

Review - Accommodating Rising Powers: Past, Present, and Future

Written by Hakan Mehmetcik

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Accommodating Rising Powers: Past, Present, and Future

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The rising powers phenomenon has become one of the defining features of international relations in the new millennium. Given the dangerous historical record of power transitions, the notion of accommodation as a peaceful power transitioning tool is one of the hottest topics that IR scholars currently dwell on, especially as the need to understand rising powers and their convergence in the international system becomes more urgent in the age of a shifting international order. However, there exists both a theoretical/conceptual and empirical gap in the literature with regards to the assessment of the concept itself, and the application of its analytical framework to different cases of rising powers. This book seeks to fill some of these gaps by providing both conceptual discussions and case studies.

The book starts by defining accommodation in IR both conceptually and theoretically. Accordingly, accommodation at the great power level involves several things: i) mutual adaptation and acceptance by established and rising powers, and elimination or substantial reduction of hostility between them; ii) acknowledging others as legitimate stakeholders and conceding to them a certain amount of rising power status, as well as a sphere of influence, even though they might not be close friends or allies; iii) the accommodated power obtaining a larger share of rights and responsibility in global governance (p.4-5). Accommodation can even mean replacement of a dominant power by the rising power, or substantial sharing of positional rights and obligations without war (p.5). Accommodation in the international system by major powers takes place in the form of four main strategies: i) ideological/normative accommodation; ii) territorial accommodation; iii) economic accommodation; and iv) institutional accommodation (p.17-18). Over different levels with these four main strategies there are several categories of accommodation. *Full accommodation* at the global level involves recognition of a rising power's position in both security and economic areas through institutions and consulting mechanisms where the rising power's voice weights as a peer. *Partial or limited accommodation* may be focused on institutional reconciliation of power instead of economic or military accommodation. *Non-accommodation* is the situation at the global level where none of the rising power's demands, neither in material terms such as military strength or non-material terms such as status, are converged (p.6-7).

The book deals with many other conceptual traits, and includes very useful and policy relevant analyses focused on rising power strategies as well as actual historical and current cases within four parts. The first part is more of a theoretical and conceptual discussion on accommodation. The second part presents historical cases (chapter 6 Britain-US, chapter 7 US-China, chapter 8 Britain-Germany, and chapter 9 US-Japan) some of which are successful, and other of which are failed cases of accommodation. The third part dwells more on current cases (chapter 10 China, chapter 11 India, chapter 12 Brazil, chapter 13 Russia). Finally, in the fourth part, there is a conclusive chapter written by Theodore McLaughlin.

All four parts and the chapters within them are very well designed, full of in-depth analysis and knowledge. However, it seems to me that there should have been more theoretical chapters in the book, since the concept of

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accommodation is very new to IR literature. Even the very definition of accommodation in *Accommodating Rising Powers* is somehow vague. Such a definition can be found in other literatures. Indeed, the concept itself is more common in communication literature. For instance, Patrick Boyland (2004) defines accommodation as “the term normally used to refer to the means we take to adjust our way of interacting with people of different cultures in order to facilitate communication. An individual is said to accommodate if s/he meets her/his interlocutors on their cultural grounds by such means as adopting their phonological system, using their habitual turn-taking procedures and observing their genre constrictions.” Additionally, he offers a 5 level accommodation framework by indexing accommodating behaviors from 0 to 5 (0 no accommodation, 1 weak accommodation, 2 fair accommodation, 3 intermediate accommodation, 4 strong accommodation and 5 full accommodation). We have to use other non-IR literatures to enrich our understanding and use of concepts that essentially belong to these non-IR traditions. Just as when we use hedging as an IR concept, we have to go and check out the use of hedging in Finance as the concept belongs to that literature, we should also consult communication literature when we deal with the concept of accommodation. Indeed, there are lessons which can be learned from other non-IR literatures!

Overall, *Accommodating Rising Powers* is a worthy read that is one of the best, if not the only elaboration on the concept of accommodation in IR.

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