

### **How do nations obtain power and wealth?**

Global wealth has increased to unprecedented levels yet inequality between and within nations has also increased.<sup>1</sup> This dynamic exposes how wealth and power are interconnected, making it essential to identify how nations obtain both to understand current global politics. How power and wealth are defined reflects different interests and values but there is broad agreement that power is essentially the capacity to influence and control and that wealth is an accumulation of assets and resources.<sup>2</sup>

Mainstream realists equate power with a wealth of ‘material capabilities’, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and armed forces, conceptualising international relations as competition between states to increase this wealth.<sup>3</sup> This perspective highlights China’s rapid increase in its material capabilities over the last 45 years, from an ‘isolated and poor nation’ to being the world’s second largest economy in terms of GDP with the world’s largest

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Evans , “Poverty, Hunger, and Development”, in Baylis et al, *The Globalisation of World Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023, pp. 425-40.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Nye, “Cyber Power”, *Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs*, 2010, p. 2; “Power”, *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionaries*, Oxford University Press, 2023, [[https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/power\\_1?q=Power/](https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/power_1?q=Power/) last accessed 21 December 2023]; Kado Muir, “Wealth in First Nations: Inclusive Wealth and Colonial Legacies”, *Bennett Institute for Public Policy*, 20 September 2022, [<https://www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk/blog/wealth-in-first-nations/> last accessed 21 December 2023].

<sup>3</sup> J. Baylis, S. Smith and P. Owens, *The Globalisation of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023, pp. 552-53; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (Illinois: Waveland Press, 2010); Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*. Illinois: Waveland Press, 2010.

army.<sup>4</sup>As identified by the International Monetary Fund, China obtained wealth by liberalising trade. China's 1978 market-orientated reforms introduced profit incentives for its own population and foreign investors, increasing productivity and export growth and providing funds for military development.<sup>5</sup> Current Western framing of China's material capability to invade Taiwan as 'dangerous' to the existing 'balance of power', exposes how China is using 'hard [military] power' to obtain political influence in international relations.<sup>6</sup> China's US\$1-trillion Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is also enabled by wealth but includes attractive 'soft powers', such as technological collaboration, as well as financial incentives for less wealthy and powerful nations.<sup>7</sup> As the European Union has identified, China uses BRI to obtain economic and political power in parts of Asia, Europe and Africa by creating an expanded, interdependent market for trade and influencing the voting of dependent nations in multilateral organisations, such as the United Nations.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that nations obtain power

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<sup>4</sup> Shujie Yao, "China Emerges as a Global Power on 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday", *The University of Nottingham China Policy Institute Briefing Series* Issue 55, September 2009; C. Giles "Sorry America, China Has a Bigger Economy Than You", *Financial Times*, 6 December 2023, [<https://www.ft.com/content/c406ef56-bc43-4cdc-8913-fbaced9b9954/> last accessed 23 December 2023]; J. Page, "The People's Liberation Army is not yet as formidable as the West Fears", *The Economist*, 6 November 2023, [<https://www.economist.com/special-report/2023/11/06/the-peoples-liberation-army-is-not-yet-as-formidable-as-the-west-fears/> last accessed 21 December 2023].

<sup>5</sup> Zulu F. Hu and Mohsin S. Khan, "Why is China Growing So Fast?", *Economic Issues 8 (International Monetary Fund)*, April 1997.

<sup>6</sup> "Special Report: China's Armed Forces", *The Economist*, November 2023, pp. 3-12; Joseph Nye, "Soft Power: The Origins and Political Progress of a Concept", *Palgrave Communications* 3, February 2017, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Nye, "Soft Power", p. 2.; "Engage with China's Belt and Road Science Boost", *Nature*, 26 October 2023, [<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-03299-6> / last accessed 27 December 2023].

<sup>8</sup> J. Yu and J. Wallace, "What is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)?", *Chatham House*, 13 September 2021, [<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/09/what-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-bri/> last accessed 28 December 2023]; Analysis and Research Team, "The Rising Influence of China in Intergovernmental Organisations and Standardisation Bodies", *Council of the European Union*, 17 December 2020, pp. 1-19.

over other nations by increasing their wealth through collaboration with other nations, as this funds initiatives to influence and control.

Alternative critical approaches conceptualise power as ‘socially produced and diffused,’ highlighting how ‘structural violences,’ such as racism, create formalised inequalities in wealth and power within and between nations.<sup>9</sup> A post-colonial perspective makes Haiti instructive of how nations use colonisation to obtain wealth and power. France employed the formalised racist ‘civilising mission’ of colonisation to take control over the land and people of Haiti, imposing a hierarchical societal structure which disempowered the indigenous population and the imported African slaves.<sup>10</sup> This enabled France to gain huge wealth through sugar and coffee industries facilitated by slavery, with one in eight people in France deriving income from this trade.<sup>11</sup> Post-independence (1804), France continued to gain wealth from Haiti by imposing a ‘reparations debt’ of 150 million francs for these ‘lost’ resources, with a total of \$21 billion taken from the Haitian economy.<sup>12</sup> Colonisation enabled France to maintain greater economic and political power to the present day at the expense of

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, “Power in International Politics”, *International Organization* 59, no. 1, 2005, pp. 39-75; Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no 3, 1969, pp. 167-91; Debra Thompson, “Through, Against and Beyond the Racial state: The Transnational Stratum of Race”, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 26:1, 2013, pp. 133-51.

<sup>10</sup> J. Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760-2010*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> “Remember Haiti”, *Brown University Library Exhibitions*, 2012, [[https://www.brown.edu/Facilities/John\\_Carter\\_Brown\\_Library/exhibitions/remember\\_haiti/economy.php](https://www.brown.edu/Facilities/John_Carter_Brown_Library/exhibitions/remember_haiti/economy.php) / last accessed 23 December 2023].

<sup>12</sup> C. Porter, C. Meheut, M. Apuzzo and S. Gebrekidan, “The Root of Haiti’s Misery: Reparations to Enslavers”, *The New York Times*, 27 May 2022, [<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/20/world/americas/haiti-history-colonized-france.html/> last accessed 23 December 2023].

an economically and politically disempowered Haiti, which since independence has remained among the poorest nations and an ‘embodiment of modern inequality’.<sup>13</sup> This demonstrates how nations obtain wealth and power by imposing disempowering societal structures which facilitate exploitation.

In essence, it is clear that nations can obtain wealth through mutually profitable collaborations or exploitation, with the former likely to empower a disempowered nation and the latter facilitated by existing power and likely to perpetuate the status quo.

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<sup>13</sup> “The World Bank in Haiti”, *The World Bank*, 26 October 2023, [<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/haiti/overview#:~:text=Haiti%20remains%20the%20poorest%20country,of%20191%20countries%20in%202022./> last accessed 23 December 2023]; Paul Farmer, “An Anthropology of Structural Violence,” *Current Anthropology* 45, no. 3, 2004, p. 313.

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