

From Regional to Global Powers: Brazil, China, India and South Africa on Transboundary Water Resources

Alexis Carles

PhD student, Aspirant F.R.S.-FNRS
Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium

Research problem & question

- Research Problem: double reality
 - Emergence of regional hegemons
 - Shifts of political authority from states to other levels of decision-making
- Research Question:
 - How do these powerful states react in the face of regional (and global) political authority shifts?
- Hypothesis
 - Exploratory research
 - Legitimacy
 - Coherence basin/global levels.

Choice of case studies

- Transboundary Water Resources.
 - Central regional issues that affect both basin hegemon and their neighbours interdependently
 - More and more basin-wide organizations/institutions
 - Development of Customary International Water Law
- Cases:
 - China on the Mekong RB
 - India on the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna RB
 - Brazil on the La Plata RB
 - South Africa on the Orange RB
 - 4 out of 17 “basins at risk” (Wolf et. al., & UNESCO, 2003)
 - They involve regional hegemon

Methods

- (Water-related) events' data analysis
- A closer literature review of those events, analysed through the lens of power and hegemony theories

Results

Sub-questions: category 1:

Do they participate actively to the events on their respective basin?

Indicators	China	Brazil	India	South Africa
Participation	Low (1/3 of 146 ev)	Moderate (1/2 of 138 ev)	Very high (90% of 267 ev)	Very high (96% of 22 ev)
% Cooperative events on the basin	84%	81%	67%	86%
% Conflictive events (hegemon included)	High 12/19 = 63%	Moderate $\frac{1}{2} = 50\%$	Very high 65/68 = 94%	Very high 3/3 = 100%

Results

Sub-questions - category 2:

How do they participate?

- What is the main strategy they use? Do they act unilaterally? Do they provide leadership?

Indicators	China	Brazil	India	South Africa
Main strategy	Resource Capture	Integration	Containment	All three
Unilateral actions?	Yes	No	Yes	Yes, through co-optation of Lesotho
Leadership?	No	Yes	No	Yes

Results

Sub-questions - category 3:

How do they react to (existing or hypothetical) multilateral cooperation schemes at the basin level?

- What type of agreements do they favour?

Indicators	China	Brazil	India	South Africa
Type of agreements favoured	Bilateral	Both	Bilateral	Bilateral
Behaviour toward basin-wide cooperation	Limited involvement	Positive	Negative	Positive

Results

Sub-questions - Category 4:

What type of hegemon are they?

- On the basis of those findings, how did we characterize their hegemony at the basin level?
Why?

Indicators	China	Brazil	India	South Africa
Type of hegemony	Restrictive	Benevolent	Controlling	Omnipotent

Results

Sub-questions - Category 5:

How do they react to the development of Customary International Water Law?

- Is it coherent with their attitude at the basin-regional level?

Indicators	China	Brazil	India	South Africa
Vote on UN 1997 Convention ¹	Against (1/3)	For (1/103)	Abstained (1/27)	For (1/103)
Signing/ratification of the UN 1997 Convention	No	No	No	Yes
Coherence regional vs. International levels.	Yes	Partial	Yes	Yes

¹ Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourse

Lessons Learnt

- Two very different upstream hegemons
- Midstream hegemons use more power resources to compensate their riparian position
- Bilateral agreements can be very cooperative, but they can also become a central strategy for maintaining and consolidating hegemony
- India and China are far from being perceived as legitimate regional hegemons (on TWRs)
- Brazil, on the other hand, seems to be a legitimate leader on the LPRB
- The case of South Africa is more complex. Now that it ensured satisfactory water allocation through the LHWP, it is more inclined to cooperate multilaterally with its riparian states, and its attitude progressively becomes one of a legitimate leader.