The Material Foundations of Global Hegemony: Energy Transitions And Architecture of World Dominance

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We are living in a time of crisis. In a chaotic environment that has manifested itself since 2008 through economic crises, wars, political turmoil, social unrest, epidemics, and climate instability, we can feel structural shifts occurring within the system we live in. To give meaning to this chaos and make projections about the future, this work offers using the systemic cycles of accumulation framework as a unit of analysis. According to the systemic cycles of accumulation framework, capitalism is organized around a hegemonic state, and a hegemonic cycle consists of three main parts: material expansion, financialization, and systemic chaos or transition. For the British and the US hegemonic cycles, I analyze these three periods through the development of the main energy source and energy transformations, and I argue that the chaos we are experiencing may be the transition period to the Chinese hegemony, which uses renewable energy (wind and solar) as its main energy source. The original contribution of this work lies in placing the energy transition at the center of hegemony debates. While energy occasionally surfaces in Arrighi's systemic cycles of accumulation (such as in the context of the 1970s oil crisis), it does not play a central and structural role in defining the cycles. On the other hand, prominent energy historians like E.A. Wrigley and Vaclav Smil do not focus on capital accumulation cycles while analyzing energy transitions in their works. However, examining these two dynamics together could open an entirely new window for understanding systemic transformations.