

Globalisation as a Myth, or the Ideology of Capitalism!

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Abstract.

This paper critically examines globalisation as an ideological construct rather than an objective reality, arguing that it functions as a modern myth within capitalist discourse. Drawing from historical myths and their role in shaping human consciousness, the study explores how globalisation, much like past myths, serves to justify existing power structures. The analysis highlights the ideological function of globalisation, particularly its use in legitimising Western capitalist dominance and its role in perpetuating economic and political inequalities. The paper also examines the transition from Pax Americana to a potential Pax Sinica, exploring how China's developmental model challenges the Western capitalist narrative. Through a dialectical approach, the study reveals how globalisation's contradictions have led to resistance and alternative narratives, questioning its universality. Ultimately, the paper argues that globalisation is not a neutral phenomenon, but a constructed myth shaped by economic and political interests, continuously redefined to serve evolving global power dynamics.

Keywords: Globalisation, Myth, Ideology, Capitalism, Pax Sinica

1. Introduction

Despite the wild imagination and exaggerations that myths often carry, surpassing the bounds of reason and logic, what always sets them apart and keeps them alive—frequently invoked in various contexts even after hundreds of years—is that they often contain a certain wisdom for those who wish to reflect upon and contemplate their essence. Human heritage, especially ancient civilisations, is rich with numerous myths, such as those found in Egyptian civilisation—most notably the tales of Isis and Osiris—or the Epic of Gilgamesh from Mesopotamian civilisation, along with many others from Indian and Persian cultures. However, Greek myths are arguably the most famous worldwide. Examples include Procrustes' bed, Icarus' wings, the Trojan horse, Pandora's box, Sisyphus' rock, Prometheus' fire, etc. Despite its historical connection to what might be termed the infancy of human reasoning, the creative epistemological model of myth—along with other forms of knowledge often described as non-scientific—has not been entirely eclipsed by time. It continues to constitute a human heritage reproduced in various forms and exhibits intertextuality through intertextuality between its diverse narratives ⁽¹⁾. In this regard, some argue that the human heritage associated with myths represents a form of tacit knowledge ⁽²⁾, historically ingrained in the human subconscious and occupying the unconscious realm. It surfaces freely in different situations, contributing in varying degrees to shaping people's visions, values,

principles, and contemporary ways of thinking. From this perspective, modern approaches in international relations studies strive to re-emphasise the significance of cultural systems within society in processes of understanding, analysis, interpretation, and explanation in the political realm. In this context, Catherine Goetze asserts: "A deep analysis of power in global politics, with its inherent hierarchy of authority, must necessarily begin with an analysis of culture" ⁽³⁾ encompassing ideas, customs, traditions, values, religious beliefs, and myths and legends.

1.1 The Main Question

What is the role of the historical mythological component in shaping contemporary international relations?

Several sub-questions stem from this main question, as follows:

1. What is a myth?
2. To what extent can the ideology of globalisation be considered a myth?
3. How has the developmental model of Western capitalism been globalised as a myth?
4. How can globalisation be seen as a dialectic?
5. Can the myth of the Chinese developmental model be described as self-made capitalism?

1.1.1 The Methodology

The research paper employs a variety of **qualitative research methods** to analyse globalisation as an ideological construct, as follows:

A) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The paper systematically deconstructs the discourse of globalisation, revealing how it functions as an ideological myth rather than an objective reality.

It examines how globalisation is framed in capitalist narratives and how these narratives justify power structures.

B) Comparative Historical Analysis

The study draws comparisons between ancient myths and modern globalisation narratives, illustrating how myths have historically been used to shape consciousness and legitimise authority.

It contrasts Western capitalist globalisation (Pax Americana) with China's self-made capitalism (Pax Sinica) to highlight shifting power dynamics.

C) Dialectical Approach

The research explores globalisation as a dialectical process, showing how contradictions within capitalism have led to resistance and alternative models.

It examines the thesis (Western capitalist hegemony), the antithesis (opposition and resistance), and the synthesis (emerging hybrid capitalism, particularly in China).

D) Intertextual Analysis

The study draws on mythological, economic, and sociopolitical texts to reveal how different historical narratives have shaped perceptions of globalisation.

References to thinkers like Max Weber, Fouad Morsi, and Ha-Joon Chang help establish connections between capitalism, ideology, and historical myths.

E) Case Study Approach

The paper examines specific historical phases of globalisation, such as Pax Americana and the rise of China's developmental model, to argue that globalisation is not a fixed phenomenon but a contested and evolving myth.

F) Ideological Critique

By critiquing sustainable development and capitalist modernisation, the research uncovers how dominant economic models have often rebranded myths that sustain existing power relations.

It challenges the assumption that globalisation is inherently beneficial, questioning its role in perpetuating inequality and economic exploitation.

2. What is a Myth?

Beyond its direct meaning as a historical cultural narrative linked to one of the ancient civilisations, the term “myth” has two other uses.

The first is **positive** and refers to a monumental achievement—physical, symbolic, and moral—realised through extraordinary and creative efforts during a specific period. This achievement often materialises despite challenges, obstacles, and scepticism or uncertainty about its feasibility.

On the other hand, the **negative** meaning of a myth aligns closely with the concept of ideology or false consciousness. In this sense, a myth emerges as a narrative claiming truth while often embodying its opposite. It becomes a story that provides justifications for ideas and practices that, if presented directly and openly, might face rejection and resistance. Thus, such a narrative is inherently deceptive, presenting one face while concealing another.

2.2. Globalisation Ideology as Myth

In the past, myths, alongside other forms of non-scientific knowledge, served as frameworks and methods for understanding and interpreting the world, even claiming the ability to predict its future. In the present, with the dominance of scientific knowledge beginning in its modernist form and era, it has become possible to engage with such non-scientific knowledge on two primary levels.

The first level involves subjecting this type of knowledge to study, research, and critique based on scientific methodologies grounded in rational and logical principles.

The second level, however, seeks to utilize myths **ideologically** to serve specific interests. This entails a conscious and scientific effort to invoke and exploit historically ingrained myths

and legends to obscure and mystify reality. This approach justifies and facilitates the adoption of a particular system of ideas, values, and ideological practices.

Perhaps one of the most profound and widespread ideological uses of myths is their connection to colonial expansion and penetration. Colonial tendencies and accompanying policies have never ceased promoting a relatively coherent set of mythical/ideological ideas, values, and justifications. These narratives aim to solidify dominance over the "Other" by fostering notions of racial distinction and superiority, thereby granting a veneer of legitimacy to practices of exploitation, resource plundering, profit accumulation, and capital formation.

2.2.3. Globalising the Developmental Model of Western Capitalism as a Myth:

While traditional colonialism may have faded in its well-known classical form, its implicit discourses and tacit knowledge remain present in different guises. Furthermore, the practices of exploitation and dominance continue almost uninterrupted. The historical colonial movement was driven by capitalist motives. Thus, while the traditional forms and patterns of colonialism may vanish, capitalism continuously renews itself, as Fouad Morsi aptly observed ⁽⁴⁾.

Since its inception, capitalism has relied on legitimising narratives, particularly those rooted in religion and racism. A prominent thinker like Max Weber, for instance, cloaked capitalism in the guise of austere, ascetic Protestantism, which emphasises work, production, growth, and accumulation. This discourse was fundamentally based on a religious and doctrinal narrative that was organically tied to a class-based social structure during the formative stages of modern industrial society's rise.

Since every era produces myths that suit its context, globalised capitalism has undergone two phases over the past three decades, each with its distinct and specific narrative.

In the first phase—toward the end of the last century—it launched a discourse promising global openness, development, equitable exchange, boundless connectivity, and the defence of freedom, democracy, and human rights, among other ideals. This narrative was propagated on a planetary scale, led by the United States and its Western allies. It is perhaps fitting to refer to this phase by its famous name: **Pax Americana**.

The current phase, which spans approximately a decade, is witnessing an attempt to formulate an alternative narrative to the capitalist system. This narrative may extend to the point of transforming the structure of global power, processes of positioning, and stratification through a prolonged state of conflict led by China. If strategically successful, this effort could pave the way for the establishment of a "Pax-China" era of Chinese peace, drawing upon a mythical heritage rooted in Confucian culture.

Whether the world is subject to classic American dominance or emerging Chinese influence, capitalist globalisation remains in place through various forms. It is defended and perpetuated by the dominant pole/team, while the defeated retreats from it, promoting a counter-narrative that calls for abandoning globalisation in favour of localisation and regionalism. This stance often adopts Aesop's famous fable: *The Fox and the Grapes*! ⁽⁵⁾.

- Below, we will review and discuss the two phases that capitalist globalisation has undergone, highlighting their dialectical relationship. We will also show how the current phase of global conflict—which might witness the emergence of a new myth—has its seeds planted in the initial phase of the classical capitalist globalisation myth.

Globalisation appeared as a universal discourse within contradictory postmodern contexts that oppose grand narratives and tend toward fragmentation, disintegration, fluidity, chaos, complexity, and uncertainty.

Globalisation, as a condition of the compression of time and space and as boundless human connectivity ⁽⁶⁾ —whether directly or indirectly via communication tools and modern technologies—faces limited opposition, primarily stemming from cultural or identity-based fears. However, globalisation is not merely a form of social or cultural connectivity among people. From its inception, it has been ideologically and practically laden with economic and political dimensions.

Thus, the correct inquiry should focus on the directions, standards, values, and policies of globalisation and the developmental model it adopts and promotes. Globalisation is not content-neutral; its capitalist content is exceedingly clear, necessitating the completion of its designation to become *capitalist globalisation*.

From the outset, proponents of capitalist globalisation neither lied nor sugarcoated their message. They openly projected the rhetoric of triumphant victors, advocating for the entire world to follow their path. Can we forget the narrative/myth of *The End of History*?

Consequently, given the efforts of the capitalist globalisation hub to impose a unified model on the world, other global actors developed a critical view of this process, likening it to the infamous myth of Procrustes' bed ⁽⁷⁾.

However, capitalist globalisation eventually faced a sobering realisation after its initial euphoria. Even the most dominant global power could not fully contain or restrict the interactions arising from the convergence of the global and the local. Gradually, the rhetoric and attempts at homogenisation lost momentum, replaced by diverse outcomes from these interactions across various levels and domains.

Thus, flexibility has emerged as a defining feature, standing in contrast to standardisation. Capitalist globalisation was not always imposed forcibly. Instead, one of the most effective mechanisms of global capitalist penetration has been the allure of what is presented and marketed as superior.

This strategy leveraged certain local cultural and social particularities, which, in turn, contributed to the success and enhanced effectiveness of the promoted cultural patterns, diversifying their manifestations. In this regard, Raymond Lee observes:

"The process of creating large-scale markets is accompanied by the intense commodification of culture, which, in turn, colonises people's leisure time across the globe. This is achieved

by exploiting the worlds of life and their particularities within local communities, aiming to facilitate commodity penetration in all its forms, whether material or symbolic ⁽⁸⁾."

Accordingly, the evolution of capitalist globalisation has imposed certain shared aspects on culture and production relations. At the same time, there are distinct elements specific to each cultural system, whose changes are not solely dictated by the necessities of capitalist production. Instead, these cultural systems may adapt this development and impart a unique character to it in tangible reality.

Thus, we must precisely identify the forms and degrees of the tense intersection between the deep tendencies in culture, on the one hand, and the imperatives of capitalist development—and consequently globalisation—on the other ⁽⁹⁾.

In other words, we need to better understand, with greater clarity and openness, that there is a globally dominant capitalist mode of production attempting to propagate its various values, foremost among them, consumerist values. This mode succeeds as long as it does not encounter effective resistance, offering a meaningful alternative. Such resistance has expanded, even at the height of globalisation. Otherwise, how could Chinese restaurants, Indian yoga, Korean films and songs, Iranian cinema, Amazigh Rai music, and Latin rhythms and dances, among others, have succeeded and spread? All of these are gems of cultures rooted in non-Western societies.

The lesson learned is that capitalist globalisation, as a grand narrative or "myth," has been tested by the realities of local intersections and interactions in every society around the world. This has made it possible, and indeed common, to subject its values and practices to critique, revision and reinterpretation based on visions and interests characterised by their specificity and relativity.

Even the so-called "last swan song" of the classical capitalist system—the global proclamation of *Sustainable Development*—can be critiqued as yet another developmental myth tied to capitalist globalisation.

At first glance, the concept of sustainable development appears to be highly positive, as it embodies the pursuit of a development process characterised by continuity, coherence, and durability. It considers economic, social, and environmental factors simultaneously and addresses the needs of the current generation without neglecting the rights of future generations ⁽¹⁰⁾.

However, on closer inspection, one finds that the essence of the development process itself—intended to be sustainable—is not subjected to the rigorous critical review it demands. Such a review would examine the nature of this development, the degree of societal consensus around it, the extent of change it may bring to class structures in the societies adopting it, and the suitability of its accompanying value systems, both positively and negatively. Moreover, it would assess the potential for addressing the networks of interests associated with it, both in the present and the future.

The concept of sustainable development is merely an updated version of the concepts and theories of capitalist development and modernisation, which can be traced back to the 1950s. These theories, in all their variations, sources, and different names, aimed to preserve and reproduce the capitalist system, ultimately claiming that there is no alternative for societies around the world but to integrate into it and adopt its policies, as if it were the only viable option ⁽¹¹⁾.

Thus, continuing the same developmental approach, the notion of sustainability implicitly implies an effort to maintain the status quo and extend the present circumstances systematically into the future. This entails preserving all existing structures of power and established interests, thereby precluding any radical or transformative changes.

The concept of sustainable development inherently carries a significant degree of conservatism in its traditional formulation, and, at best, a reformist approach in its most optimistic interpretation!

In addition to what has been mentioned, despite the apparent positivity of this concept and the attractiveness of its goals and comprehensiveness, the question remains: To what extent does adopting this concept by a country benefit it, given the dominance of the global capitalist system and its neoliberal economic orientation? How aware are we that the pursuit of sustainable development goals begins from a foundation of economic and social inequality between countries within this global capitalist framework? Is this concept intended to work within the current global capitalist system, or does it aim to formulate a new world system that transcends the existing capitalist structure?

The pursuit of sustainable development through the current global neoliberal capitalist system empties the goals of that development of their real content. It fails to address the essential questions about the root causes of the structural economic and financial crises around the world, the vast class disparities between elites and the masses, social exclusion, and the climate, environmental, and health crises caused by the misuse of resources, carbon emissions polluting the environment and leading to natural disasters, the exploitation of poorer countries, and violations of their sovereignty, among other issues.

The implication is that the myth of classical capitalist globalisation, with its recently promoted developmental concept, has been deconstructed from the very beginning. We may now be at the final stages of this historical myth, paving the way for the emergence of a new myth.

2.2.4. The Dialectic of Globalisation!

From the outset, globalisation carried within it its contradictions: the subject (Thesis) represented by traditional capitalist forces from the post-World War II era, led by the United States and its Western allies, on one side, and the antithesis (Anti-thesis), which formed from the forces representing "the rest of the world" (the rest), on the other. Through the struggle that unfolded over the past few decades, a new compound subject (Synthesis) emerged, characterised by hybrid capitalism. It is no longer surprising that forces adopting "officially" socialist ideologies have advanced to the forefront of the capitalist system.

Globalisation, in general, and capitalist globalisation in particular, lie at the heart of the struggle for global leadership. The modern phase of globalisation, which was politically and economically initiated after the collapse of the Soviet Union, proceeded almost without barriers. It was promoted at most levels, despite occasional challenges from emerging forces championing the anti-globalisation movement. However, a major turning point occurred when these rising forces reached the threshold of power and could displace the traditional forces, take their places and offer a strategic alternative for global leadership.

It was at this specific point that all the proposals questioning globalisation surfaced, openly advocating for a retreat from it, favouring regionalisation instead.

What distinguishes this current strategic conflict from that of the post-World War II era is that today, the ruling elites adopt an almost identical ideology—the capitalist ideology. The struggle is no longer between two opposing ideologies, socialism and capitalism. This is where the paradox lies: the imposition of neoliberal capitalism on the entire world has yielded outcomes that the traditional capitalist elites did not anticipate.

Unexpectedly, major powers, not originally part of the traditional capitalist elite, received and absorbed these imposed capitalist tendencies. After understanding their mechanisms, they reflected these tendencies in their way, relying on the distinctive features of their social and cultural structures. They then confronted the traditional capitalist powers on their turf and defeated them in many areas. The result was a reversal of the situation, with some of the world's leading capitalists now rejecting globalisation and calling for protectionism and a renewed role for the nation-state.

Thus, the myth of capitalist globalisation promoted from the outset remained successful and flourishing as long as the forces dominating it were in the leading position. However, with the rise of new powers challenging the positions of traditional powers, it became necessary for those who launched it to attempt to curb and declare its failure, as it had ventured down paths they had not anticipated ⁽¹²⁾.

2.2.5. The Emergence of the Myth of the Chinese Development Model as Self-Made Capitalism!

In his book *Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism* ⁽¹³⁾, Ha-Joon Chang mentions that the major capitalist powers, after building themselves through trade and industry, and, of course, through the extraction and plundering of the resources of the countries they colonised for decades, kicked away the ladder they had climbed—referring here to the strategies, plans, and capitalist mechanisms that were relied upon from the stages of emergence, consolidation, and initial accumulation. This was done so that no other powers could reach and achieve the same goals. However, those striving to achieve the goal of building a strong capitalist economy will not lack means, especially since the philosophy at the heart of the capitalist system is inherently pragmatic. As the Chinese communist leader Deng Xiaoping famously said, "It doesn't matter whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches the mouse!"

In this regard, the Chinese model positions itself as the leader of the new global capitalist system, relying on a narrative completely different from the previous developmental models and experiences. The People's Republic of China, coming from the Far East with its culture, values, and beliefs—especially Confucianism—was once a colonised and exploited country for many decades. When it shifted toward industrialisation, it followed a gradual path, evolving from traditional imitation-based manufacturing to world-class, cutting-edge technological production. China built itself without relying on capitalist accumulation derived from colonial practices. What it has achieved today qualifies it to rightfully take a leading position in the global capitalist system in the future.

In this sense, it is entirely appropriate to describe China's development model as representing *Self-Made Capitalism*, which, to be fully understood, may require an in-depth study focusing on Confucian ethics and the spirit of self-made capitalism, like Max Weber's famous studies. This would emphasise the foundational Confucian doctrine and other powerful beliefs that have a strong presence among East Asian populations, such as values of work, discipline, diligence, cooperation, collectivism, patience, endurance, humility, and self-control.

The doctrine, with its values, was primarily a matter for its followers in China and the Far East. However, its fusion with capitalist globalisation has infused it with a considerable amount of contrasting philosophical principles, especially pragmatic principles. This blending, under the concept of "glocalisation," has led to the creation of this unique Chinese capitalist developmental model. Through it, China has successfully exploited the process of capitalist globalisation and its various mechanisms, embodying the myth of the Trojan Horse, through which it has commercially infiltrated and penetrated countries worldwide, including the capitals of the classical Western capitalist centres. Suppose China succeeds by the end of this decade in securing the economic leadership position within the global capitalist system. In that case, it will have achieved something akin to what Prometheus did when he "stole" fire from the gods, according to the famous myth! ⁽¹⁴⁾.

3. Conclusion

The discourse of globalisation, often presented as an inevitable and neutral phenomenon, emerges through this study as an ideological construct—a modern myth designed to sustain the dominance of capitalist hegemony. Just as historical myths have shaped human consciousness and justified power structures, globalisation functions as a narrative that legitimises Western capitalist expansion and perpetuates economic and political inequalities. However, the contradictions inherent in globalisation have fostered resistance and alternative models, challenging its universality.

The emergence of China's self-made capitalism and the potential shift from Pax Americana to Pax Sinica illustrate how global power dynamics remain fluid, constantly reshaped by competing myths and counter-narratives. While capitalist globalisation was initially imposed as a unipolar force, its interaction with diverse local cultures and economic systems has produced hybrid outcomes that defy standardisation.

Ultimately, this study underscores the need to critically assess the ideological underpinnings of globalisation, recognising it not as a deterministic force but as a constructed and contested

myth. The future will likely witness the rise of new myths, shaped by the evolving struggles for economic and political influence, reaffirming that globalisation is far from a singular or static reality, but rather a continuously redefined construct serving shifting global interests.

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