

Yan Xuetong: Chinese Values and Liberalism

Who will shape the future international normative order?

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As the strength disparity between China and the United States continues to shrink dramatically, China's rise will simultaneously reshape the international configuration from US-dominated unipolarity to China-US-led bipolarity. Consequently, Western scholars are increasingly worried that these shifting dynamics will result in a Chinese-led global order that could potentially influence the domestic affairs of their particular societies.¹ Although it is conceivable that China's material strength will match or even surpass that of the United States in the next two decades, whether or not China's political ideology will wield as profound an influence on the international order as has American liberalism remains unclear. To gauge the likelihood of such a possibility, this manuscript will examine the current ideological challenges that American liberalism faces, the relationship between liberalism and Chinese traditional values, and the viability of humane authority as a dominant principle in the international order.

Competiton of Ideologies

A look at the history of the 20th century shows that no modern ideology has been able to maintain itself as an international mainstream value for more than three decades. Rather, several modern ideologies have become elevated to such a status, including nationalism in the 1910s, fascism in the 1930s, communism in the 1950s, nationalism again in the 1960s, and liberalism in the 1990s. However, none of these modern ideologies wielded dominant influence over the modern international system for as long as Confucianism did over the ancient Chinese interstate system. During the Cold War, communism and capitalism were the two contending global ideologies, and the competition between them shaped the character of that era's international order. Liberalism rose to pre-eminence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and subsequently influenced the international value system to the extent that the post-Cold War era is known as the liberal order. However, as we enter the second decade of the 21st century, liberalism has begun to falter due to the growing challenges of other ideologies that threaten to undermine its dominance.

Decline of Liberalism

Liberals espouse a wide array of views depending on their understanding of the intended purpose of liberal principles. As such, the meaning of 'liberalism' diverges in different parts of the world. In the United States, liberalism is associated with the welfare-state policies of the New Deal programmes initiated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt,² while the ideas of laissez-faire economics exist simultaneously within current American conservatism.³ In Europe, liberalism is most commonly associated with a commitment to government responsibility and social welfare, whereas in Latin America and many post-Communist countries it often relates to socialism, and is hence, generally referred to as social liberalism.⁴ In China, liberalism refers politically to Western democracy and economically to a market economy.

Despite the above differences, the liberalism in any country generally affirms the principles of equality, freedom, democracy, civil rights, secular government, international cooperation, and the resultant programmes in support thereof. Liberalism first became a distinct political movement after achieving a degree of popularity among Western philosophers and economists during the Age of Enlightenment. In the first half of the 20th century, Western liberalism spread from European democracies to other parts of the world, mainly due to the dominance afforded by their victories in both world wars. In the aftermath of WWII, the United States became the de facto leading exponent of liberalism, and its hegemonic power signified the influence on international norms of the American liberalist values of equality and freedom. This is exemplified in Chapter I, Article 1, Clause 2, of the United Nations (UN) Charter reflecting the UN directive: ‘To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.’⁵

Liberal democratic governments achieved great social progress across Western Europe during the Cold War, a development that would reinforce their values in almost all fields as liberalism came to be viewed as a Western ideology in direct opposition to the oppression in the Communist East. With the subsequent success of the US-directed Western camp in its strategic competition with the Soviet-directed Eastern camp, liberalism became the dominant international ideology in the post-Cold War period. This triumph of the Western world led many to believe in the pre-eminence of liberal values. Francis Fukuyama went as far as to say, ‘What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: That is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.’⁶

The history of liberalism has been filled with competition from other ideologies—conservatism, secularism, constitutionalism, nationalism, fascism, communism, Islamic fundamentalism, and so on. And yet, despite the aforementioned predictions to the contrary, today it faces challenges once more. In 2016, anti-establishmentarianism gained momentum; in the United States it took the form of Trumpism, while in Europe and other democratic countries it became known as populism.⁷ Although liberal parties in many countries continue to wield power and influence both domestically and abroad, the combination of Brexit and the 2016 election of Donald Trump dealt a serious blow to the global standing of liberalism. People in both the UK and the United States are now ideologically divided, and liberalism is far less dominant than in the past.

However, the root causes of the decline of liberalism in Western countries differ from those in non-Western countries. In the West, this trend has been mainly the byproduct of the inadequate response of democratic governments, in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008, to the need to resume their domestic economies. Faced with the inefficiencies of democratic governance, many liberalists, including former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and Fukuyama, have made critical comments on this very issue.⁸ Yoni Appelbaum warns that ‘[w]ith democracy in retreat abroad, its contradictions and shortcomings exposed at home, and its appeal declining with each successive generation... . The greatest danger facing American democracy is complacency. The democratic experiment is fragile, and its continued survival improbable.’⁹ Younger Americans, for instance, have lost faith in the ability of American democracy to deliver on its promises.¹⁰ Among people born before WWII, more than 70% highly value living in a democracy, while for those born after 1980 the number shrinks to less than a third.¹¹ The situation in the United States is not unique, as there is a similar decline of liberalism across most democracies. In Australia and

New Zealand, for example, the generation gap in regard to democratic values is comparable with that in the United States.¹² Results of a survey of European millennials show that only 32% selected democracy as one of their top five most important social values.¹³ Increasingly, liberalists in the West seek to reform liberalism, to the extent that some now refer to their political ideals as liberal progressivism, while others style themselves as progressive liberals.¹⁴

Meanwhile, the argument for liberalism in non-Western countries has been undermined by both the slowing economic growth of Western countries in comparison to rising states, and the foreign policy double standards that the former have demonstrated. When it comes to economics, global millennials are much more likely than older generations to express positive opinions about the Chinese communist government and its ability to improve living standards as compared with Western governments. At the same time, people in developing countries admire China's policy of setting clear national priorities that invest greatly in the future, and as a consequence are more open to non-democratic forms of government. In 2011, almost half of global millennials were agreed that the idea of a strong leader was preferable to that of a democratic parliament and elections.¹⁵

In addition, the perception that Western countries apply double standards in their foreign policy further undermines the popularity of liberalism. For example, the policies of Western governments towards Arab states have been inconsistent with the professed goal of promoting liberal values in the region. Despite having a far less democratic system of government than the United States, the monarchy of Saudi Arabia has received steady support from the United States due to its status as an important strategic ally, while the secular regime of Syria has been opposed since the so-called Syrian uprising of 2011. This assistance has extended to Saudi Arabia's military intervention into other Arab states, as demonstrated by the provision of military aid to anti-government forces in Syria and the use of military assets to suppress anti-government forces in Yemen and Bahrain. Furthermore, the Arab Spring Movement that pledged to rid the Arab world of dictators has resulted in new dictatorships rather than liberal governments.¹⁶ In fact, quantitative research shows that both military and economic forms of American intervention are more likely to hinder than to promote human rights abroad,¹⁷ suggesting the likelihood of a decline rather than a rise of liberalism in the Middle East.

Competing Ideologies in China

The decline of liberalism as a mainstream global political value creates an opportunity for other ideologies to compete for influence. Its successor is likely to originate in a country that achieves greater political and economic success than the United States. Looking ahead over the next decade, China appears to be the sole country with the potential to shrink the comprehensive strength disparity between itself and the United States sufficiently to become a new superpower. Today, people in democratic countries regard China in way a similar to what Europeans once did the United States—as an uncouth land of opportunity and rising economic might.¹⁸

Consequently people in many countries fear that the current liberalist order may be replaced with one shaped by Chinese values.¹⁹ Christian Reus-Smit has noted, 'a fear that as power shifts to the East, [the] non-Western great power will seek to reshape international order according to their own values and practices'.²⁰ Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd recently remarked, 'Very soon we will find ourselves at a point in history when, for the first time since George III, a non-Western, non-democratic state will be the largest economy in the world. If this is the case, how will China exercise its power in the future international order? Will it accept the

culture, norms and structure of the post-war order? Or will China seek to change it? I believe this is the single core question for the first half of the twenty-first century, not just for Asia, but for the world.’²¹

In 2017, the Chinese government announced its plan to increase soft power significantly by 2035, publicly stating that China’s modernisation, ‘offers a new option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence; and it offers Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind’.²² This statement implies a desire on the part of the Chinese government to advance its official ideology and exert global influence. In fact, after the 19th Party Congress held in October 2017, the Chinese Communist Party sent international propaganda delegations abroad to introduce its programmes and opinions.²³ However, the ideological situation in China is complicated. For one thing, the official ideology advocated by the Chinese government is inconsistent with the popular traditional values espoused by ordinary people. In addition, even Marxism, the official ideology that ostensibly guides domestic administration, differs from the exceptional Chinese traditional culture applicable to foreign policy. In general, there are three powerful ideologies competing for influence in China’s foreign policymaking.

(1) Marxism is the official ideology of the Chinese Communist Party, but it has limited influence on actual foreign policy. The Chinese government has stated that Marxism should guide all areas of its work, such that ‘[i]n developing this culture, we must follow the guidance of Marxism, base our efforts on Chinese culture ... We must continue to adapt Marxism to China’s conditions, keep it up-to-date, and enhance its popular appeal.’²⁴

Nevertheless, the Chinese government seems reluctant to mention Marxism when explaining its foreign policy. In fact, the government has not claimed to use Marxism as a guiding principle in its foreign policy since the adoption of the opening up and reform policy in 1978, clearly due to the contradiction between the core idea of class struggle in Marxism and the emphasis on international cooperation imbued in the opening up principle. The later adoption of peaceful development as a fundamental principle made guiding foreign policy through Marxism impossible.

Implemented in 2004 with Hu Jintao as Party Secretary, the principle of peaceful development has since become the orthodoxy that guides China’s foreign policy, to the extent that it has now become immutable.²⁵ Since class struggle is the core of Marxism, it cannot possibly harmonise with peaceful development. A return to class struggle in foreign policymaking would, on the contrary, endow on China a much more aggressive international image.

(2) Economic pragmatism has been the ideology most popularly accepted by both the government and ordinary people in China in the wake of Deng Xiaoping’s political reforms of 1978. As the potential for another world war substantially subsided, economic prosperity became the reference point for judging the appropriateness of an ideology in China. The country’s economic achievements over the last four decades have laid a strong social base for the values of economic pragmatism. Although the Chinese government has not specified economic growth as its primary priority since 2013, most Chinese people still regard the economy as the basis for national comprehensive strength, and therefore, support the elevation of economic interests to the level of a main policy objective. Economic pragmatism has largely established its legitimacy in China through the Marxist argument whereby the economy is the basis of the political superstructure, a perspective that shares certain similarities with the American economic

nationalism as represented by Steve Bannon.²⁶ In regard to foreign policy making, both define strategic interest from an economic perspective and stress the importance of foreign trade. At the same time, both are reluctant to take on international responsibility and share the desire to shake off the burden of maintaining world order. It was for this reason that Deng Xiaoping adopted the principle of ‘keeping a low profile’, while Trump espouses ‘America first’.²⁷

(3) Today, traditionalism is gaining momentum among everyday Chinese people, as well as intellectuals and politicians, even though it is not the official ideology. Traditionalism does not exclusively refer to Confucianism, but rather to a combination of all schools of ancient Chinese thought. Despite their differences, each of these schools emphasises the significance of political leadership, as well as the role of strategic credibility, in constituting a base for the solidarity and durability of that leadership. In this regard, they argue that a superpower’s foreign policies should prioritise strategic reputation. To achieve this end, the ancient idea of ‘humane authority’ (wang) promotes the values of benevolence (ren) and justice (yi) in guiding decision-making.²⁸ Traditionalism also advocates the strategy of leading-by-example, and thereby emphasises the importance of a leadership that produces demonstrable achievements. This school of thought encourages China to improve its international strategic reputation by shouldering more international security responsibility, especially in providing neighbours with security protection.

Although traditionalism is not the Chinese government’s official ideology, scholars of traditionalism and the Chinese government are agreed that foreign policy should be guided by Chinese traditional political wisdom rather than any ideology rooted in Western culture, including Marxism. For instance, in 2011 the government issued the white paper China’s Peaceful Development, which stated unequivocally, ‘Taking the path of peaceful development is a strategic choice made by the Chinese government and people, in keeping with the fine tradition of Chinese culture, the development trend of the times, and the fundamental interests of China.’²⁹ In this statement the phrases, ‘development trend of the times’ and ‘fundamental interests of China’ reflect objective factors, and that of the ‘fine tradition of Chinese culture’ the subjective factor. This official document reflects the Chinese government’s intent to take traditional political values into account when formulating foreign policy. Although the Chinese government adjusted its foreign policy guidelines from ‘keeping a low profile’ to ‘striving for achievements’ in 2013, it has nonetheless continued to be guided by Chinese traditional values in its decision-making. For instance, at the Conference on Diplomatic Work towards Surrounding Countries, explanations of new foreign policies included terminology applicable to Chinese traditional values such as qin (closeness), cheng (credibility), hui (beneficence), and rong (inclusiveness).³⁰ These four Chinese characters also appeared in the foreign policy section of the 19th Party Congress report.³¹

Along with the previously mentioned change in foreign policy guidelines, China has also adjusted its diplomatic posture from that of an ordinary power to a major power, implying a shift in the government’s perception of its current capabilities. At the World Peace Forum in 2013, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi explained this change through the lens of ancient Chinese philosophy:

The unique features of China’s diplomacy originate in the rich and profound Chinese civilisation. Throughout its five thousand-year history, the Chinese nation has developed the humanistic-oriented concept of loving all creatures as if they were of your species and all people as if they were your brothers, the political philosophy of valuing virtue and balance, the peaceful approach

of love, non-aggression and good-neighbourliness, the idea of peace as of paramount importance and harmony without uniformity, as well as the personal conduct of treating others in a way that you would like to be treated, and helping others succeed in the same spirit as you would want to succeed yourself. These traditional values with a unique oriental touch provide an endless source of invaluable cultural asset for China's diplomacy.³²

Regardless of whether or not these benevolent Chinese traditional thoughts have seen application in real policies, the Chinese government has claimed, at least rhetorically, to be guided by them when formulating foreign policy. In fact, citations of ancient Chinese sayings are now a prerequisite for Chinese leaders' policy speeches. However, the possibility that such Chinese traditional values embrace those of economic pragmatism, so generating a hybrid that guides China's foreign policies, cannot be ruled out, since economic pragmatism is still very popular among everyday people and bureaucrats.

Beyond Liberalism

Through the above discussion, we can see three evolving dynamics that suggest the potential emergence of a new international mainstream value.

They are: (i) Although American liberalism is in decline, it nonetheless remains the most dominant global ideology, and at the present time has no peer competitor. (ii) As the most powerful rising state today, China's ideology may eventually challenge that of the United States. (iii) China officially claims to be guided by Chinese traditional values in its foreign policymaking. These three conditions imply two possible avenues of development for the international order amid US–China bipolarisation. They are: Competition between American liberalism and Chinese traditional values; or a combination of the two. As to the former, for Allison this portends a China–United States cultural conflict escalating into a civilisational clash.³³ However, I think the second alternative is more likely, as adopting a combination of the two would offer the two giants greater benefits. Similarly, Reus-Smit proposes that the relevant principles through which to shape international orders are not necessarily homogenous, but may be combinations of different types.³⁴ Combining liberalist and Chinese traditional values could generate a new and competitive set of ideals that help to establish a stable international order. Therefore, the following section will discuss the possibilities offered by combining the three values of liberalism—equality, democracy, and freedom, with the three Chinese traditional values—benevolence, righteousness, and rites. Such a combination could shape an international order of an entirely different character from that of both the Cold War and the post-Cold War.

Before discussing how to combine these values, we must first define the concepts of 'fairness' and 'justice' as they relate to international politics, to avoid any possible misunderstandings stemming from their everyday use. John Rawls defines 'justice as fairness',³⁵ a definition which considers the principle of justice as a closed system discrete from other societies rather than as one participant in relations between states. However, an international system comprises different domestic societies wherein justice and fairness mainly apply to judgements of institutions, and rarely of individuals. Thus, in such a setting justice and fairness refer to different matters. For instance, we distinguish a just from an unjust war, but never a fair from an unfair war, in the same way that we distinguish fair from unfair trade, but never just from unjust trade. Therefore, I define justice as being in accordance with righteousness of result, and fairness as being in accordance with a morality favourable to the disadvantaged.

Benevolence's Embrace of Equality

The Christian tradition values the concept of equality as one enjoined by the natural law of life.³⁶ However, due to inherent genetic differences and divergent social environments, disparities between human beings are inevitable, as apparent in variances in intelligence, strength, height, weight, and athleticism, as well as in social differences rooted in family background, education, peers, and so on. Focusing on equality without taking these differences into consideration is equivalent to advocating the jungle law of unquestioned equal rights and zero distinctions between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. The individualist value of liberalism thus often leads to conflict rather than cooperation among human beings. Even when defined in terms of competitive opportunity,³⁷ under circumstances where violent means are the best option for winning competitions, absolute equality can still generate life-and-death rivalry. The war between different religious groups in Libya since 2011 is a case in point.³⁸

Benevolence (ren) is the core idea and social norm of Confucianism, which as a governing principle calls upon state leaders to empathise with and care for their peoples. Thus, it can find application in the management of relations between the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, and those occupying high and low ranks at work, so helping to reduce social conflicts between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. As the members of an international system are divided into different classes according to their strength, the principle of equality without benevolence places the lesser states in an unfavourable position. They will consequently fight ceaselessly to attain equal power.

By embracing the merger of equality with benevolence, we can popularise the value of fairness on a global level. For instance, 'first come, first served' is a principle of absolute equality. It gives those that are first in line the opportunity, for example, to take a seat on a bus, but it is not fair to the aged or infirm. A norm of fairness dispels this conflict by requiring that the able bodied, whether or not among the first in line, yield their seats to those in greater need of one. Another popular example is that of the boxing regulations at the Olympic Games. To ensure equality, the established rule is that the fighter who fails to get up after a knockdown before the referee has counted to 10 is deemed the loser. However, to ensure fairness, contestants are divided into classes according to weight, so giving boxers of an ascending scale of weights an equal chance to win championship awards. In this case, the weight classification of boxers constitutes the prerequisite for referees and judges to award fair marks based on the skill each contestant displays in a match.

This principle of differentiated treatment is equally applicable in international politics. For instance, the concept of 'common but differentiated responsibilities', which arose at the Stockholm Conference in 1972, and was accepted by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992, and the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, reflects this ideal.³⁹ On the issue of reducing CO₂ emissions, the international community embraced the principle whereby the developed and developing countries take common but differentiated responsibilities.⁴⁰ The Lomé Convention, signed in February 1975 between nine members of the European Community (EC) and 46 developing countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP), also embodied this equitable principle. Through this convention, the EC countries offered preferential economic treatment to members of the ACP group.⁴¹ These treaties suggest the possibility of a greater emphasis on fairness over equality in future international principles.

Righteousness's Embrace of Democracy

Democracy is one of liberalism's major contributions to human political life, and the legalisation of governmental actions through popular support is at its core.⁴² In a modern civil society, every citizen judicially and equitably claims ownership of national sovereignty and state power. However, owing to the logistical issues stemming from large populations, it is impossible for all citizens to participate directly in the decision-making attendant upon state affairs. Therefore, the representative system through democratic procedures is the obvious choice for the execution of state power.⁴³ The active principle in the democratic procedure is that of majority consent through secret ballot. However, while the democratic process of decision-making legitimises governmental decisions, it cannot guarantee that those decisions are just. For instance, in 2003 the US Congress authorised the White House's decision to attack Iraq based on alleged evidence that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. Although this authorisation legitimised American military action against Iraq, the war was eventually proven to be unjust after revelations which invalidated the alleged evidence.⁴⁴

In fact, not even international legitimacy automatically ensures that a state's actions are just. As international society is an anarchical system, the power distribution among members of international institutions is mainly arranged according to their varying levels of strength. Therefore, a just outcome achieved solely through international institutions' procedures is rare. As regards the issue of pure procedural justice, as held to by liberalists, Rawls says, 'Even though the law is carefully followed, and the proceedings fairly and properly conducted, it may reach the wrong outcome...the injustice springs from no human fault but from a fortuitous combination of circumstances with defeats the purpose of the legal rules.'⁴⁵ He adds, 'Pretty clearly, perfect procedural justice is rare, if not impossible, in cases of much practical interest.'⁴⁶ For instance, members of the Arab League made the decision to expel the Syrian government led by Bashar al-Assad from its ranks and offer military assistance to anti-government forces in Syria, all through a democratic process. This democratic decision internationally legitimised the subsequent support provided to rebel militants in Syria, but simultaneously escalated a war that killed tens of thousands of civilians, and made more than a million people refugees.⁴⁷ In humanitarianism terms, therefore, the Arab League's decision was unjust.

Righteousness (yi) is an ancient Chinese moral code shared among a number of philosophical schools, including Confucianism, Daoism, and Moism. Although righteousness has broad connotations, its core tenets include upright, reasonable, and proper behaviour. Mencius said: 'Benevolence is man's mind and righteousness is man's path.'⁴⁸ In other words, only by choosing the just way can one implement benevolence. The difference between righteousness and democracy is that the former stresses the results of a policy while the latter emphasises its legitimacy. Allison says, 'For Americans, democracy is the only just form of government: The authorities derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed. That is not the prevailing view in China, where it is common to believe that the government earns or loses political legitimacy based on its performance.'⁴⁹ In reality, however, legitimised policies generate many unjust results. For instance, the UN is designed to maintain world peace, but it is dominated by the leading global powers—the five permanent members of Security Council. It is, therefore, common practice among the leading powers to undermine the UN's democratic regulations through use of their veto powers and achieve unjust purposes.

The value of righteousness can help constrain such unjust legitimisation of leading states' conduct by requiring justice in both form and outcome. By fusing democracy with righteousness, we can popularise the value of justice and help to ensure that the resolutions of international organisations are both legitimate in form and just in result. When the two are unified, justice is upheld. For instance, most countries exercised sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa during the Cold War. Not only did such actions carry legitimacy in the form of a UN resolution adopted by a majority of UN members but, more importantly, the anti-apartheid policies were just in nature and in accordance with the principle of righteousness. The combination of the two explains why this particular use of sanctions was not regarded as an intervention in domestic affairs.⁵⁰

When comparing justice and democracy, the former proves a more useful value in promoting social fairness. At the same time, justice does not repel but rather draws support from democracy. In fact, justice may utilise democracy as a means of achieving greater social fairness while preventing unjust results. American philosopher John Rawls set forth two principles of justice: Principle I is freedom and equality; and Principle II is a combination of equal opportunities and differentiated treatment. Principle II aims to achieve justice based on the value of fairness, which cannot be achieved by democracy alone.⁵¹ In addition to ensuring that the actions of leading states taken through democratic procedures are legitimate, therefore, it is necessary also to ensure that the results of their actions are just by assessing decisions according to the principle of righteousness. For instance, as the polarisation between the rich and poor intensifies due to globalisation, priority needs to be given to the principle of justice over that of democracy in order to promote common development in our age. The principle of democracy alone ensures only that every country, regardless of its wealth, has the right to decide on its own development agenda. In contrast, the principle of justice calls on developed countries to provide economic aid to developing states amounting to 0.7% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in efforts to eliminate or mitigate polarisation.⁵²

The Rites' Embrace of Freedom

Freedom is also a core value of liberalism. Rooted in man's inherent attributes, the desire for freedom is instinctive among all animals. This primal need provides legitimate justification for freedom in human society, in the same way as man's desire for longevity does for the right to live. But human beings are a social species for whom the community is a precondition for survival.⁵³ Building a social order, however, requires sacrificing a certain degree of freedom to the norms that regulate an individual's behaviour.⁵⁴ The tension between individual freedom and the greater social order exists in both domestic and international systems. Although social norms can be implemented within a domestic system through the monopolisation of force, violence, and chaos will inevitably prevail, should actors utilise such ability to protect their interests in an international system. Hence, the balance between the freedom of individual states and the international order becomes a crucial political issue.

Rites (li) constitute a Chinese traditional value applicable not only to political affairs, but also one that ordinary people practice in their daily life. Rites refer to social norms or customs formed according to given ethics. Although a formality, a rite plays a more extensive role than law in maintaining social order. Confucius says, 'If you do not learn rites, your character cannot be established.'⁵⁵ Laws deter illegal actions by punishing law-breaking behaviour after the fact, while rites preemptively restrain people's uncivilised behaviour through moral formats. Rites are

a more extensive restraining force than laws, because they function in areas unrelated to the law. Laws protect freedom of speech, but are unable to curb the hurling of abuse; rites, meanwhile, can inhibit people from uttering obscenities. Moreover, freedom without the constraint of rites can easily give rise to violent conflicts. For instance, the 2012 American movie *Innocence of Muslims* is legally consistent with the principle of freedom of speech, but nonetheless caused widespread protests in many Muslim countries which resulted in numerous deaths and injuries.⁵⁶ In 2015, two brothers later identified as terrorists attacked the Paris office of the French satirical weekly magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in response to its publication of satirical cartoons and nude caricatures of Muhammad. The attack killed 12 people and injured 11.⁵⁷

Rites are the foundation of civility, and advance the social significance of human life beyond the principle of freedom. Because man values life's meaning, the major difference between humans and animals is not discernible exclusively in the degree to which they pursue freedom, but rather in the former's pursuit of freedom with a meaningful purpose. Rites help to guide humans towards civilised behaviour, thus enriching the meaning of life. Freedom without civility may lead to a regression of human society to one more akin to that of animals and beasts. Xunzi said: 'Birds and beasts have parents but no parental affection; they distinguish between male and female but do not make the distinction between man and woman.'⁵⁸

In Chinese culture, extremely uncivilised behaviour, such as incest or maltreatment of the aged, is regarded as inhuman or bestial. Human civility, therefore, lies in the ability to distinguish between social goods and ills. For example, all animals have the freedom to excrete, but civility prohibits humans from excreting indiscriminately, as an animal might. It is through civility that humanity constantly advances while other animals remain forever in an uncivilised state. The conventions and formalities of the Oriental and Western etiquettes may differ, but the observation of such proprieties is a shared social norm.

The embrace of freedom alongside the social recognition of rites will improve human civility, thus reducing the danger of violent conflicts among human beings. Allison has expressed concern about a potential civilisational clash between China and the United States due to, 'the profound differences between American and Chinese conceptions of the state, economics, the role of individuals, relations among nations and the nature of time'.⁵⁹ He notes, 'Chinese culture does not celebrate American-style individualism, which measures society by how well it protects the rights and fosters the freedom of individuals.'⁶⁰ However, what he does not realise is that Chinese culture advocates the recognition of rites in order to prevent the social violence to which individual freedom gives rise. Should both rising and dominant states guide their competition for international power in accordance with the principle of civility, such competition will be peaceful, and may possibly be healthy as well. With the Trump administration's characterisation of China as the United States's major rival, as noted in its National Security Strategy,⁶¹ it has become increasingly necessary for these two giants to consider ways of regulating their competition in a civilised manner.

In the 21st century, innovation has become a primary method of wealth accumulation which dramatically reduces the need to control natural resources as part of the power competition between rising and dominant states. Thus, it is possible for China and the United States to establish norms of civility that regulate their competition for global domination in a peaceful manner. The shift of world power throughout history has often been accompanied by wars between rising and dominant states which are classic manifestations of the incivility of

international society. Establishing international norms in accordance with the value of civility will help to reduce the risk of war between all states, including rising and dominant powers. The crystallisation of the value of civility amid the establishment of new international norms would not only transcend liberalism, but also advance human civilisation.

Principles of Humane Authority

In the previous section we discussed how a combination of liberalist and Chinese traditional values could create a new set of international mainstream standards. However, this is not to say that all values within the Chinese tradition are fine and outstanding. Chinese traditional political thought includes also certain dregs and dross. For instance, although the principles of humane authority (*wangdao*) and hegemony (*badao*) both find homes in the Chinese tradition, they nonetheless contradict each other insofar as the ways they provide international leadership. This section will clarify the differences between these two concepts, and discuss the means through which the principle of humane authority can find application in shaping the present international order. The most important precondition for implementing the humane authority principle lies in the consistency between the leading power's domestic ideology and that it advocates internationally.

The Different Principles of Hegemony and Humane Authority

As far back as antiquity, whenever China rose to a leading position in East Asia, a debate would arise among both high-ranking officials in the royal court and ordinary scholars as to the contrasting ruling principles of humane authority and hegemony. Starting from the belief that humans are self-interested, the principle of humane authority encourages China's rulers to adopt a benevolent foreign policy towards their weaker neighbours in expectations that recipients of said benevolence will express gratitude for the benefits ensuing from such leadership.⁶² In contrast, the principle of hegemonic rule advocates that China's leaders adopt a deterrent strategy towards its neighbours. Arguing that human beings place greater value on what they stand to lose than to gain, the principle of hegemony suggests that China's neighbours will assign more to value what they stand to lose by challenging China's leadership than what they might gain from it.⁶³ Both of these principles maintain that the establishment of a hierarchical system based on a leading state's superior strength is the sole method of preserving interstate order, but humane authority tends towards use of the carrot while hegemony emphasises the stick in this regard.

Because hegemony has negative connotations in modern times, its supporters have tried to find a more palatable descriptor for the concept. Chinese proponents have replaced the principle of hegemony (*badao*) with that of 'xiong cai da lue' (great talent and bold vision), while American adherents have coined the phrase 'benevolent hegemon' to distinguish American hegemony from its historical counterparts.⁶⁴ However, neither 'xiong cai da lue' nor 'benevolent hegemon' adequately expresses the value difference between hegemony and a better type of international leadership; consequently, both are no more than sugar coatings on the same hegemonic ruling principle.

Rather than contrive more palatable terms for the hegemonic principle, ancient Chinese thinkers distinguished types of interstate leadership according to their ruling principle. For instance, Guanzi categorised international leadership according to descending levels of good governance: The grand ruler (*huang*), emperor (*di*), humane authority (*wang*), and hegemon (*ba*).⁶⁵ Guanzi

proposed that a humane authority understands morality, while a hegemon knows how to win wars.⁶⁶ Xunzi held that the difference between humane authority and hegemony does not lie in power, but morality. He distinguished between the two through the former's ability to achieve the voluntary subordination of others through moral actions, and the latter's capacity to build alliances through establishment of strategic credibility.⁶⁷ Mencius made a similar distinction, maintaining that humane authority practices benevolence through morality whereas a hegemon feigns benevolence while relying on might.⁶⁸ Mencius may have been the first among his peers to characterise hegemony in a negative light, but his definition of it is nonetheless closest to the connotation of a 'benevolent hegemon'.

Possibilities for Modernising the Values of Humane Authority

It is true to say that ancient Chinese ideologies have a slim chance of becoming mainstream values today; the contemporary world is after all quite different from the ancient Chinese interstate system in many respects. However, the rise of China could make possible a transposition of the values of humane authority to the present day, according to the needs of future world leadership. As discussed in the previous section, the three elements that constitute humane authority—benevolence, righteousness, and rites—can be modernised as the values of fairness, justice, and civility through their embrace of equality, democracy, and freedom. That is to say, contemporary rising states can establish new international norms not by rejecting the values of liberalism but by merging them with the modernised values of humane authority. This approach will foster universal acceptance of these new values and thus the establishment of a stable international order.

Furthermore, the ideals of fairness, justice, and civility do not conflict with any of the world's religions. Since the end of WWII, religious organisations have served as both representatives and protectors of disadvantaged social groups. As international norms based on the values of fairness, justice, and civility are objectively more favourable to the poor and the weak than to the rich and powerful, they therefore, appeal to religious adherents. In addition, these three values are practiced within the norms of international organisations. For instance, the commitments of developed countries to aid developing countries constitute practice of the norm of fairness. Meanwhile, international opposition to the use of military coups as a means of achieving governmental power is a manifestation of the norm of justice, and the banning of the use of biochemical weapons constitutes a norm of civility.

Adopting these three values will help modern leading powers to gain international authority. History shows that mainstream international values are generally superseded by ones which attain a greater degree of popularity than their predecessors. In the interests of reducing external pressures, therefore, it is imperative that rising states create a new, universally acceptable ideology that legitimises their international leadership. As the rise of any state will lead to power redistribution, or even to a shift of the world centre, that state will inevitably face opposition from those that stand to lose power. However, overcoming this opposition can be achieved through the legitimisation of an international leadership and cultivation of new mainstream values. The decline of liberalism makes a rising state's adoption of it as its legitimising ideology unlikely. However, the situation nonetheless raises the likelihood that a modernised variant of humane authority could be an attractive alternative for rising powers. Modernised humane authority has three advantages over liberalism. First, it is distinct from liberalism, but not to the extent of being unacceptable to liberal states. Secondly, new norms based on this principle would

be favourable to the smaller states that currently constitute the majority of UN membership. Thirdly, its core values are universally moral, which would inevitably increase the confidence of other countries in such a new leadership.

Requirement of the Consistency Value

Under the background of China's rise, the above mentioned advantages may constitute certain necessary conditions for adopting the modernised principles of humane authority as mainstream international values, but they are not sufficient. The principle of humane authority also traditionally requires consistency between a ruler's internal governance and his conduct of foreign affairs, known as neisheng waiwang (Domestic governance follows the principle of the sage and foreign policies follow the principle of humane authority).⁶⁹ With respect to modern politics, neisheng waiwang calls for both domestic and foreign policies to be rooted in humane values. As such, another important precondition for the elevation of humane authority is that of the consistency of values that leading states espouse both at home and abroad. For instance, since the end of the Cold War, liberalism has become the contemporary mainstream value most closely associated with the US government's domestic policies. This argument does not deny the important influence of European governments, but rather emphasises the crucial role that the leading state's domestic policies play in maintaining liberalism's dominant position. This argument is further supported by the rapid decline in liberalism's global influence since the American government began advocating anti-establishmentarianism at home in 2017.⁷⁰

Although China stands to be the most powerful rising state in the coming decade, a full embrace of the modernised principle of humane authority as a mainstream international value is difficult to envision in the foreseeable future. This is due in part to the Chinese government's pursuit of differing values at home and abroad. However, the Chinese government has recognised the inconsistencies between Marxism and traditional Chinese values, such that it has begun to reconcile the two.

In 2017, the report of the 19th Chinese Communist Party Congress stated: 'To develop socialist culture with Chinese characteristics is to follow the guidance of Marxism, base our efforts on Chinese culture, and take into account the realities of contemporary China and the conditions of the present era.'⁷¹ In addition, the report advocated the cultivation and practice of socialist core values that, 'draw on China's fine traditional culture, keep alive and develop its vision, concepts, values, and moral norms, and do so in a way that responds to the call of our era'.⁷²

During a panel discussion at the 19th Party Congress, Wang Qishan, a member of the Politburo Standing Committee, summarised this effort as, 'the embrace of the fundamental tenets of Marxism into the Chinese traditional cultural essence'.⁷³ However, embracing Marxism into Chinese traditional values is an ambitious goal not easily achieved; nor is any effective method of doing so in sight.

A major state has two means through which to align its domestic ideology with the international mainstream value. The first is to revise its native ideology accordingly, as 19th century Japan did through its adoption of European imperialism, so making the nation a member of the colonial club. The second is to universalise its native ideology to a degree whereby it becomes a widely accepted international norm, as the United States did after the Cold War. Owing to the length of time necessary to socialise an ideology into an international system, this alternative requires that the major state maintains a durable leading position. However, a new leading state that pursues

the principle of humane authority will have the best chance of maintaining such long-term leading status. As the relationship between leading and lesser states in any international system is asymmetric as regards both strength and interdependency, the principle of humane authority will allow lesser states to realise the benefits of aligning with a leading state through trading off asymmetrical wants for lasting security.⁷⁴ Thus, under such a model the international support for a new leading state will see greater stability and longevity.

Conclusion

International mainstream values play a guiding role in establishing international norms. In keeping with this maxim, the decline of liberalism will inevitably generate challenges to the current international order which, after the end of the Cold War, found itself based on the norms established under the guidance of American liberalism. Having enjoyed a dominant status for three decades, the values of liberalism are now being challenged by the rise of competing ideologies—anti-establishmentarianism in the United States, populism in Europe, traditional values in China, Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East, and economic nationalism in both the developed and developing countries. Although it is not yet clear which ideology will replace liberalism as the new global mainstream value, the official ideology of a rising state will have the best chance of universal adoption due to the tendency of the disadvantaged to imitate the advantaged.

As China presently stands as the pre-eminent candidate in this regard, the ideologies competing for influence in its policymaking—Marxism, economic pragmatism, and traditionalism—are worthy of study. Yet, because none of these ideologies has yet proven to be as globally influential as liberalism, it is too early to predict their future.

A combination of liberalist and Chinese traditional values in the establishment of a new international mainstream value will facilitate the establishment of a better international normative order. Although in decline, liberalism still wields greater influence than any other ideology at this time, but China's rise will expand the international influence of Chinese traditional values.

These two factors offer the chance to combine the Chinese traditional values of benevolence, righteousness, and rites with the liberalist values of equality, democracy, and freedom, thus modernising them in the forms of fairness, justice, and civility. Ultimately, it is the merging of these values that should prove universally acceptable to people of different countries. Furthermore, this new set of mainstream values could characterise the coming international order quite differently from that of the Cold War or post-Cold War.

In this global climate, the modernised principle of humane authority carries certain advantages as regards becoming the mainstream international value. Although humane authority is distinct from liberalism it embraces some of the latter's core values. The norms of humane authority are also favourable to the majority of UN members, and its moral principles could potentially intensify followers' confidence in its political leadership. However, to achieve universal adoption, humane authority requires consistency between a leading state's domestic ideology and the political values it pursues abroad. Unfortunately, China, the most powerful rising state today, is conflicted in this regard, thus making it difficult to predict which ideology will be elevated to the next mainstream international value. This article advocates the values of humane authority to

improve the world order. Even though they cannot guarantee a desirable world, I nevertheless believe that such values constitute the best chance of shaping an international order that is more peaceful than the one we live in today.

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