world-order-governance politics.

1. The changing international order

We live in a world of power transition, or so it seems. The need to expand the G8 to the G22, the discussion about a reform of the United Nations Security Council, the growing literature about the decline of the United States, the increased research interest in the BRIC countries, the talk about Chimerica and Chindia and in general the emergence and rise of new powers all point in this direction.

Finally, it seems, the Cassandra warnings of realists like Kenneth Waltz (1993, 1995 (1993)), who, as soon as the Cold War ended, proclaimed that the United States would not be able to enjoy the fruits of unipolarity for long are becoming true (Zakaria 2009, Brooks/Wohlforth 2008, Haass 2008, Leonard 2005, Schmidt 2006, Kegley/Raymond 1994). Taking this for

granted, it becomes obvious that theories explaining power transitions are relevant for the time-period we live in.

Literal power transitions, or periods of power parity that are likely to lead to a transition, are often associated with the outbreak of war in literature (Organski 1968, Organski/Kugler 1980, Kugler/Lemke 1996, Tammen/Kugler et al. 2000). But how serious is the situation? Is a power transition really imminent or at least in short reach, as some authors suggest?

Let us look at some empirical data, to enlighten this point. Since the Power Transition Theory (PTT) defines parity as a relation between dominant power and rising power, where the weaker side has reached at least 80% of the power capacity of the stronger side, we will do the same here.

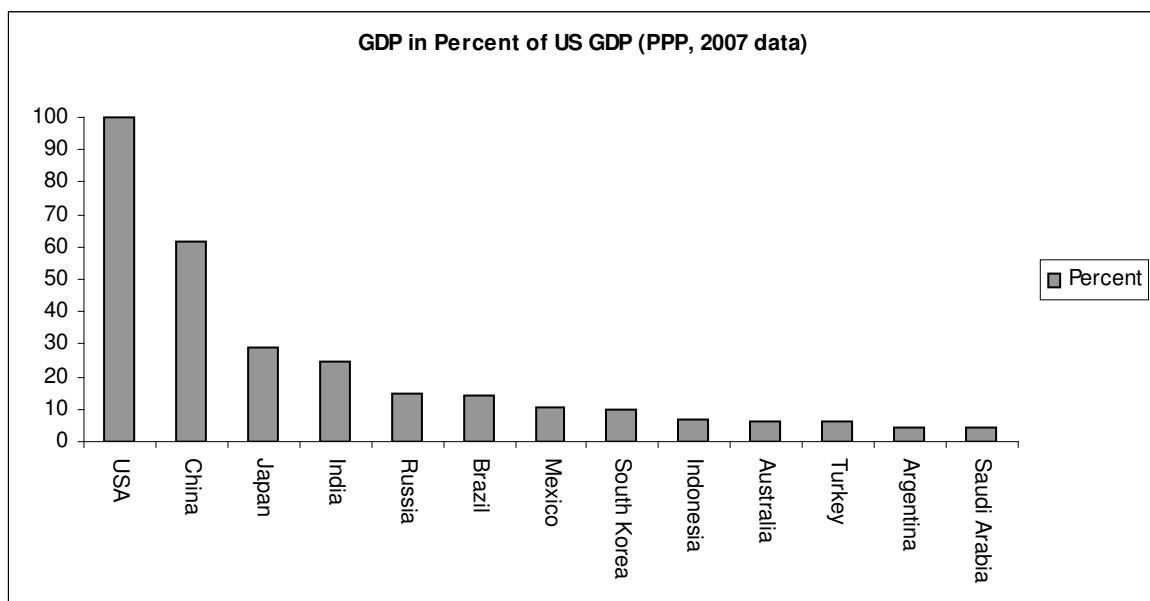
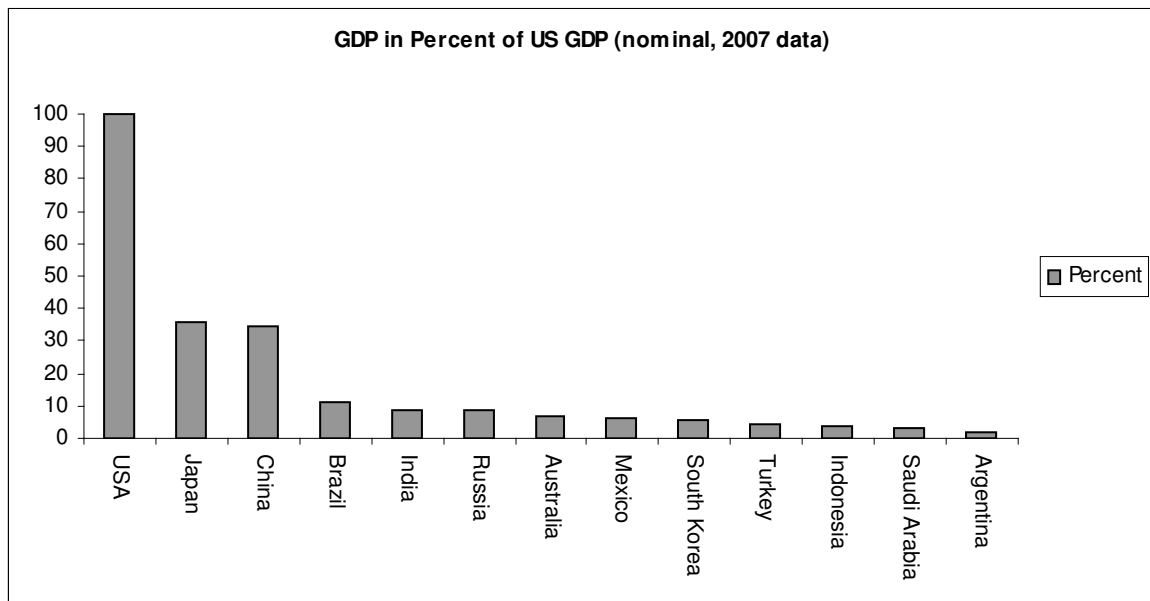
For a short overview we are using the gross domestic product (GDP) as an indicator for power. The result is somewhat underwhelming¹: None of the candidates even comes close to 80% of the US' power. There is no difference, whether one chooses nominal GDP or purchasing power parity GDP. All of them imply that the United States remain by far the strongest power for the time being.

At the same time, however, there is some truth to the story of changing power patterns. Turning to annual GDP-growth it becomes apparent that the United States are beginning to stall in their still comfortable leading position, while the growth trend in some of the rising powers are boldly going upwards.² Between 1990 and 2015³ the average

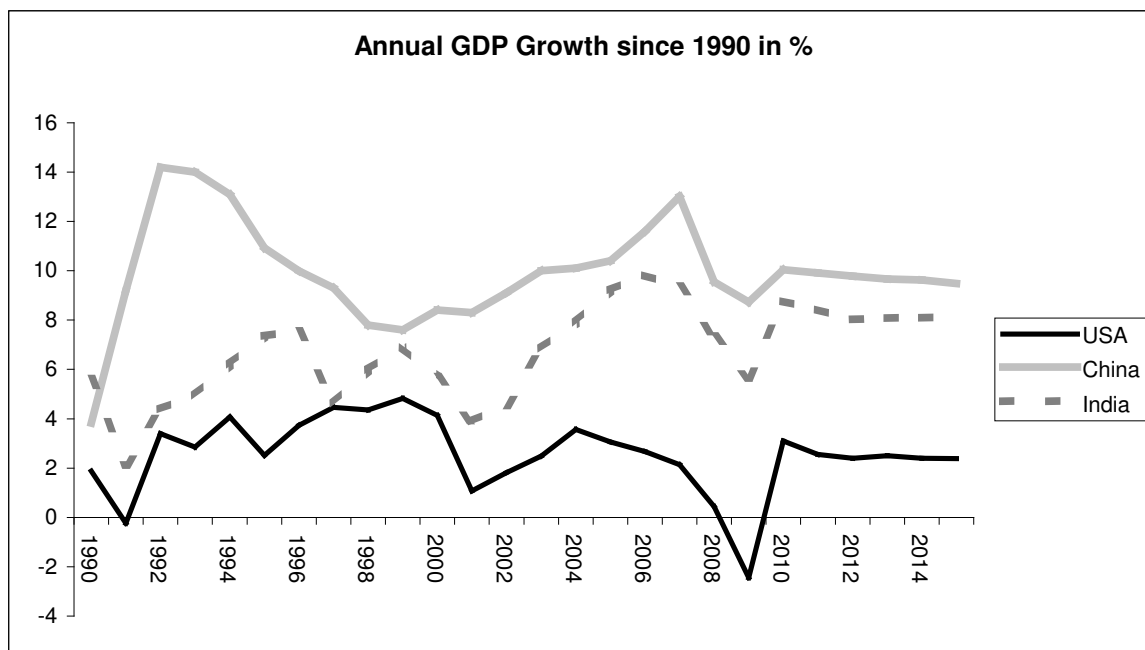
¹ *Gross domestic product* (GDP) or *gross national product* (GNP) is widely used by power transition theorists and international relations theorists in general at least as a first cut indicator of national power. See Organski/Kugler (1980: 30-38) for discussion and reasoning. See Merritt/Zinnes (Merritt/Zinnes 1989) for a discussion of different methods for measuring power.

² These trends also show that Russia and especially Japan, much rather than being rising powers themselves could more aptly be described as co-declining powers, as their average growth between 1990 and 2015 (estimates by IMF starting 2008) are even below Washington's.

³ The data has been obtained from the IMF website. Numbers from 2008 onwards are based on IMF estimates.



GDP growth of the United States has been about 2,5%. The current decade (2000-2009) has even lower numbers with an average of 1,9%. China and India on the other hand – the fastest growing states of the emerging powers group – have an average growth of 9,9% and 6,8% respectively; 9,9% and 7% for the current decade and 9,2% and 8,2% according to the IMF estimates until 2015.



If these trends continue, we can extrapolate with some certainty that there will indeed be a power transition in the future. While it would be dubious to predict a specific year or even a decade in which the power trajectories intersect it would be just as dubious to deny the possibility of such a power transition altogether. This becomes even more apparent when one realizes that, owing to their vast population, China and India do not need to reach a *per capita* productivity similar to the United States to close the gap. The per capita GDP can stay well behind the United States (and other industrialized countries) for a long time and still give China and India the edge in total GDP terms.

So there is a twofold result of our cursory empirical power review: On the one hand the predominance of the United States seems to be unchallenged (and possibly unchallengeable) for the time being. There is no new hegemon on the horizon. To even call the international system, where no other power is half as powerful as the United States in GDP terms⁴, multipolar at this time has to remain questionable.

On the other hand, virile power dynamics are unquestionably visible in some of the rising/emerging powers, while the growth of the United States (and other “old” powers) is much slower. This is not just a trend of recent years and can be tracked back at least to 1990. Of course there can be events that could stop these trends, but there is no inherent reason why they should not continue.

⁴ Following the *purchasing power parity* approach China reaches the 60% threshold (with Japan and India following approximately 29 and 25% respectively). This would make the system bipolar at best.

This is a somewhat odd situation: In the past, the power gap between a declining hegemon and a rising power has never been this wide. When a power started its rise, it could overtake the former dominant power in just one generation or less. Therefore the rise of powers and power transitions were often thought of as one and the same. Today we face a different setting: Powers are doubtlessly rising, but it will be a very long climb until they can reach our current hegemon. So what should be applied, what should be used to theoretically tackle this state of affairs? A theory of power transitions or a theory of hegemony? We strongly suggest a mixture of both.

The aim of this paper is to show the intersections of power transition theory and hegemony theory, and the potential advantages of merging these two theories. It is not our aim to establish a new theory. We do not present any new empirical data. And we also do not want to subject the combination of power transition theory and hegemonic theory to an empirical test. We just want to show – on a conceptual level - that the merging of the two theories leads to an advantage for both.

2. Outline: Combining two Similar but Distinct Approaches

Power Transition and Hegemony approaches are seldom thought of as linkable partners. At a first glance this seems logical as both are applicable in very different empirical situations. As a matter of fact: When a hegemonic system functions properly and ideal-typically there is one hegemon and no other actor powerful enough to potentially challenge its rule. When a power transition is foreseeable and, at the latest, at the entering of a rising power into parity with a once dominant state, the structural prerequisite for hegemony has ceased to exist. One could even say PTT *starts* to apply as soon as hegemony theory *stops* to apply.

This exclusivist view of both approaches may, however, prove to be short-sighted. Instead of being kept apart they can and should be combined to present a more complete overall picture. The natural point of intersection is the concept of a peaceful power transition. Power Transition Theory, as is argued below, may be famous for its predictions or rather explanations of power transition wars; but – less prominent and less highlighted by its founders – it also offers some insights into the conditions of the opposite: power transition peace. This idea, however, is under-specified under-conceptualized and under-theorized so far. We believe that hegemony theory, or more precisely liberal hegemony theory can help to fill this gap; especially in relation to power rises that are expected to happen in the long run.

3. Power Transition Theory – A Theory of War, a Theory of Peace

Power Transition Theory, as originally established by A.F.K Organski (1968) and Organski and Jacek Kugler (1980) offers a perspective that seems to be tailor-made for analyzing such a situation. If indeed a power transition (defined as overtaking at the top of the international system), prolonged parity or at least massive disruptions of power are on their way, the PTT warns we are entering risky times. The danger is most pressing when a position change (overtaking) takes place. In such a case the declining power could be tempted to act preventively and attack the challenger while it still has the edge (Chan 2008: 51-62). The focus of the PTT, however, lies on the challenger who often attacks the dominant power to complete its ascendancy.

The power development, however, merely provides an opportunity. PTT does not assume that this opportunity is automatically realized.⁵ Being a not purely structural theory, such as Waltzian neorealism, PTT also requires some measure of willingness. This willingness is understood in terms of satisfaction with the status quo of the international order, or more precisely a lack thereof. A power that is overtaking the former dominant power, or is finding itself in a prolonged period of parity with that power is likely to initiate a war if it is dissatisfied with this status quo.

The status quo of the international order is a central concept for PTT, because it is here where it differs most profoundly from all forms of realism (and many other IR theories). These assume in unison that the ordering principle of the international system is anarchy.⁶

PTT, however, describes international politics as being less stamped by anarchy⁷ and more by a hierarchy, resembling a pyramid structure, which is overseen by the respective dominant (=most powerful) power. The dominant power once created and designed the international order according to its convictions, wishes and interests (Siverson/Miller 1996: 59).

⁵ “Claims that power transitions are a necessary and sufficient condition for war arise from the fact that Organski and Kugler failed to include an operationalization of evaluations of the status quo in their work” (Lemke/Kugler 1996: 12).

⁶ None of them put this finding as much at the center of their research agenda as Waltzian neorealism (Waltz 1979, Masala 2005), who regards the anarchic character of the international system as unchangeable and unavoidably structure, which influences (or in the words of Waltz “shape and shove”) the behaviour of states. Institutionalists in contrast, find islands of organizations and rules in the ocean of anarchy, which sometimes can tame its effects in certain areas (Keohane 1984, Zürn 1998). Alexander Wendt in turn, one of the founders of IR constructivism, who became famous for his remark „anarchy is what states make of it“, can be understood in the sense that (existing) anarchy does not have to lead to a pattern of behaviour that is uniform among actors (Wendt 1992).

⁷ “[International r]elations [...] are anarchic in the literal sense that there is no world government, but the international system is not chaotic“ (Bussmann/Oneal 2007: 90). Proponents of PTT sometimes call the structure of the international system “conditionally anarchic” (Kugler/Hussein 1990).

This can be done through sheer overwhelming force, but also through international organizations, in which the dominant power and its allies obtain disproportional voting powers and thus are enabled to enact their dominance directly and materially. But the normative fabric of the international order is also angled towards the dominant power (Müller 2009: 5).

The profits⁸ that this order produces (may they be economic or security related in nature), benefit mainly the dominant power and its allies (Tammen/Kugler et al. 2000: 6, Organski 1968: 358). Hence, they are private rather than public goods (Lemke 2004).⁹ For this reason, the dominant power mostly shrinks back from accepting any changes in this order. But while the dominant power and its entourage can enjoy the benefits of the order it once created, there are also those states outside of this inner circle who receive none (or at least in their perception not enough) of the aforementioned goods.

“They consider the international system to be unfair, corrupt, biased, skewed, and dominated by hostile forces“ (Tammen/Kugler et al. 2000: 9).

The dominant power cynically disregards complaints as long as they come from lesser powers, but the situation changes when discontent is to be found within a great power or when a discontented power starts to rise (Siverson/Miller 1996: 59). Hence, there are relatively straightforward „natural“ issues between dominant power and contender:

“One reason for the discrepancy between what is received and what is desired is that dissatisfied great powers are said to be likely to emerge as major competitors only after the creation of the world order. The established beneficiaries are reluctant to surrender some portion of their privileges to newly arrived and arriving powers despite shifts in the relative positions of the great powers” (Thompson 1996: 167).

Note that this is not a question of power maximization for the sake of maximizing power and ultimately of securing security and survival, as for example in the offensive realism championed by John Mearsheimer (2001). There is much more at stake here, namely the entire organizing structure of the international system including all (public and private) goods that it produces. For that reason PTT expects rising (dissatisfied) powers to be aggressive, even when they have already overtaken the former dominant power. For even a dethroned former dominant power still enjoys the benefits of the international order that it once established.

⁸ One problem of PTT is, however, that this profits get seldom defined: “[P]ower transition theory does not identify what benefits the international system provides to states and over which they may fight. It has merely been assumed that the dominant state is able to construct a system that provides it with the most benefits and its allies with greater benefits than other states receive” (De Soysa/Oneal et al. 1998: 518).

⁹ Margit Bussmann and John Oneal (Bussmann/Oneal 2007) doubt that the dominant power provides “private goods“ to its allies. Similar arguments are utilized by Indra De Soysa and John Oneal (De Soysa/Oneal et al. 1998).

Not until this order is restructured (this time according to the wishes and interests of the new dominant power) does this pattern change. But as those who profit from the old order rarely agree to such a restructuring (which would almost certainly diminish their share of profits), PTT expects the new dominant power to enforce or at least try to enforce changes violently.¹⁰

Peaceful Power Transitions

While PTT is mainly used by its proponents to explain the outbreaks of (power transition-) wars, it also entails a somewhat less developed theory of (power transition-)peace. Recall that PTT does not envision *all* power transitions to be violent. Examples of peaceful power transitions exist and are not seen as anomalies of the theory if the following condition is met: The rising challenger has to be satisfied with the status quo of the international order. Once we set the PTT straight in such a manner it becomes apparent that it is even more relevant for the current situation (provided of course that we are living in a period of an imminent power transition). PTT can thus be utilized not only (as it mainly has been in the past) to work backwards in time and explain the outbreak of certain wars in terms of power transitions, but also to look forward in time in order to make predictions about the probable nature of upcoming power transitions and even more importantly in order to give hints on how to mitigate the dangers and how to further a peaceful power transition.

The problem, however, is that the central variable of PTT on which the willingness of the rising power to wage a war rests and which therefore should be adjusted in direction of a peaceful transition is dramatically underdeveloped in theory as well as in practice. We will end this first part of our paper with the critique of PTT's handling of satisfaction, before entering the second part in which we advance *liberal hegemony theory* as a possible means by which a dominant power can enhance satisfaction or at least dampen dissatisfaction of potential challengers well before the actual power transition takes place.

4. The Missing Link – How to Satisfy a Great Power?

For reasons of convenience and in absence of a convincing indicator for *status-quo-satisfaction* many scholars just assume rising powers to be dissatisfied by default and only investigate their actual degree of (dis-)satisfaction in the unexpected event of a peaceful power transition. This approach, however, actually weakens the creed of PTT on at least two grounds: First, it

¹⁰ PTT does not expect all of these attempts to be successful. Precisely because former and future dominant power usually clash in a period of parity, the outcome of a war cant be predicated. History knows many unsuccessful bids for power transition, where the declining major power was able to defend its position at least for a certain time.

overlooks that power and satisfaction are *pari passu* in the causal logic of PTT; there is no reason in the (theoretic) writings of Organski and other PTT pioneers that would allow for the relegation of satisfaction to the place of a secondary or, even worse, an ad-hoc variable. Second, forgoing satisfaction analysis bears the risk of creating false expectations. The satisfaction variable works in two ways: while dissatisfaction increases the risk of war satisfaction decreases it. Hence, a war following a power transition can not be coded as fulfilling PTT's prediction without the correct "satisfaction rating".

Here we want to highlight some approaches brought forward by PTT scholars to measure and utilize the satisfaction variable.¹¹ Two indicators have been utilized most widely in the last twenty years¹²:

1. The increase in military expenditure. To sum up the argument: Powers that are dissatisfied and strive to overturn the status quo need to build the necessary military capabilities (Werner/Kugler 1996: 191/192).

2. Comparison of alliance portfolios of contender and dominant power (Kim 1991, Kim 1992, related: Gibler 1998). The argument here is that a dissatisfied power, most likely searches for allies that are dissatisfied as well and share the formers interest of challenging the status quo. Those states in turn can hardly be expected to be found among the allies of the dominant power, which has created the order and is bound to defend it. Hence, to complete the line of thought, the satisfaction of a power can be deduced from its preferred allies (Organski 1968: 842).

Both of these operationalizations, however, are problem-ridden (De Soysa/Oneal et al. 1998, (DiCicco/Levy 2003: 131). The armament indicator starts from the reasonable assumption that a power which has dedicated itself to radical and violent revision of the international order needs appropriate instruments of force. However, the relation to satisfaction remains rather indirect. A causal relation between satisfaction and armament is difficult to deduce. At most, one may assume purely statistical covariance.¹³ But this alleged covariance ignores that there may be ample reasons for increased military spending, other than dissatisfaction with the

¹¹ Even though we criticize these different approaches, the authors are to be applauded for their efforts, as many proponents of the PTT have shunned away from using this variable altogether resulting in ultimately useless empirical tests. This has to be said even for the most acclaimed tests of PTT (Organski/Kugler 1980, Houweling/Siccama 1988).

¹² An additional approach that highlights similarities in the domestic realm and hence offers an interesting link to democratic peace theory is presented by Lemke and Reed (1996).

¹³ By contrast there is a clearer correlation between the variables armament and war (see Singer 1963, Siverson/Diehl 1989, VanEvera 1999: 145-147, Vasquez 2009: 193-200), although it may run both ways. "An arms race is a symptom of conflict as well as a contributing factor to its escalation" (De Soysa/Oneal et al. 1998: 518). Hence, this indicator is also in danger of tautology: If wars get triggered by previous arms races, then every participant automatically becomes a dissatisfied power.

status quo. One has to look no further than to literature on the security dilemma, to find that even states merely wanting to maintain their position and preventing a downgrade of their position can tumble into an unintended arms dynamic or even an arms race (Müller/Schörnig 2006: 39-72 present different models for the explanation of arms dynamics). Another difficulty of this indicator is that it can spot dissatisfaction only when it is (almost) too late for any constructive reaction. A power that has already put a remarkable part of its fortune into its military in order to overthrow the international order, will be very hard to satisfy and thus pacify. It is quite unlikely, however, that the dissatisfaction emerged only immediately before the military build-up (which then serves as the indicator for said dissatisfaction). A sensible indicator, which would be able to generate political directives in order to facilitate peaceful power transitions, needs to detect changes in the satisfaction status much earlier.

The alliance indicator is plagued by similar shortcomings. Like the armament indicator it measures satisfaction indirectly at best. At the same time it opens the floodgates for spurious correlation and spurious non-correlations. Should, for example, the missing alliance between Japan and Norway (which is allied with the United States through the NATO) indicate Japanese dissatisfaction with the status quo (Siverson/Miller 1996: 70)? Is dissatisfaction down under growing as Australia stubbornly refuses to even think about entering alliances with Portugal and Iceland (both US Allies)? Obviously there are other factors at work here. In the mentioned examples probably geographic proximity. It can, however, not even be taken for granted that proper dissatisfied states eschew allying with the dominant power (or its allies) at all times. Imperial Japan, for example, remained allied to (then dominant) United Kingdom long after its revisionist intentions became obvious and even Nazi-Germany sought (in vain) an alliance with Great Britain (as did Imperial Germany before).¹⁴ Finally, this indicator allows coding the dominant power as dissatisfied if it chooses, as the United States did before NATO was established, to forgo international alliances altogether (Siverson/Miller 1996: 70). In standard PTT, however, the dominant power is always satisfied.¹⁵ Hence, the alliance indicator overlooks potentially dissatisfied states while at the same time wrongly assigning dissatisfaction to others. In this respect it might be even more prone to wrong classifications

¹⁴ The alliance indicator is also in danger of tapping into the same tautology trap that threatens the armament indicator: “States often form alliances against others precisely because they are in conflict” (De Soysa/Oneal et al. 1998: 518). The hazard is again that “the dimensions along which [satisfaction- / CR] status is assessed [...] be inherently related to the behavior to be explained” (ibd.).

¹⁵ If this assumption is a correct one, can be disputed (see for example Chan 2008: Chapter 3 and 4).

than the armament indicator, which also wrongly codes some satisfied states as dissatisfied but should at least be able to capture the entire population of dissatisfied powers.¹⁶

Giving satisfaction such a central place in its causal framework as PTT does, it is unacceptable to trivialize the classification of the actors or to classify them according to inadequate indicators whose relation to the variable to be indicated is indirect at best. In this field there certainly are possibilities, opportunities and necessities for further advancement of PTT.¹⁷

However, we will not tackle these issues here directly and it is not the aim of this paper to propose a new (measurable) indicator for satisfaction that is better suited than the one we have discussed. The important thing to remember is that - besides other problems - the standard indicators do not grasp the *meaning* of dissatisfaction. Hence, even if they were valid and reliable (which we doubt) they can not be used to influence the satisfaction status of the rising power.

Looking at the problem from the perspective of peaceful power transitions it becomes paramount not how to identify dissatisfaction right here, right now but rather to identify and possibly mitigate the reasons that cause this dissatisfaction by suggesting policies that could prevent or at least ease dissatisfaction.

Returning to the question of the international order (see above), where PTT itself recognizes the roots of dissatisfaction as many rising powers feel disadvantaged by this very order, it becomes obvious that the policies of the dominant power play a huge role in shaping such dissatisfaction. After all, it is this power which once created this order, and which benefits mainly from this order and defends this order. Thus the really important question (which is largely ignored in PTT literature) is, whether the dominant power could design the international order in a manner less prone to fuel dissatisfaction among other powers. The simple answer to this question has to be: Yes, it can.

This can be logically deduced from the principle assumptions of PTT: If the dissatisfaction of rising powers is largely a dissatisfaction with the status quo of the international order; and if the international order is mainly created, shaped and protected by the dominant power; and if there is to be the possibility of a rising power that is not dissatisfied, then there only two valid logical conclusions: Either the rising power in question is just stupid and does not realize that the international order is only benefiting other states; or the politics of the dominant power have to be variable enough to allow for different modes of an international order, ranging

¹⁶ It will, however, not be able to capture dissatisfaction among middle or lesser powers who may lack the (financial) capabilities for major military build-ups.

¹⁷ See De Soysa/Oneal et al. 1998, Danilovic 1996, Kim 1996, Lemke/Kugler 1996, Siverson/Miller 1996: 70/71, Vasquez 1996, Werner/Kugler 1996.

from a pure self-serving, egoistic and exclusive system (leading to dissatisfaction) to a much more nuanced order that strives to retain dominance but still manages to include/integrate other powers into the system taking their concerns and interests seriously (leading to satisfaction).

According to the logic of PTT, the chances of a peaceful power transition should be immensely enhanced, if the respective dominant power could mitigate rising dissatisfaction in such a way.¹⁸ In the remaining parts of this paper we explore the potential of (liberal) hegemony theory in this regard.

5. It's the Hegemony!

Before we explain the potentials liberal hegemony offers to increase satisfaction in and with the international system, we will briefly discuss our reading of the term hegemony and show where to place the term liberal hegemony in the state of the art on hegemony.

First, there needs to be an actor possessing the power resources necessary in order to assume a superior position in relation to its competitors.

Secondly, such a powerful actor needs to take the chance and actually assume this position of leadership. The 'will' to be a hegemon is decisively motivated by the prospect that the benefit of hegemonic order is largest for the hegemon, but at least larger than the resulting hegemonic costs (Menzel 2004:10).¹⁹ According to such a view, hegemony arises only when a hegemon is powerful enough and willing to assume the leadership of the system. Hegemony cannot exist without a hegemon. The existence of a hegemonic state is thus not only the precondition for a hegemonic order, it also serves to reproduce a hegemonic order once it is instituted.

Hegemony is, of course, not the only form a system tending towards unipolarity may take. Asymmetric power relations are also the foundations of an empire (Münkler 2005, Schroeder 2004), an isolationist super-power which refuses to take part in the international system, or even the notion of a greater space (Schmitt 1991, Herborth/Wurm 2009). Without discussing them further in this paper²⁰, we assume that those forms of unipolarity indeed have a disposition to breed dissatisfaction among lesser and especially rising powers, just as PTT

¹⁸ "The power-transition model does not require that the dissatisfaction felt by the challenger be judged valid by an 'objective' observer. Dissatisfied powers may or may not have a 'good reason' for feeling aggrieved. While their positions may be somewhat disadvantageous when compared with those of a few other nations, their advantages over the rest of the world are substantial. Indeed, according to the model, the truly disadvantaged nations are by definition too weak to disturb the peace" (Organski/Kugler 1980: 23). Still, trying to increase satisfaction on the part of potential challengers might still be worth a try, especially when the alternative (of a rising dissatisfied challengers) seems to be leading straight to war.

¹⁹ It could also be fruitful, though we will not undertake this task in this paper, to incorporate a "will-to-power"-variable in the framework of power transition theory.

²⁰ For a discussion of other forms of unipolarity see Herborth/Wurm (2009).

envisions (Organski 1968: 364-371, Organski/Kugler 1980: 19). But what are the particularities of hegemony which make it so different?

With an eye to systemic configurations of power, the term hegemony thus acknowledges grave asymmetries in power relations without actually challenging the traditional image of international anarchy. Hegemony refers to the predominant influence and the recognised leadership position of a political unit within a system but without granting it definite decision-making authority. Hegemony denotes a structural form of the international system in which “a single powerful state controls or dominates the lesser states in the system” (Gilpin 1981: 29). In a less unilateral parlance Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye define hegemony as a structural form of the international system in which “one state is powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing interstate relations, and willing to do so ” (Keohane/Nye 1989: 44). According to Immanuel Wallerstein’s “World Systems Theory”, hegemony is more than mere leadership, but less than full-fledged imperial power (Ferguson 2003). Very much in line with Gilpin (1981) and Keohane/Nye (1989) Wallerstein defines the hegemon as “*primus inter pares*” (Wallerstein 1984:38).

According to John Mearsheimer, hegemony refers to the “domination of the system” (Mearsheimer 2001: 40). However, a hegemon is more than the dominant state in the international system. A hegemon is powerful enough to dominate and control the other great powers in the region. In order to maintain the stability of the position there must evidently be a clear advantage in the amount of power held in contrast to the runner-up (Mearsheimer 2001:45/46). It must be the aim of each and every state to seek more power until it has itself become the hegemon in the unipolar system: “Indeed, the best guarantee of survival is to be a hegemon, because no other state can seriously threaten such a mighty power” (Mearsheimer 2001:3).

Hence, hegemony denotes the superiority of one state while leaving the sovereignty of other states fully intact (Wohlforth 1993:12). Paul Schroeder defines hegemony in a similar way: “Hegemony means clear, acknowledged leadership and dominant influence by one unit within a community of units not under a single authority” (Schroeder 2004). For Herfried Münkler a hegemon is the “the first amongst tendential equals” (Münkler 2005:77).

None of this precludes that in a particular systemic constellation two or several hegemonic powers co-exist at the same time, each exercising hegemonic power in its respective vicinity thus splitting up the system into several spheres of influence.²¹ In any case all of these authors

²¹ PTT on the other hand envisions **one** dominant power for each system. There maybe regional systems with an own dominant power, but these are superseded by the global system with the one global dominant power (Lemke 2002).

seem to agree that hegemony does not challenge or even overcome the anarchical structure of the international system.

To sum up, systemic accounts hold that hegemony is characterised by a dominant state that in comparison to the other powers, possesses exceptional power resources of the most varied kind along with the ability to mobilise and the will to use them. Thereby hegemony refers primarily to a predominance resulting from resource combination (Gilpin 1981, Keohane 1984, Spiezio 1990). Typical indicators of economic and military supremacy include, for instance, the share of global fleet or troop strength,²² the share of global military expenditure, of the global GDP, of global trade, of global industrial production or the relative weight in the international financial system (Modelski 1987, Modelski/Thompson 1996; Rasler/Thompson 1994; Thompson 1988). Occasionally, however, soft indicators such as civilizational appeal or the fascination with popular or mass culture are acknowledged as factors of secondary importance (Menzel 2004:10).²³ According to a second common trait identified in literature, states are held to be the key players amongst which the most significant actions take place and relationships are formed, which combined (or not) help to create to a hegemonic order. i.e. non-state actors are best understood as attendant elements of state behaviour, but not as being a constitutive element of the international order's structure themselves. In short: world order is state order (Albert 2001:376).

Different Types of Hegemony

So far we have established structural conditions of hegemony that distinguishes it from other forms of international order. However, hegemony itself is not a monolithic concept. Under the umbrella of the beforehand identified features, several distinct forms of hegemony can be constructed in theory and championed in practice. The means with which a hegemon pursues his aims in his international (hegemonic) order can vary widely on a scale ranging from consensus-based action as one extreme to pure coercion as the other extreme. These different forms of hegemony can not be discerned from a systemic viewpoint but require an agent-based definition of hegemony.

Such a definition of hegemony is put forth most clearly by German legal scholar Heinrich Triepel in his book "Hegemony: a Book of Leading States", first published in 1938. Hegemony, according to Triepel, should be understood as "restrained power" (Triepel 1974:148) and thus characterised as a cooperative relationship, which is designed for the long-

²² Building on archival research concerning "relative fleet strength", George Modelski has provided the empirical evidence that a hegemon has always minimum 50 percent of worldwide fleet under his control. (Modelski 1987).

²³ For soft indicators see especially (Nye 2004).

term maintenance of asymmetric power relations based on reciprocity and largely voluntary participation of inferior states. Triepel's hegemonic state is thus marked by self-restraint in exercising its power and by a certain orientation towards common interests, while the followers reward such benevolence by accepting its extraordinary position and follow its lead. In accordance with Triepel (1974) hegemony is a leadership relation on the basis of persuasion and acceptance.

The acceptance of the extraordinary position of a hegemonic state by inferior partners plays an important role for Keohane as well. "The hegemon plays a distinctive role, providing its partners with leadership, in return of deference" (Keohane 1984:46). Applying this to the U.S., it is not achieved, as realism assumes, through hard power resources, but instead "American hegemonic leadership in the post-war period presupposed a rough consensus (...) This consensus can be viewed (...) as the acceptance by its partners of the ideological hegemony of the United States" (Keohane 1984:137).

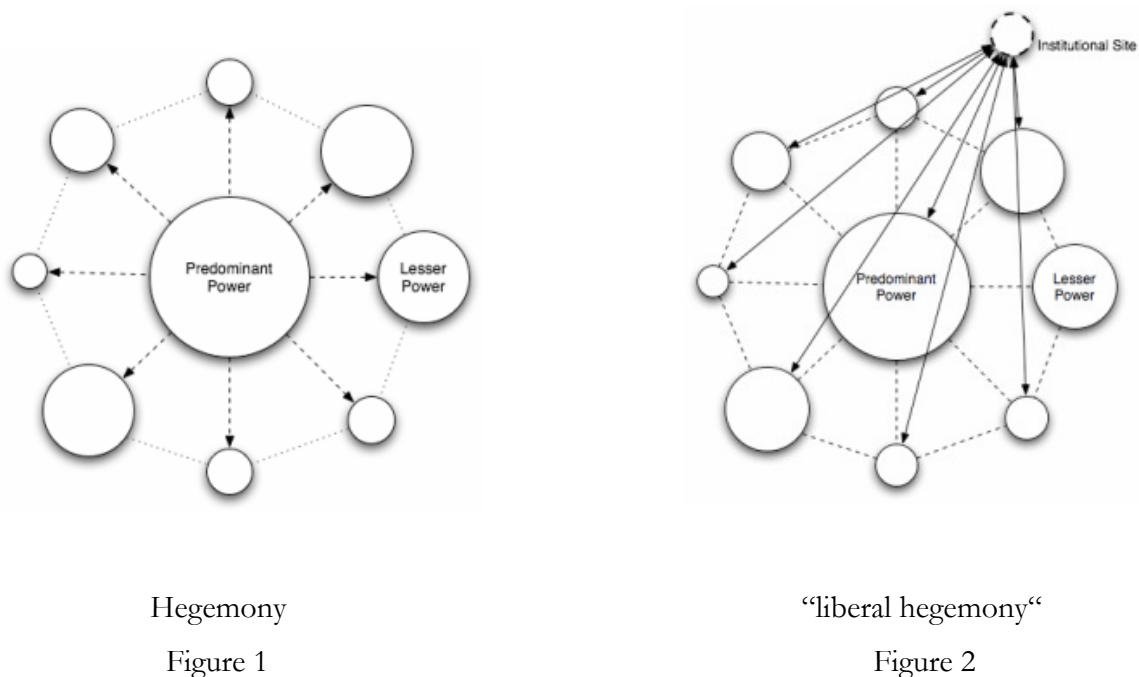
Still hegemony refers to an asymmetric power relation, thus constituting actors as unequal. However, the alignment or subordination of the secondary partners within a hegemonic order occurs voluntarily in principle and maintains the option of possibly leaving the cooperative arrangement. Hegemonic states ensure and, to some extent, manage compliance by means of exercising self-restraint. In a hegemonic bargain, the superior state deliberately refrains from an indiscriminating use of force. Hegemony thus presents itself as the least hurtful power relation. To the extent that a hegemonic state provides public goods and refrains from challenging the sovereignty of other states it thus creates both negative and positive incentive to follow its lead. (Take 2005:117f).

6. It's the Liberal hegemony, Stupid!

Nexon/Wright (2007) are able to distinguish between hegemony and "constitutional order" as a sub-type of hegemonic order. Introduced to the debate by Ikenberry, "*constitutional order*" refers to a hegemon's exercise of power through institutions – clearly reminiscent of what Ikenberry and Kupchan described in terms of "*liberal hegemony*" (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990). Nexon/Wright distinguish both hegemony and constitutional order/liberal hegemony from mere unipolarity. While the concept of unipolarity infers political dynamics from the mere existence of powers of different magnitude, hegemonic orders presuppose regular asymmetric ties between the predominant power and lesser powers.²⁴ 'Constitutional order' or 'liberal

²⁴ In English school terminology, unipolarity occurs within an international system, while hegemony presupposes an international society through which positive and negative incentives can be channelled.

hegemony' is then introduced as a sub-group of hegemonic relations where influence is exercised through an institutional site.



Source: Nexon/Wright (2007:256)

The strong emphasis on institutions is a hallmark of research on U.S. hegemony. So Figure 1 rather reflects Triepel's definition of hegemony, while Figure 2 depicts the view of authors such as Ikenberry (1998/1999), Nye (2003), Ruggie (1993) and Keohane (1984).

Ikenberry explains the major differences between the two understandings of hegemony and the advantage of the concept of liberal hegemony to create a peaceful power transition. Hegemonic order remains stable as long as the leading state retains its preponderance. The problem, of course, is that hegemonic states inevitably experience relative decline, and the order that is created during the zenith of their power cannot be sustained as that power wanes (Organski 1968, Gilpin 1981, Kennedy 1987). Rising states-embracing their own and often competing interests in creating a congenial international order will eventually challenge the declining hegemonic state. The result has typically been strategic rivalry among the great powers, and hegemonic or power transition war.

Hegemonic stability theory (Kindleberger 1988, Kindleberger 1983) assumes that the long-term rise and decline of major states is the ultimate source of the instability of hegemonic order. But, just as PTT, it leaves the possibility that rising states might be accommodated

within the existing (hegemonic) order open. This raises the possibility for variations in the ability of specific hegemonic orders to accommodate rising great powers (Ikenberry 2001:47f). One of the variants he presents is the concept of “constitutional order”, or, as he later called it, liberal hegemony. The advantage of a liberal hegemony is the durability of political institutions, particularly the constitutional institutions that define the basic rules of the polity, which provides sources of stability. Where a polity is held together by constitutional institutions that ensure some kind of power sharing and guarantee some mutually satisfactory distribution of gains, the failure of those institutions will usher in heightened conflict and political instability. Thus stability requires that institutions function relatively autonomously and operate to ensure that there are no permanent “losers” (Ikenberry 2001:48). Hence liberal hegemony could be one option for a hegemon willing to stabilize the system *and* to accommodate rising great powers.

The notion of liberal hegemony²⁵ is based on the concept of socialization and hegemonic power developed by G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan (1990). In 1990 the authors thought that the Pax Americana would be in decline “and we are left to reflect on the nature of the normative principles that might be used by a future hegemon to legitimate a new order” (Ikenberry/Kupchan 1990:315). Ikenberry/Kupchan explain that not only the material incentives are important to bind leaders in secondary states, the acquiescence of leaders in secondary nations furthermore is based on socialization.

According to this concept, leadership is the ability to foster cooperation and commonality of social purpose among states. So if a hegemonic state is liberal, the subordinate actors in the system have a variety of channels and mechanisms for registering their interests with the hegemon. Transnational relations are the means by which subordinate actors in the system represent their interests to the hegemonic power and the vehicle through which consensus between the hegemon and lesser powers is achieved (Deudney/Ikenberry 1999:110).

Ikenberry bases the concept of liberal hegemony on three characteristics: Bonding, binding and institutionalized voice opportunities.

Bonding means for the hegemon to certify state power: to make it open and predictable. The open governmental decision-making process and the hegemon operating according to predictable international rules and procedures can reassure weaker and secondary states that the exercise of power will not be arbitrary or exploitive (Ikenberry 1998/99: 60f).

²⁵ There are many notions for liberal hegemony. The conservative Charles Krauthammer calls the time after the Gulfwar in 1990/91 the beginning of “Pax Americana”, when the USA were a “benign hegemon” (Krauthammer 1990/91). Kubbig calls the consensus based hegemon “democratic hegemon” (Kubbig 2001a:663). Because this paper is primarily working with the concept of G. John Ikenberry, we will use the term liberal hegemony.

Binding relates to establishing institutional links with other states, thereby also limiting the autonomy of the hegemon and allowing other states to have institutionalized “**voice opportunities**” in the decision-making of the leading state. Accordingly, binding institutions create constraints on the way power can be utilized in such a system (Ikenberry 2001a:63). Binding restricts the range of freedom of states – ranging from weak to strong – and when states are reciprocally bonded, they jointly reduce the role and consequences of power in their relationship (Ikenberry 2001a:64). Binding a hegemon’s power to other countries through formal or informal commitments, alliances or partnerships is an effective way of reassuring other states regarding a balance in power and stability. Binding also increases the hegemon’s legitimacy to include partners in foreign policy. Liberal hegemony is thus based on institutions, a transparent decision-making process, and communication.

Thus it fits perfectly into PTT’s satisfaction puzzle. If a rising power *can* be satisfied with the international order²⁶ then the application/establishment of a liberal hegemony could be the best bet to achieve this aim. Conversely, a dominant power that utilizes an international order that does not provide for voice opportunities and that forgoes any binding and bonding with the non-dominant states can be sure to foster dissatisfaction among those states which can become dangerous once they become rising powers.

7. Conclusion

transition theory. Especially the important variable satisfaction of partners or rising powers is relevant in both concepts. But while the PTT forgets to lay an eye on the influence of the hegemon to work towards a peaceful power-transition, liberal hegemony forgets to look at the time when the power of the hegemon is declining. The combination of both theories leads to a concept that is useful in the present and the future to create a peaceful power-transition.

We have to limit this approach concerning two aspects:

Until now the concept of liberal hegemony is linked to democratic norms and, consequently, liberal hegemony can only work between democracies.²⁷ But even if democracies are the

²⁶ Not all rising/revisionist powers can be. See the discussion about unlimited-aims revisionist states in Schweller (1999).

²⁷ According to Ikenberry, “democracies are better able to create binding institutions and establish credible restraints and commitments than nondemocracies” (Ikenberry 2001a:75f). Furthermore, Ikenberry lists additional arguments why his concept is limited to democracies. “The openness and decentralization of democratic states also provides opportunities for other states to consult and make representations directly, thus increasing their willingness to make binding commitments (...). Finally, democratic states have greater institutional checks on abrupt, policy shifts than nondemocratic states, and this “policy viscosity” serves to reduce policy surprises” (Ikenberry 2001a:77). An additional reason why the working relationship between democracies is superior compared to that between democracies and autocracies is connected to the large degree of commonality between the leading elites of these countries. “Democracies are more accessible from the outside than non-democracies. Leaders who rise through the ranks within democratic countries are more inclined to participate in the ‘give and

preferred partners for the hegemon, binding autocratic states to the system is not impossible. Binding, bonding and voice opportunities are, from time to time, also the basis for cooperation between the hegemon and long-term autocratic partners (Wurm 2007). Thus, in principle, there is nothing to be said against *binding* an autocratic state which could later be a challenger to the system.

Another caveat concerns the question of power measurement. In this paper we have used GDP-Data to come to the conclusion that an actual power transition still lies far in the future. Different power indicators could lead to different power projections. For example the *Composite Indicator of National Capability* (CINC) of the *Correlates of War Project* (COW) offers slightly different results.²⁸ While it agrees that none of the other rising powers comes even close to achieving parity with the United States (India coming closest with just over 50%), CINC implies that there has already been a power transition between the United States and China. According to CINC-data, China already overtook the United States in 1996. This counterintuitive outcome most likely results from the overemphasis on population. Contra COW and following GDP measures, we maintain that there has not been a power transition at the top of the international system yet. We continue to rely on GDP as it has been the most widely used power indicator in the recent years, but it is without a doubt reasonable to also check alternative indicators even beyond GDP and CINC.

We are aware that our results are of a preliminary nature. But we believe that much fruitful and to this day undiscovered research ground lies at the interface of PTT and hegemony theory. We have explored but one of many possible linkages.

Taking into account the striking similarity of both approaches and their empirical fields of application it has to remain puzzling why both research communities or research programmes have decided to stew in their own grease instead of engaging in a healthy dialogue.

Fortunately it seems that there is still much time ahead, before a period of power parity followed by a possible power transition becomes a reality. Hence there is still time left, not only for the hegemon but also for scholars of PTT to devise more convincing instruments to define and work with their central variables. But PTT will have to do more than before to become/stay relevant. It will not be enough to present fancy correlation models, proving PTT hypotheses for historic cases of power transition. Moreover, PTT will have to offer contributions to better theoretically explain and empirically foster a peaceful power transition – a concept that is embedded in the theory but until now quite underdeveloped. Especially

take' with other democratic leaders than those who rise up in autocratic and authoritarian states' (Ikenberry 2001b:204).

²⁸ See <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/>

with regard to the satisfaction variable, which is the key to peaceful power transitions, PTT remains crude and unsophisticated up till now. It should be noted that complaints about the status of the satisfaction variable from without **and** within the PTT research program have been circulating for more than a decade (see DiCicco/Levy 2003: 131, De Soysa/Oneal et al. 1998, Lemke/Kugler 1996, Lemke/Werner 1996 : 235), without a convincing rebuttal from proponents of PTT. To wake them up from their permanent hibernation concerning this matter, a good starting point may be to yell: It's the hegemony, stupid!

8. Literature

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