

Laudation

From the 2023 Hedley Bull Prize in International Relations

The Jury has this year chosen to award the prize to **Rohan Mukherjee** for his book ***Ascending Order: Rising Powers and the Politics of Status in International Institutions*** (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

The jury reported the following:

Rohan Mukherjee's book analyses the propensity of rising powers to support or contest the predominant world order based on the strength of their status within international institutions. This work is grounded on a solid theoretical framework and an empirical analysis built on three case studies of powers that challenged the order: the United States in the British-led Atlantic system of the mid-nineteenth century, Japan in the Washington system of the interwar period, and India and China in the international order of the Cold War.

The existing International Relations literature on transformations in power politics, due to the rising of new powers in the global arena, has produced several meaningful reflections and outcomes, particularly on power shifts. Mukherjee's contribution is to focus on the role of the rules of international institutions. A novel theory, called Institutional Status Theory (IST), introduced in the first chapter, clarifies the conditions under which rising powers will engage in different strategies to achieve or preserve status in the international order. Whereas most literature has investigated the causes of war, IST posits that rising powers may decide to sacrifice their material interests in exchange for membership in the great-power club. Symbolic equality with the great power is the key.

Institutions turn into an arena in which rising powers position themselves in respect to established powers. Consequently, institutional openness and procedural fairness are key variables which determine cooperation or conflict.

The case studies include primary sources on internal debates to demonstrating how these mechanisms worked in various historical periods and in different political contexts.

A final chapter considers the relevance of IST for the case of present-day China, which has shown, since the end of the Cold War, a changing pattern of cooperation and dissonance in different institutions and policy issues. As a whole, the book considers historical events and contemporary developments to demonstrate the underexplored desire for symbolic equality in international politics beyond power shifts and that disregarding the status concerns of rising powers – especially powers like China and India – can lead international institutions to undercut their own priorities.

This work opens a wider and urgent debate on the capacity of international institutions to address such status ambitions.

In the words of our jury:

The jury praised Mukherjee's book as it is a wide-ranging work, offering a solid theoretical framework combined with compelling case studies. The book uncovers new ground, in a learned and original way. It offers a reflection on status in international relations but from the perspective of rising powers. The topic is appealing and addressed to a wide readership, including students of International Relations courses, senior and junior scholars, as well as practitioners.

Daniela Irrera (Chair)

On behalf of the Hedley Bull Prize Jury
European Consortium for Political Research