Deudney and Ikenberry believe--like Hegel--that accidents happen to those who are accident-prone. They insist that Germany and Japan were defeated in World War II due to their deep-seated structural problems. It is true that Germany suffered from a critical production failure in 1940-42, but this was remedied from 1942 on. In World War I, it had experienced no similar failure. Nor did Japan's industrial war machine suffer extraordinary failure in World War II. In both world wars, the nondemocratic capitalist great powers performed great feats and initially won shattering victories. On the other side, the democracies repeatedly blundered: they were dangerously late in rising to the challenge; their armed forces, particularly during the 1930s, were ill prepared; their initial defeats were potentially catastrophic; and their conduct thereafter was not free of serious errors.

Contrary to the comforting notion that the democratic system eventually proved superior, the reason for Germany's and Japan's defeats lies in the fact that the two countries were simply smaller than their adversaries and less tolerant of failure. For Germany to have broken out of its
limited territorial confines and fatally crippled the superior coalition assembled against it in either of the world wars, it would have needed a consecutive string of major successes. Indeed, it came remarkably close to achieving that goal in both world wars. By contrast, the colossal power of the United States meant that the democracies were able to sustain catastrophic failures—such as the loss of Russia as an ally in World War I and the fall of France and the destruction of the U.S. Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor in World War II—and still recover.

Thus, without the United States as their ally, France and the United Kingdom would probably have lost to Germany in both world wars. The remainder of the twentieth century would have been very different, and political scientists would have had a far less rosy story to tell about democracy. The constructed grand narrative of the twentieth century would have emphasized the superior cohesiveness of authoritarian regimes, not the triumph of freedom. For grand narratives, like history, are written by the victors.

Reading Deudney and Ikenberry, it seems that the victory of liberal democracy was virtually inevitable. But in order to make this claim, one must assume that the rise of a huge liberal democratic United States as the paramount political power of the twentieth century was preordained—and that it could only have emerged and evolved in the form that it did (founded on a vast and sparsely populated continent by Englishmen who subsequently achieved independence and unity and then retained this unity after a civil war). Moreover, one would have to assume that there was no way Germany could have won either of the world wars in Europe and that if it had, a victorious Reich (and a victorious imperial Japan) would have inevitably liberalized in due course. None of these assumptions is plausible.

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Since 1945, nondemocratic capitalist great powers have been absent from the international system, but the recent meteoric rise of China has broken that pattern. Unlike Germany and Japan in the past, China today has the world's largest population, and it is experiencing such spectacular economic growth that it is projected to close the economic gap with the developed world within a generation or two.

Addressing the rise of China, Deudney and Ikenberry repeat the claim that nondemocratic regimes are necessarily ridden with corruption and cronyism, and so their development is bound to stall once they reach a certain level of growth. But as former U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Alan Greenspan has noted, Singapore—a nondemocratic state with a first-class economy—is one of the least corrupt states in the world. The same was true of imperial Germany and its Prussian predecessor. It has become an axiom that corruption is inevitable in the absence of democratic transparency and accountability. Yet Prussian-German bureaucracy was renowned for its efficiency and clean hands and was put forward as an ideal type by Max Weber. The secret of these model cases lies in the bureaucracy's high social status, strong ethics of duty and public service, and, in Singapore, high pay. China today suffers from pervasive corruption, and it remains to be seen whether its neo-Mandarin rulers can eventually succeed in establishing similar standards.
It is widely argued that the rule of law is essential for an advanced capitalist economy to function and that nondemocratic countries lacking it are at a disadvantage. This argument ignores the fact that Germany was semiauthoritarian until 1918 and yet the rule of law prevailed and a first-class capitalist economy flourished. The same was true of Japan before 1945 and is true of Singapore today.

Although the pure economic argument turns out to be less clear-cut than many believe, proponents of democratic inevitability still contend that sociopolitical transformation generated by economic development eventually leads to democratization. It is widely believed that economic and social development create pressures for democratization that authoritarian state structures cannot contain. Michael Mandelbaum, for example, argues in his book Democracy's Good Name that capitalism is synonymous with individual choice. People who are accustomed to exercising free choice in their personal lives can be expected to demand the same right in the political sphere. Thus, nondemocratic capitalist regimes suffer from an internal contradiction that makes them prone to implosion.

This argument appears very convincing until one remembers that the world is full of contradictions and tensions that do not necessarily lead to implosion. Market democracies themselves have always been plagued by the contradiction between the great economic inequality generated by capitalism (which also biases the democratic political process) and democracy's egalitarian drive. This tension was so stark that socialists throughout the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century regarded it as an irreconcilable contradiction certain to doom capitalist democracy, leading them to argue that socialism--economic democratization--was the inevitable wave of the future. In the meantime, some of this inherent tension has been alleviated by the welfare state in the democratic capitalist countries, although it always remains very close to the surface, occasionally bursting out in anticapitalist demonstrations and other forms of protest.

VALUE CHAINS

In their article "How Development Leads to Democracy," Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel offer a value-centered version of modernization theory, based on their important comprehensive surveys of world values. They document clear differences between low- and high-income societies due to shifts from the "survival values" of traditional societies to the individualistic "self-expression values" of more affluent societies. Based on the experience of the twentieth century, Inglehart and Welzel argue that such a transformation of values lays the groundwork for democratization. But like other varieties of modernization theory, their argument overlooks the more fundamental question: Are liberal values an inevitable, universal product of industrialization and greater affluence, or has this particular set of values itself been decisively shaped by the overwhelming political, economic, and cultural liberal hegemony that the United States and western Europe have exercised since the defeat of the nondemocratic capitalist great powers in the first half of the twentieth century?

Inglehart and Welzel stress the persistence of different cultural traditions and significant cultural variations even among societies that have undergone modernization. Indeed, in East Asia, the world's most populous and fastest-developing region, long-standing cultural traditions emphasize
community, social order, and social harmony—but they do not impede growth. Whether an alternative path to modernity will emerge there and prove viable remains to be seen.

Inglehart and Welzel are careful to note that the democratization process is not deterministic but probabilistic. Nevertheless, they leave the strong impression that all that is necessary for it to take its course is time. Undeniably, there is a strong propensity for industrial capitalist society and liberal democracy to be associated with each other, and this propensity is largely responsible for the spread and success of the liberal democratic model over the past two centuries. Even a strong propensity, however, is just that; whether it triumphs over competing propensities depends on circumstances, countervailing forces, contingent events, and other imponderables.

**UNDILUTED OPTIMISM**

When it comes to the question of how to deal with a nondemocratic superpower China in the international arena, Deudney and Ikenberry, as well as Inglehart and Welzel, exhibit undiluted liberal internationalist optimism.

China's free access to the global economy is fueling its massive growth, thereby strengthening the country as a potential rival to the United States—a problem for the United States not unlike that encountered by the free-trading British Empire when it faced other industrializing great powers in the late nineteenth century. According to Inglehart and Welzel, there is little to worry about, because rapid development will only quicken China's democratization. But it was the United Kingdom's great fortune—and liberal democracy's—that its hegemonic status fell into the hands of another liberal democracy, the United States, rather than into those of non-democratic Germany and Japan, whose future trajectories remained uncertain at best.

The liberal democratic countries could have made China's access to the global economy conditional on democratization, but it is doubtful that such a linkage would have been feasible or desirable. After all, China's economic growth has benefited other nations and has made the developed countries—and the United States in particular—as dependent on China as China is dependent on them. Furthermore, economic development and interdependence in themselves—in addition to democracy—are a major force for peace. Democracies' ability to promote internal democratization in countries much smaller and weaker than China has been very limited, and putting pressure on China could backfire, souring relations with China and diverting its development to a more militant and hostile path.

Deudney and Ikenberry suggest that China's admission into the institutions of the liberal international order established after World War II and the Cold War will oblige the country to transform and conform to that order. But large players are unlikely to accept the existing order as it is, and their entrance into the system is as likely to change it as to change them.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides a case in point. It was adopted by the United Nations in 1948, in the aftermath of the Nazi horrors and at the high point of liberal hegemony. Yet the UN Commission on Human Rights, and the Human Rights Council that replaced it, has long been dominated by China, Cuba, and Saudi Arabia and has a clear illiberal
majority and record. Today, more countries vote with China than with the United States and Europe on human rights issues in the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Critics argue that unlike liberalism, nondemocratic capitalist systems have no universal message to offer the world, nothing attractive to sell that people can aspire to, and hence no "soft power" for winning over hearts and minds. But there is a flip side to the universalist coin: many find liberal universalism dogmatic, intrusive, and even oppressive. Resistance to the unipolar world is a reaction not just to the power of the United States but also to the dominance of human rights liberalism. There is a deep and widespread resentment in non-Western societies of being lectured to by the West and of the need to justify themselves according to the standards of a hegemonic liberal morality that preaches individualism to societies that value community as a greater good.

Compared to other historical regimes, the global liberal order is in many ways benign, welcoming, and based on mutual prosperity. It is natural for people in the West to believe that everybody else would want to join it, and yet both Germany and Japan had to be pulverized before they could be made to join the liberal order.

Today, nondemocratic capitalist China offers not only a policy of noninterference but also support for state sovereignty, group values, and ideological pluralism within the international system. These are attractive not only to governments but also to peoples, as an alternative to U.S. and Western dominance and as a counterforce to the sweeping, blind forces of globalization. A message need not be formulated in universalistic terms to have a broader appeal, as the great attraction of fascism during the 1920s and 1930s demonstrated.

It is possible that democracy's twentieth-century triumphs have already spread the liberal democratic model so far and so deep that the renewed challenge from the nondemocratic capitalist great powers has come too late. But the opposite is also possible. A less teleological and triumphalist reading of twentieth-century history should help guard against the illusion that anybody can read the future like an open book. The democratization of China and Russia and the ultimate triumph of democracy are far from preordained.

By Azar Gat

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