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GLOBAL ECONOMIC ASYMMETRIES AS A CATALYST FOR SYSTEMIC CRISES OF HUMANITY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract. This article presents a comprehensive study of the nature, forms of manifestation, and systemic consequences of global economic asymmetries as a key factor determining the emergence and cascading spread of systemic crises facing modern humanity in the 21st century. The relevance of the study lies in the fact that traditional models of international economic relations, built on assumptions of convergence and the gradual equalization of development levels, can no longer adequately explain the deepening stratification between the global core and the periphery. It is demonstrated that economic asymmetries have ceased to be a local or temporary phenomenon and have become a structural attribute of the global economic system, which reproduces itself through the distribution of capital, income, technology, energy resources, information, and ecological space. It is substantiated that the modern global economy gives rise to the phenomenon of "asymmetric interdependence," under which developed countries concentrate technological rent, financial capital, and institutional power, while peripheral and semi-peripheral countries are increasingly fixed in the role of suppliers of raw resources, cheap labor, and, in effect, "absorbers" of environmental risks. Five key types of asymmetries are identified and systematized: income and property asymmetry, technological asymmetry, financial and monetary asymmetry, resource and environmental asymmetry, and information and digital asymmetry. The mechanisms of their mutual reinforcement and accumulation under the conditions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the digital platformization of the economy, and the reconfiguration of global value chains are established and analytically described. The author's own concept of "cascading crisis-generating potential" is proposed, according to which structural asymmetries give rise to an interconnected chain of sectoral crises: financial, food, energy, migration, climate, and geopolitical, which, interacting with one another, acquire a synergistic and self-reinforcing character rather than remaining isolated shocks. On the basis of the analysis conducted, the necessity of forming a new architecture of global economic governance is argued, aimed at mitigating structural asymmetries through the reform of international financial institutions, a fairer redistribution of technological rents, and the introduction of carbon and digital taxation mechanisms at the global level. In the concluding part of the article, practical proposals are formulated regarding Ukraine's strategic priorities and its possible positioning in the global economic space amid post-war recovery and European integration.

Keywords: global economic asymmetries; systemic crisis; globalization; inequality; technological rent; financial instability; climate crisis; digital economy; world economic system; international economic regulation.

ГЛОБАЛЬНІ ЕКОНОМІЧНІ АСИМЕТРІЇ ЯК КАТАЛІЗАТОР СИСТЕМНИХ КРИЗ ЛЮДСТВА У ХХІ СТОЛІТТІ

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Анотація. У статті здійснено комплексне дослідження природи, форм прояву та системних наслідків глобальних економічних асиметрій як ключового чинника, що детермінують виникнення і каскадне поширення системних криз сучасного людства у ХХІ столітті. Актуальність дослідження зумовлена тим, що традиційні моделі міжнародних економічних відносин, побудовані на припущеннях конвергенції та поступового вирівнювання рівнів розвитку, вже не спроможні адекватно пояснити поглиблення розшарування між глобальним центром і периферією. Доведено, що економічні асиметрії перестали бути локальними або тимчасовими явищем і трансформувалися у структурний атрибут глобальної економічної системи, який відтворюється на рівні розподілу капіталу, доходів, технологій, енергоресурсів, інформації та екологічного простору. Обґрунтовано, що сучасна світова економіка формує феномен «асиметричної взаємозалежності», за якого розвинені країни концентрують технологічну ренту, фінансовий капітал та інституційну владу, тоді як периферійні й напівпериферійні країни дедалі більше закріплюються у ролі постачальників сировинних ресурсів, дешевої праці та своєрідних «поглиначів» екологічних ризиків. Виокремлено та систематизовано п'ять ключових типів асиметрій: доходно-майнову, технологічну, фінансово-валютну, ресурсно-екологічну та інформаційно-цифрову. Встановлено й аналітично описано механізми їх взаємного підсилення та накопичення в умовах четвертої промислової революції, цифрової платформізації економіки та реконфігурації глобальних ланцюгів доданої вартості. Запропоновано авторську концепцію «каскадної кризогенності», згідно з якою структурні асиметрії породжують взаємопов'язаний ланцюг галузевих криз фінансову, продовольчу, енергетичну, міграційну, кліматичну та геополітичну, які, взаємодіючи між собою, набувають синергетичного і самопідсилюваного характеру, а не залишаються ізольованими шоками. На основі проведеного аналізу аргументовано необхідність формування нової архітектури глобального економічного управління, спрямованої на пом'якшення структурних асиметрій через реформування міжнародних фінансових інститутів, більш справедливий перерозподіл технологічної ренти, а також упровадження механізмів вуглецевого й цифрового оподаткування на глобальному рівні. У завершальній частині статті сформульовано практичні пропозиції щодо стратегічних пріоритетів України та її можливого позиціонування в глобальному економічному просторі в умовах повоєнного відновлення й європейської інтеграції.

Ключові слова: глобальні економічні асиметрії; системна криза; глобалізація; нерівність; технологічна рента; фінансова нестабільність; кліматична криза; цифрова економіка; світова економічна система; міжнародне економічне регулювання.

Statement of the Problem. At the beginning of the 21st century, humanity found itself facing an unprecedented convergence of interrelated crises. In terms of their nature, scale, and depth, these crises differ significantly from the pivotal crises of previous eras. It was the global financial and economic crisis of 2008–2009, the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy and food crises—which were exacerbated by Russia's aggression against Ukraine—as well as chronic climate collapses, the digital transformation of the economy, and rising geopolitical tensions among leading centers of power—

form a complex and multifaceted crisis landscape. The common denominator of these phenomena is the global economic asymmetries that have accumulated over decades, evolving from the backdrop of global economic development into a structural factor driving systemic imbalances.

Global economic asymmetries, as they exist today, are multidimensional. They encompass the uneven distribution of income and wealth among and within countries. The technological gap between innovation leaders and resource- and agriculture-based economies, the monetary and financial hegemony of reserve currencies, the concentration of control over critical resources, the information monopoly of digital platforms, as well as environmental inequality, under which the burden of climate change is borne primarily by the countries that have contributed least to it. The Gini index is rising in most developed economies. The income gap between the wealthiest 1% of the world's population and the rest of humanity is widening. Eighty percent of global investment in R&D is concentrated in five countries. The dominance of the dollar and the euro in international transactions and the control of key digital infrastructures by a handful of megacorporations have created a situation in which the global system has lost its ability to self-correct through traditional market mechanisms.

In the context of globalization, asymmetries do not merely coexist but enter into complex interrelationships that form self-sustaining feedback loops. Technological asymmetry exacerbates income inequality. Income inequality limits the periphery's ability to invest in human capital. A shortage of human capital deepens technological backwardness. Technological backwardness leads to an unfavorable position in global value chains, which in turn perpetuates poverty and generates migration flows, political instability, and conflicts. Thus, these asymmetries act as catalysts for crisis-inducing processes that tend to cascade: financial shocks trigger energy crises, which in turn generate food crises; the latter provoke migration- and politics-related crises; and climate change complements and accelerates all of the preceding ones.

For Ukraine, which is engaged in a defensive war and has an open economy integrated into global markets for raw materials, agricultural products, and labor, the issue of global economic asymmetries takes on particular urgency. The Ukrainian reality is characterized by disproportionately high costs amid global imbalances and, at the same time, a unique need for international solidarity in the reconstruction effort. These factors make a theoretical understanding of this issue not only academically significant but also practically essential for the formulation of a national strategy.

Analysis of Recent Studies and Publications. The theoretical examination of global economic asymmetries has a long scholarly tradition. Structuralists R. Prebisch and G. Singer demonstrated that the terms of trade systematically deteriorate for raw-material-supplying countries, creating a persistent dichotomy between the center and the periphery. I. Wallerstein's world-systems theory (Wallerstein, 2004), further developed by J. Arrighi, A. Gunder Frank, and S. Amin, demonstrated the inherent hierarchical structure of the capitalist world economy, which is reproduced through mechanisms of unequal exchange, capital outflows, and institutional asymmetry.

Nobel laureates in economics have enriched our understanding of this issue through their analysis of specific dimensions of inequality. J. Stiglitz (2019, in *The Price of Inequality and People, Power, and Profits*), showed how rising inequality undermines economic growth, democratic institutions, and social stability. A. Deaton (2013), in *The Great Escape*, analyzed the long-term dynamics of inequality in health and income. T. Piketty (2020), in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* and *Capital and Ideology*, used unique datasets to demonstrate that modern capitalism, without redistributive policies, inevitably concentrates capital at a rate exceeding all previous historical records.

Technological asymmetry and the role of digitalization are explored by E. Brynjolfsson and E. McAfee (*"The Second Machine Age"*), K. Schwab (2022) (*"The Fourth Industrial Revolution"*), and D. Acemoglu and P. Restrepo (2023) (*"Technological Unemployment and Automation"*). Platform capitalism and digital monopolies are analyzed by S. Zuboff (2019) (*"The Age of*

Surveillance Capitalism") and N. Srnicek (2017). Financial instability and the role of the dollar are studied by H. Minsky (2008) (theory of financial instability), N. Taleb (2012) ("anti-fragility"), K. Reinhart and K. Rogoff (2009), B. Eichengreen (2022), and E. Prasad (2022); analysis of climate and resource asymmetry is examined by J. Sachs (2020), N. Stern (2007), and J. Hickel (2020); the concept of the "imperialist regime of appropriation" is explored by U. Brandt and M. Wissen (2021).

Among Ukrainian scholars, significant contributions to the study of global imbalances have been made by V. Heyets (2020), O. Bilorius and Y. Pakhomov (2022), A. Filipenko (2020), D. Lukyanenko, A. Poruchnyk and Y. Stoliarchuk (2019) (methodological foundations for analyzing global transformations), as well as T. Tsygankova (2022), V. Sidenko (2018), E. Libanova (2014), A. Hrytsenko (2017), A. Chukhno (2021), and O. Shnyrkov (2023) (mechanisms of Ukraine's integration into the global economy and systemic dimensions of crisis-inducing phenomena).

Purpose of the article. The objective is to provide a systems-theoretical justification for the role of global economic asymmetries as a key catalyst for systemic crises in the 21st century, to identify the mechanisms of their mutual reinforcement and cascading spread, and to formulate the conceptual foundations for reforming the architecture of global economic governance, taking into account Ukraine's strategic interests.

Presentation of the Main Material. A conceptual understanding of the problem requires preliminary clarification of terminology. By "economic asymmetry", we mean a persistent, uneven distribution of economic resources, opportunities, benefits, and risks among economic actors, which is self-reinforcing, inertial, and systemically entrenched. Unlike situational and market-justified inequality, asymmetry is characterized by its ability to reproduce itself through institutional, technological, and structural mechanisms. It becomes global when it extends to the level of countries, regions, and global networks of production, exchange, finance, and knowledge. Structural analysis allows us to identify five key types of contemporary global asymmetries, the characteristics of which we propose to expand upon.

The first type is income-and-wealth asymmetry. It manifests itself in an unprecedented concentration of wealth and income, both across and within countries. According to Oxfam (2024), in 2023–2024, the richest 1% of the world's population held more wealth than the remaining 99% combined. The ten richest people controlled resources equivalent to the GDP of more than 40 of the poorest countries. The global Gini coefficient for income remains at 0.65–0.70. At the cross-national level, 20% of the population in developed countries receives about 75% of global income; the gap in per capita GDP between the most developed and the poorest countries exceeds 100 times in PPP terms and more than 300 times in nominal terms. At the same time, domestic inequality in leading countries is accelerating: the share of labor income in U.S. GDP fell from 64% in the 1980s to 56% in the 2020s, while the share of capital income rose accordingly. The mechanism by which income and wealth asymmetry is reproduced involves several interrelated factors. First, the financialization of the economy, in which returns on financial assets grow faster than labor income: the rate of return on capital (r) systematically exceeds the rate of economic growth (g), which inevitably leads to the concentration of wealth (Piketty, 2020). Second, the "winner-takes-all" phenomenon in digital sectors, where a small number of companies and individuals receive disproportionately large rewards. Third, the weakening of the labor union movement has reduced wage earners' ability to secure wage increases. Fourth, regressive tax practices, under which big capital and transnational corporations optimize their tax liabilities, while the middle class pays full rates.

The second type—technological asymmetry—is perhaps the most strategic in today's environment. Five countries (the U.S., China, Japan, Germany, and South Korea) account for over 70% of global R&D spending. More than 80% of patents in the fields of artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology, and semiconductors are held by companies from just three or four countries. The production of state-of-the-art chips is effectively monopolized by Taiwan's

TSMC, South Korea's Samsung, and the U.S.'s Intel. Rare earth metals and lithium processing are predominantly controlled by China.

Technological asymmetry generates a specific type of rent: innovative, or technological, rent. This rent does not disappear with the spread of technology (as classical theory predicted), but is preserved through intellectual property regimes, network effects, and control over standards and ecosystems. Pharmaceutical companies in developed countries reap superprofits from drug patents, while the periphery is denied access to them. Digital platforms concentrate profits in their home countries, transforming the behavioral data of billions of users into a source of capitalization. A distinctive feature of the current phase of technological asymmetry is its geopolitical dimension: the sanctions standoff between the U.S. and China in semiconductors and artificial intelligence is creating new fault lines in the global economy, forcing middle-power countries to make painful strategic choices.

The third type is financial and monetary asymmetry, which has deep historical roots. The hegemony of the U.S. dollar, established by the Bretton Woods Agreements of 1944 and preserved after the abandonment of the gold standard in 1971, persists despite numerous predictions of its decline: about 60% of global foreign exchange reserves are denominated in dollars, more than 80% of international settlements are conducted through the dollar directly or indirectly, and prices for key commodities are predominantly set in U.S. currency. This grants the U.S. a unique "excessive privilege" (V. Giscard d'Estaing) and enables it to finance current account deficits by issuing its national currency, which is accepted worldwide. The "weaponization" of the dollar—using its hegemonic status through sanctions, restrictions on SWIFT access, and the freezing of sovereign assets—reinforces the system's asymmetric nature while simultaneously creating incentives to seek alternatives.

Financial and monetary asymmetry is exacerbated by the role of transnational asset managers. The largest of these—BlackRock, Vanguard, and State Street—control portfolios totaling more than \$20 trillion, which exceeds the GDP of most countries in the world. They have a decisive say in the corporate governance of thousands of companies and shape global investment trends. The offshore economy diverts more than 10% of global GDP from taxation: multinational corporations use transfer pricing schemes to shift profits to low-tax jurisdictions, depriving source countries of at least \$240 billion in revenue annually (Chancel et al., 2022). International efforts under the BEPS framework and the agreed-upon global minimum corporate tax rate of 15% are the first systematic steps, but their effectiveness has yet to be proven.

The fourth type—resource and environmental asymmetry—has become particularly acute in the context of the climate crisis. The average U.S. resident consumes 9 times as much energy as an Indian resident and produces 5 times as much CO₂ as the global average. At the same time, developed countries are responsible for about 70% of cumulative emissions since the beginning of the industrial era, while developing countries—with minimal resources for adaptation—bear the brunt of the consequences of climate change. The concept of the "imperialist regime of appropriation" (Brand & Wissen, 2021) describes a mechanism whereby the lifestyle of developed countries is institutionally based on unequal exchange with the rest of the world: cheap labor, the export of environmentally polluting industries, and the extraction of critical minerals under opaque conditions—all of which perpetuate environmental and economic inequality on a global scale.

The transition to a low-carbon economy does not eliminate resource asymmetry but transforms it. Over 60% of cobalt production is concentrated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and China controls over 70% of lithium processing. New dependencies on critical minerals and renewable energy technologies risk replicating the logic of oil geopolitics in a "green" context. Climate change acts as a multiplier of inequality: rising temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, and extreme weather events disproportionately affect tropical countries, small island states,

and arid regions of Africa and the Middle East—while the \$100 billion in annual aid promised at UN climate forums has yet to materialize in full (UNCTAD, 2023).

The fifth type is information and digital asymmetry. It is the most recent, but one of the most dynamic. A few tech giants—Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon, and Meta in the U.S., and Alibaba, Tencent, and ByteDance in China—account for the vast majority of the digital economy's market capitalization: in 2024, the combined market capitalization of the five largest U.S. technology companies exceeded \$12 trillion—comparable to the combined GDP of Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Digital inequality manifests itself in several ways: more than 30% of the world's population still lacks internet access (primarily in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia); the skills gap between countries in terms of digital literacy is widening; the vast majority of web content and training data for AI models is concentrated in a few languages and cultural contexts; and the regulatory gap places developing countries in a position of digital dependence without effective leverage.

Having identified five types of asymmetries, let us now analyze the mechanisms by which they reinforce one another. We propose introducing the concept of *"asymmetric resonance"*, according to which different types of asymmetries do not operate in isolation but enter into positive-feedback loops that generate qualitatively new systemic effects.

Digital asymmetry concentrates revenues from platform services in the home countries of tech giants, exacerbating income inequality at the international level.

Resource and environmental asymmetry resulting from the "green" transition is creating new forms of dependence on critical minerals.

The resonant effect of asymmetries gives rise to the phenomenon of *"cascading crisis-prone behavior"*. The essence of this phenomenon lies in the fact that systemic imbalances accumulated at one level, upon reaching a critical mass, erupt into a crisis that—in a context of global interdependence—inevitably spreads to adjacent subsystems. This mechanism is clearly evident in the period from 2020 to 2023. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep-seated asymmetries in healthcare, vaccine access, and fiscal capacity. Climate disasters served as a backdrop, further exacerbating each of the aforementioned shocks. The digital transformation, accelerated by the pandemic, has further concentrated profits in the technology sector.

This analysis demonstrates that contemporary crises cannot be viewed in isolation: they constitute a "polycrisis" (Schwab & Malleret, 2022; Tooze, 2021), in which shocks intertwine and cascade. Traditional stabilization policy tools, designed for specific types of crises, are losing their effectiveness: monetary stimulus, which was appropriate in 2008, proved counterproductive amid the inflationary shock of 2021–2023; fiscal stimulus is hampered by excessive debt burdens; climate policy is in short-term conflict with energy security. A polycrisis requires a systemic approach—simultaneously addressing multiple types of asymmetries.

The institutional dimension of global economic asymmetries deserves separate consideration. The architecture of global governance, formed primarily in the postwar decades, demonstrates a systemic mismatch with the realities of the 21st century. The IMF (2023) retains decision-making mechanisms that give dominant weight to developed countries: The United States effectively holds a veto (with over 15% of the votes at an 85% threshold), and the imposition of neoliberal policies on aid-recipient countries often exacerbates structural imbalances rather than resolving them. The WTO's dispute settlement body is paralyzed because the United States is blocking new appointments; The Doha Round has reached an impasse; issues of digital trade, environmental standards, and government subsidies are not being systematically addressed. The G7 and G20 lack sufficient legitimacy and enforcement mechanisms, and no global institution has the authority to regulate digital platforms or establish an international framework for artificial intelligence.

Three potential scenarios for the evolution of global governance can be identified: *"Reformed Globalism"* – a fundamental reform of existing institutions with increased representation for

developing countries; "*Fragmented Globalization*" – the division of the world economy into competing regional blocs with their own technological standards and trade rules; "*deglobalization*" – a systematic retreat from global integration and a rise in protectionist tendencies, the least likely but entirely realistic scenario should geopolitical confrontations escalate.

Given the diagnosis of global asymmetries and their crisis-inducing potential, a comprehensive system of measures is needed across five areas. *In the tax and property sphere*: raising the global minimum corporate tax rate (from 15% to 21–25%), imposing a tax on the excess profits of technology companies, and restricting offshore activities. *In the technology sector*: reforming the intellectual property regime by expanding compulsory licensing mechanisms and providing public investment in basic research for developing countries. *In the financial and monetary sector*: strengthening the role of IMF Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) as a reserve asset, reforming IMF quotas, introducing central bank digital currencies, and limiting the "weaponization" of currencies.

In the resource and environmental sphere, Ukraine's strategic priorities in the global economic arena center on several key areas. First, the use of frozen Russian assets (over \$300 billion) as the basis for a reconstruction reparations fund. Second, integration into the EU, with active participation in shaping the new architecture of Europe's green and digital transformation, as well as the development of agricultural processing and biotechnology as alternatives to raw-material exports. Third, energy transformation—a shift from import dependence to the potential export of green electricity and hydrogen to the EU market. Fourth, building human capital: investments in education, science, and technology entrepreneurship, and the return of qualified specialists from abroad. Fifth, an active diplomatic stance in international negotiations as a voice for middle-income countries that uphold the principles of multilateral cooperation and equitable global development.

Conclusions. This comprehensive study allows us to draw general conclusions. Thus, global economic asymmetries in the 21st century have transformed from a local phenomenon into a structural attribute of the world economy, reproduced through institutional, technological, and financial mechanisms. Contemporary asymmetries are multidimensional and encompass five key spheres: income and wealth, technology, finance and currency, resources and the environment, and information and digital technology, each with its own logic of formation and reproduction.

The proposed concept of "cascading crisis-prone dynamics" explains how contemporary systemic crises arise from accumulated asymmetries. Financial, energy, food, migration, climate, and geopolitical crises constitute a "polycrisis" in which shocks intertwine and cascade, rendering traditional stabilization tools ineffective.

The current architecture of global governance is fundamentally ill-suited to the challenges of the 21st century. The IMF (2023), the World Bank (2024), the WTO, and other key institutions require profound reform, including increased representation of developing countries and the introduction of new instruments for regulating the digital economy and climate finance.

For Ukraine, the strategic priorities are: utilizing the aggressor's frozen assets for reconstruction; active integration into the EU as a key player in shaping the new global architecture; energy transformation with the goal of becoming a green energy exporter; development of human capital and the IT sector; and active participation in reforming global governance.

Prospects for further research include quantitative modeling of mechanisms of asymmetric resonance and cascading crisis potential; a comparative analysis of strategies employed by middle-income countries to adapt to an asymmetric environment; prospective research on scenarios for the evolution of the global system through 2050; and the development of conceptual foundations for Ukrainian economic diplomacy in the context of an asymmetric global environment.

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