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China's collectivist cosmopolitanism: Harmony and conflict with Western conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism rooted in individualistic notions of human rights

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Abstract

Just as leading Western countries have begun withdrawing from the neoliberal Washington Consensus that paved the way for economic globalization over the last 40 years, China has proposed an ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, or One Belt One Road, outlining its vision for global development. President Xi's vision of collectivist cosmopolitanism is centered on the principle of sovereign equality between nations, emphasizing civilizational uniqueness rather than universal human rights. In this view, economic and social development are path dependent, and in China's case, prioritize decolonization and national sovereignty. Xi's view in major speeches is cosmopolitan but collectivist, emphasizing economic growth, openness, dynamism, and an "avowed respect" for the integrity of other cultures, while saying nothing about individual human rights or groups within China. This approach positions ancient Chinese traditions like Confucianism as playing a central role in cultivating individuals' and society's moral qualities so that person, society, and governance are bound together as a mutually beneficial and interconnected whole. It forms the theoretical basis of a Chinese view of cosmopolitanism, which could be the basis of dialogue with Western cosmopolitanists. The challenge is reconciling the different emphasis accorded to human rights versus national sovereignty in the two views. Empirical results of a new measure of Cosmopolitan Orientation that correlates positively rather than negatively with nationalism and religiosity provide insights into the specific basis for this dialogue to become beneficial rather than conflictual.

Keywords

cosmopolitanism, individualism, collectivism, Belt and Road Initiative, human rights, One Belt One Road

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The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically slowed the expansion of economic globalization in 2020 (Vidya & Prabheesh, 2020). But politically, stiff challenges to globalization in developed countries started decades earlier, including egalitarian left-wing protest movements in the 1990s (Clark & Themudo, 2006; Fernandez, 2008), and then nationalistic and populist right-wing movements (Zaslove, 2008) with anti-immigration agendas later (Araújo et al., 2020; Mols & Jetten, 2014). These have chipped away at the "Washington Consensus" (Williamson, 1993) that claimed that free markets underpinned by fiscal discipline and democratically elected governments is the essential formula for global prosperity. The thesis that liberal democracy was destined to spread across the planet and rule the world (Fukuyama, 1992) has retreated in the wake of populist nationalist leaders removing the United States and Great Britain from international treaties (Norris & Inglehart, 2019), and the resurgence of authoritarianism in Europe (Timbro, 2019), Russia, and China. Prospects for a global society based on Western visions of cosmopolitanism (Beck, 2002; Brock, 2013;

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Pogge, 1992) are at a lower ebb now compared to the triumphalism of the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union (see Fukuyama, 1992). The purpose of this article is to re-vision possibilities for actually existing cosmopolitanism (see Leung et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2020), and, more broadly, global consciousness (Liu & Macdonald, 2016) given changes in the macro-political situation around the world in the last two decades.

Economic globalization is not in full retreat from the global scene. In 2013 Xi Jinping became president and soon established himself as paramount leader of the People's Republic of China (PRC). He launched an internal vision statement—the Chinese Dream—and a long-term foreign policy—the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), or One Belt One Road (OBOR)—that are intended as the backbone of a more expansive and globalist position for China (Ferdinand, 2016). These go beyond the foundation established by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization for internationalization in central Asia (Yuan, 2010). Consistent with his predecessor Hu Jintao, Xi continued in the official line of PRC ideology by valorizing the concept of the "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (Xi, 2017a). Media discourses positioning the PRC vis-à-vis globalization and the Western world in the *People's Daily* were analyzed by Ng et al. (2011). They argued that these discourses were largely defensive in nature (given the hostility against China in Western media), and mobilized international values and principles in defending China's right to grow into a larger role internationally; but that the same discourses could be redeployed in a more offensive or expansive manner. Such expansiveness is characteristic of the PRC under Xi.

More idiosyncratically, President Xi has made the revival of Chinese traditions—mainly Confucianism, but articulated in a way that acknowledges its connections to Daoism and Buddhism—a platform for long-term "peaceful development" (Xi, 2014, 2017a). In accord with Confucianism (Liu & Liu, 2003), he has adopted a person- and character-centered strategy for incremental improvement rather than Western-style structural reform (that would require the Communist Party of China to become more legally transparent; see Lubman, 1999/2000; Mohanty, 2013). In his speeches on Chinese tradition, President Xi emphasizes historical trajectories in development: where each culture develops in accord with its cultural heritage, while respecting national differences with other cultures. Thus, Xi has put forward what could be interpreted as a nationalist position on China's becoming global, which reinscribes a revitalized Chinese traditional culture at its core. This contrasts sharply with the doctrinaire approaches characteristic of the twentieth century: Marxism on the one hand versus liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1992) on the other.

Ideological and violent conflict between communism and capitalism plagued global development throughout the twentieth century, with capitalism (and liberal democracy) "winning" with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. However, the triumph of capitalism has not resulted in the peace and prosperity for all as forecast by Fukuyama (1992), but rather winners and losers. The greatest beneficiary of globalization in the twenty-first century has been the People's Republic of China (PRC), whose meteoric rise to become the second most powerful state on the planet was predicated on an intricate interaction between capitalist economics and communist governance (Coase & Wang, 2016). Cheap and productive labor from places like China and India have made losers of organized labor in OECD countries, where income inequality has risen massively since the 1980s (Firebaugh, 2002; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). Resentment among the working classes (and others) for the failings of liberalism metastasized into neoliberalism (Stiglitz, 2002) has given rise to populist nationalism across the OECD (Lonergan & Blyth, 2020; Timbro, 2019). It seems that liberal democracy, beholden as it is to globalized capitalism and the economic inequality that goes along with it, is incapable of giving birth to a global consciousness where there is "a knowledge of both the interconnectedness and difference of humankind, and a will to take moral actions in a reflexive manner on its behalf" (p. 320, Liu & Macdonald, 2016).

Rather, it appears that the standard bearers for liberalism, a Western and universalized approach to global development, should develop a better understanding of theories of culture-specific development pre-eminent in the majority world, be it the "benevolent dictatorship" of Xi Jinping in China or the religious nationalism articulated by Narendra Modi in India. Otherwise, we run the risk of a Thucydides trap, where anxieties about China's rising trigger responses from the United States that result in a civilization-ending world war (Allison, 2017; Liu, 2022, chapter 8). Hence, the crux of this paper involves interpretation of major elements in President Xi Jinping's discourses—the BRI, the Chinese Dream, and emphasis on peaceful development through Chinese traditions—in the context of globalization, and in relation to Chinese compared to Western conceptions of cosmopolitanism.

We present the content of these discourses and how they fit together in the context of the layering of party orthodoxy. This gradual, accretive process is characteristic of the formation and change of official policy in the PRC. The Chinese Dream is primarily directed at an internal audience; whereas the BRI joins internal development with external development and influence, and emphasis on development through Chinese traditions on a national historical trajectory. How these adhere in practice with the making of an international "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" (Xi, 2017a) is a major question for international relations of the twenty-first century (Nathan & Zhang, 2021). All of them together articulate a pathway forward for China's taking a leading role on a multilateral world stage. How should non-Chinese, especially cosmopolitanists, interpret these discourses? Is this a zero-sum game involving competition between civilizations, or is there the possibility of a

win-win in global development toward a more cosmopolitan planetary future? We introduce the empirically and psychologically robust measure of Cosmopolitan Orientation (Leung et al., 2015) as part of the answer to these questions.

Chinese and Western scholarly perspectives on globalization

The most theoretically and philosophically compelling Western perspective on globalization is cosmopolitanism. The great German philosopher Immanuel Kant (for a concise review, see Cavallar, 2012) articulated legal/political and moral/ethical foundations for cosmopolitanism, and theorized that both are required for world peace. Moral cosmopolitanism revolves around valuing each individual as an end unto him- or herself, not as a means to an end. Every person is deserving of moral inclusion and respect for their human rights under the law, and this is presented as a human universal that does not stop at national boundaries. As stated by Brock (2013), "Contemporary cosmopolitans standardly believe that every person has global stature as the ultimate unit of moral concern and is therefore entitled to equal respect and consideration no matter what her citizenship status or other affiliations happen to be" (p. 689). By contrast, contemporary Chinese views of cosmopolitanism are more collectivist and relational (e.g., Gao, 2016; Yan, 2013; Zhao, 2009). China's paramount leader President Xi Jinping (see Xi, 2017b) is a vocal advocate of cosmopolitanism that originates in a collectivist view that emphasizes peaceful development for an entire society, rather than focusing on human rights for individuals within this society: "As the world grows more interconnected day by day, only by realizing common development in every country, allowing more and more people to enjoy the fruits of development, can world peace and stability have secure foundations and effective guarantees to allow development in each country of the world to continue" (Xi, 2017a). There is a tension here, where Western emphasis on universal human rights of the individual contrasts with a Chinese perspective where those rights are subordinated to the collective's needs for economic development (see Zhao, 2021, p. 238).

In his 1795 essay "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" Kant also articulated legal/political aspects of cosmopolitanism. Following Kant, contemporary Western theorists argue that cosmopolitanism can be broadly divided into moral and legal forms (Pogge, 1992), or moral and institutional forms (Brock, 2013). Kant called for civilized nations of the world to band together to form a league, or a federation, that "does not tend to any dominion over the power of the state but only to the maintenance and security of the freedom of the state itself and of other states in league with it." He thus contends that states and the nations they represent should be sovereign, but voluntarily submit to the umbrella of a federation only to maintain peace and security. This furnishes grounds on which contemporary Western philosophers like Pogge (1992) or Brock (2013) can dialogue with contemporary Chinese theorists like Yan (2013) or Zhao (2009). We shall explore, through analysis of the official discourses of Xi Jinping on globalization, nationalism, and a Chinese perspective on cosmopolitanism, whether and to what extent an actually existing cosmopolitanism can grow (or be stretched) to accommodate these conceptualizations.

From the perspective of the developing world, the history of the last half a millennium of globalization has been, until the last half century or so, a history of colonization (Gandhi, 1910/2009; Xi, 2017a; Zhao, 2009). Influential theorists such as Wallerstein (2004) theorized that Western countries, by virtue of having modernized first, and having been in a position to extend their influence through trade, aid, warfare, and colonization, are at the center of "the world system." Others are at its periphery, and as such, must suffer the consequences of marginalization and loss of sovereignty. Such state-based imperialism using the approach of realism in international relations is in Western theory the counterpoint to the idealism of cosmopolitanism. Being locked into a peripheral position does not align with the national interests of China as a non-Western rising power. However, there is doubt about whether China's antagonism toward the existing system of global hegemony is backed by a genuine commitment to some form of cosmopolitanism that would serve to increase the spread of prosperity to "peripheral regions" around the world, and increase prospects for world peace (for a highly critical discussion of China's rhetoric and action with respect to the global crisis of COVID-19, see Zhao, 2021).

Despite these doubts, there is every reason for cosmopolitanists to more effectively theorize the possibilities for "actually existing cosmopolitanism" (Robbins, 1998) in the context of the existing power of states and their predilections for imperialism. Given the challenges of climate change confronting humanity as a whole, and the recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia, it is incumbent on cosmopolitan theorists to contribute to discourses outlining how the USA and China can avoid the Thucydides trap of warfare (Allison, 2017). Central to these efforts are communicating a better understanding to English-language readers how the rulers of China conceptualize globalization, and what their perspective is on cosmopolitan forms of global consciousness (Liu & Macdonald, 2016).

Empirical evidence on the relationship between cosmopolitanism and nationalism

Empirical evidence is one way to communicate better understanding. In this area, older research using global surveys is flawed, because it uses measures of cosmopolitanism that position it as one pole of a single dimension anchored by nationalism at the other end (e.g., Norris &

Inglehart, 2009; Olofsson & Öhman, 2007; Pichler, 2011). This research assumes that cosmopolitanism is the polar opposite of nationalism. While this might carry some truth at the institutional level of global governance, it is not true for individuals. Bayram (2019) argued that cosmopolitan individuals have an integrated dual identity that embodies both nationalism and world citizenship, and this dual identity is compatible with patriotic obligations. Using data from the latest version of the Word Values Survey fielded in sixty countries between 2010 and 2014, she showed that cosmopolitans who identify as world citizens also identify with their nation, and are willing to make the ultimate patriotic sacrifice of going to war to defend their country. This empirical finding suggests that cosmopolitanism and nationalism are not at opposite ends of the same dimension, but are compatible in some cultural contexts.

Supporting this thesis, research using a new, purpose-built, three-factor measure of cosmopolitan orientation at the individual level (Leung et al., 2015) with nationally representative samples from 19 countries (Zhang et al., 2020) found relatively weak (but positive) relationships between national identity and cosmopolitanism. Leung et al.'s (2015) measure of Cosmopolitan Orientation (or COS) has three strongly positively correlated components, which can be reliably aggregated together, but also can function separately: (1) global pro-sociality, a desire to be of service and to help other people, regardless of their nationality; (2) cultural openness, an orientation toward valuing and seeking to gain more experiences and knowledge of other cultures and different kinds of people; and (3) respect for cultural diversity, involving support for the preservation of cultural diversity and respect for cultural differences. This measure was found to have excellent psychometric properties across 19 countries (Liu et al., 2020). It is also crucial to note that COS does not align to any political ideology.

There is some variability across countries in how COS works. In a few economically advanced countries with active nationalistic and anti-immigration discourses (e.g., America First, Brexit) there was a slightly negative relationship between national identity and aspects of cosmopolitanism (Zhang et al., 2020). But in most countries, national identity correlated positively, especially with global pro-sociality (willingness to help others no matter who they are or where they live) and respect for cultural diversity (two of the three indicators of cosmopolitanism at the individual level according to Leung et al. 2015). Furthermore, COS also correlated positively, and not negatively with religiosity (Zhang et al., 2020). Another large project involving national samples from 35 countries by Chen et al. (2022) reported that global consciousness (defined as cosmopolitan orientation, plus an orientation to global openness, plus identification with all humanity) was stronger in developing countries compared to in developed countries. It thus seems that aspirations for national development and for decolonization are important for global consciousness and for actually existing cosmopolitanism in non-Western countries. Dialogue, and mutuality of understanding between the center of global systems as currently constituted, and the periphery as represented by countries like China, is not only possible, but can be facilitated by cosmopolitanism, which is by no means exclusive to any ideology or system of governance at the state level.

The Belt and Road Initiative and peaceful national development

Prior to the leadership term of Xi Jinping, China had adopted a low-key approach to its international relations, as exemplified by paramount leader Deng Xiaoping's strategy of "hiding one's talents and biding time" (韜光養晦) while "building concrete achievements" (有所作為; Kawashima, 2011). The BRI is the centerpiece of a more assertive Chinese strategy for international relations. It seeks to connect China as a hub to people and resources along the traditional silk roads (on land and sea) between China and Central Asia, Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, and Europe. The scale of this plan is massive in its audacity and risk.

Chong and Pham (2020) conceptualize what is at stake by arguing that if "the ancient Persian and Greek alike viewed the roads as pathways to empire, others perceived the Roads as civilization builders" (p. 7). There was no shortage of both optimistic versus pessimistic views of the BRI in their edited volume. But there are a couple of central ideas worth repeating here. The first is that Chinese discourses on the BRI are very carefully controlled by the state. It is a top-down enterprise, but one that is completely consistent with neoliberal economics, where building up transport infrastructure is the single most essential element for increasing productivity and economic efficiency. In marked contrast with the Cold War between the USA and Soviet Union, there is no fundamental ideological conflict between US and Chinese economic systems. Conflict over the BRI does not revolve around issues of ideology so much as instrumental considerations, such as who benefits, and who gains more power and influence.

China has relatively little experience on the BRI, and Chinese is not a lingua franca for communicating along the BRI the way English has been. Therefore, China might repeat many of the mistakes of Western development agencies like the World Bank or International Monetary Fund (Stiglitz, 2002) by not engaging sufficiently with local people and local realities. This has resulted in tensions between locals and Chinese expatriates in Angola (De Morais, 2011). The forging of relationships is central to Chinese conceptions of identity (Liu et al., 2010), but this will not be easy given language and culture barriers along the BRI. Furthermore, whether this massive infrastructure project will contribute to global warming or provide a pathway toward sustainable development as claimed by Xi (2017b) is an open question (see Gates, 2020 for the centrality of infrastructure construction to carbon emissions).

Because of the novelty of the BRI, and the relative newness of China as an assertive global power on the world stage, it is worth reviewing key official

pronouncements from its paramount leader Xi Jinping, beginning with his "Work Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind" speech given at the United Nations Geneva office. Xi's basic point of view is optimistic and progressive, and it centers on peace and development: "Interconnection and interdependence between countries are crucial for human survival. The forces for peace far outweigh factors causing war, and the trend of our times toward peace, development, cooperation and win-win outcomes has gained stronger momentum" (Xi, 2017a). Interconnectedness and moral interdependence is central to Liu and MacDonald's (2016) conception of global consciousness, and is consistent with Kantian views of cosmopolitanism.

However, in a 4500-word speech, he says only one thing about human rights: "China pursues a path of development in keeping with its national conditions. We always put people's rights and interests above everything else and have worked hard to advance and uphold human rights. China has met the basic living needs of its 1.3 billion-plus people and lifted over 700 million people out of poverty, which is a significant contribution to the global cause of human rights." This contradicts many important conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism, from Kant to present-day theorists like Pogge (1992) or Beck (2002).

In this and every other speech we have read, the greater emphasis is on national development and sovereignty: "The essence of sovereign equality is that the sovereignty and dignity of all countries, whether big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, must be respected, their internal affairs allow no interference and they have the right to independently choose their social system and development path." This is the foundational basis on which China plans to engage with the world on global development. Xi (2017a) claims further that "It is … incumbent on all countries to uphold the authority of the international rule of law, exercise their rights in accordance with law and fulfill their obligations in good faith." But it also claims that the "relevance of law also lies in fairness and justice. All countries and international judicial institutions should ensure equal and uniform application of international law and reject double standards and the practice of applying international law in a selective way, thus ensuring genuine equality and justice in the world." Such a position is not inconsistent with major Western theorists like Cohen (2009, 2012), who argues that national sovereignty must remain as a balancing principle to prevent "imperial" forms of liberalism. She writes that "the dualistic model I have in mind … would seek to harmonize the core principles of international law—sovereign equality and human rights—not abandon one in favor of the other" (Cohen, 2009, p. 365). The reasoning behind this is that global superpowers are famous for privileging their own actions and interpretations above that of international law (see Aslam's [2013] analysis of American drone strikes in Pakistan). Aslam (2013) argues that Great Powers have additional responsibilities in international society by virtue of a normative evaluation of both their rights and duties. This proviso may be witnessed more in breach than in fulfilment of duties for both China and the USA, and it warns idealists of the importance of realism and including limitations in the analysis of international affairs.

Realism in international relations is undoubtedly part of the reason why China continues to advocate for global free trade. But such self-interested advocacy also contains optimism about progress, which is generally characteristic of the majority world (Chen et al., 2022; Choi et al., 2021). As articulated by Xi (2017a), "Several centuries ago, China was strong and its GDP accounted for 30% of the global total. Even then, China was never engaged in aggression or expansion. In over 100 years after the 1840 Opium War, China suffered immensely from aggression, wars and chaos. Confucius said, 'Do not do to others what you do not want others to do to you.' We Chinese firmly believe that peace and stability is the only way to development and prosperity." The story is: decolonization and sovereignty first, with economic development to follow. It would take quite a reversal in official policy to deviate from this stand on peaceful development, and such reversals are not characteristic of how official ideology evolves in the PRC. A consensus that there is to be continuity in official ideology, from Mao to Deng to Jiang to Hu to Xi, is maintained. This is even the case with Mao, whose actual policies at the time of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution are far more revolutionary than PRC policy today. Examining the history of ideology in the PRC that has accumulated over the decades suggests that there is a historical trajectory behind the ideal of peaceful national development that is largely unbroken. A keen student of history, President Xi announced at the 2017 Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation that "we should build the Belt and Road into a road for peace. The ancient silk routes thrived in times of peace, but lost vigor in times of war. The pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative requires a peaceful and stable environment" (Xi, 2017b). This type of statement appears to be in accord with the history and identity of China (see Liu et al., 2010).

Together with this, the signal belief expressed by Xi (2017a) is one shared by many liberal economists, that development "holds the master key to solving all problems." His Belt and Road Forum speech is largely consistent with liberal economics, pointing to industry, finance, infrastructure, trade, and innovation as keys to prosperity. In an earlier speech, he proposed the Five Shoulds (五个坚持) as an illustration of building a common future (Xi, 2017a). It is notable that the first four of the five basic principles are rooted in establishing international institutions like the UN and WTO, and are consistent with Western civilizational norms, including efforts to build a world of "lasting peace through dialogue and consultation,"

"common security for all through joint efforts," "common prosperity through win-win cooperation," and "an open and inclusive world through exchanges and mutual learning." He expresses gratitude for Western contributions to the global culture (中国发展得益于国际社会，中国也为全球发展作出了贡献, or "China's development has benefitted from global society, and China is also making contributions to global development") in a dialectical manner that connects Chinese prosperity to global development. It is only in his fifth principle in that speech that he references Heaven and Humanity in Union (天人合一), a holistic view of the cosmos that is specific to Chinese culture (see Liu, 1998, for a Confucian analysis). Despite all the instability in international relations between China and the USA in recent years, this commitment to global development and trade has not wavered. It should therefore remain as a substantial basis for intercultural dialogue, where harmony can be emphasized more than conflict.

While Nathan and Zhang (2021) emphasized the utilitarian and self-serving elements of Xi's vision of community of a shared future for humankind, this stand is not inconsistent with Kant's essay on perpetual peace. From a psychological perspective, we believe that an overarching orientation toward peace is the single most important feature of institutional governance by states that will allow for cosmopolitanism to grow among individuals: global pro-sociality was the single most important component of cosmopolitanism that was correlated to all sorts of benefits for global society along a range of indicators (Liu et al., 2020). Win-wins in economic interdependence help maintain peaceful pro-sociality: this is the basic argument of liberalism, not just Chinese cosmopolitanism (these arguments are summarized below in Table 1). Chinese cosmopolitanism brings the neglected element of culture and historical trajectory into dialogue with the neoliberal principles of the Washington Consensus that *assume* an eventual homogenization of cultural differences under its supposedly universal banner. It makes it obvious that such homogenization is not destiny, as was popularly imagined by American intellectuals after the collapse of the Soviet Union (see Fukuyama, 1992; Williamson, 1993). It's going to take a lot of work for humanity to get to a truly global state of cosmopolitanism.

President Xi also pays heed to cultural openness, another important element of cosmopolitan orientation (Leung et al., 2015):

> In pursuing the Belt and Road Initiative, we should ensure that when it comes to different civilizations, exchange will replace estrangement, mutual learning will replace clashes, and coexistence will replace a sense of superiority. This will boost mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual trust among different countries. We should establish a multi-tiered mechanism for cultural and people-to-people exchanges, build more cooperation platforms and open more cooperation channels. Educational cooperation should be boosted. (Xi, 2017b)

However, it is doubtful whether Chinese workers and their bosses, as individuals working in groups, actually are able to manifest the cultural openness idealized by Xi. Most citizens of the PRC only speak one language, and Chinese is not a well known in most other countries. The literature on PRC Chinese working abroad is thin, but a recent publication by English et al. (2021) found that for such workers in Montenegro, "greater cultural distance means lesser knowledge about who and what the local host population stand for, and as a result, the migrating individual gains a sense of misplacement and exclusion" (p. 10). Interestingly, length of stay did not improve adaptive acculturation in this convenience sample. This suggests that the opportunity for positive contact for workers on the BRI may also be limited, and not produce positive effects in accord with the contact hypothesis.

There are also hopeful sections in Xi's (2017a) speech, on green and low-carbon futures briefly echoed in Xi's (2017b) speech on the BRI:

> We should pursue green, low-carbon, circular and sustainable way of life and production, advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a balanced manner and explore a model of sound development that ensures growth, better lives and a good environment. The Paris Agreement is a milestone in the history of climate governance. We must ensure this endeavor is not derailed. All parties should work together to implement the Paris Agreement. China will continue to take steps to tackle climate change and fully honor its obligations.

But it would be risky to suppose that China will honor its obligations to the Paris Agreement any better than the other nations that have committed to it. The reality is that manufacture of the concrete and steel required for building infrastructure for the BRI is likely to release massive carbon emissions into the atmosphere unless some major forward thinking takes place (see Gates, 2020). In this context, responsible and forward-looking actions by cosmopolitan *individuals* working in the construction industry is key. It is the individual who makes connections, and makes friends with people from other cultures along the BRI, not abstract policies and speeches. However, to what extent is China sending cosmopolitan representatives of its society to develop the BRI, and assisting them? The literature suggests that most of China's cultural dissemination acts along the BRI are at the corporate level (Cheng et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021). These policies are supposed to help with local infrastructure development, carrying out welfare activities in local communities, and making donations at special moments. Given that these companies originate from state-owned enterprises, it is difficult to say

Table 1. Similarities and differences between Western and Chinese notions of cosmopolitanism

Main domains		Washington Consensus	China collectivist cosmopolitanism
Individual vs. collective priority	Similarities	Respect for humanity	
	Differences	Universal human rights prioritized	Collective needs for economic development prioritized. The sovereignty and dignity of each country must be respected, their internal affairs allow no outside interference
Economics	Similarities	Building up transport and other infrastructure conducive to trade is the single most essential element for increasing productivity and economic efficiency, and, through this, peaceful co-existence	
	Differences	Free-market capitalism	Government-led, top-down capital investment
Politics	Similarities	Politics shapes legitimate pathways for economic development	
	Differences	Politics is shaped by fiscal discipline and democratically elected governments	Politics is shaped by political leaders through a top-down person- and relationally centered strategy
International relations	Similarities	The quest for peace, underpinned by some commitment to the United Nations	
	Differences	American exceptionalism augmented by multilateral alliances (in particular with NATO and the EU)	Chinese sovereignty augmented by a few specific alliances (in particular with Russia)

whether this is a spontaneous act of the company, or whether individuals working on the BRI subscribe to officially mandated policies of cosmopolitanism.

Hence, international readers have a right to retain some skepticism regarding this rhetoric, but should also keep in mind that reminding rulers of their promises is a tried and true tactic in Confucianist approaches to political philosophy, which try to steer nondemocratic governance systems toward benevolence (see Liu et al., 2010; Liu & Liu, 2003).

The Chinese dream and the place of traditional Chinese culture in modern China

Xi Jinping's articulation of the Chinese Dream may be seen as consistent with statements by previous paramount leaders, like Hu Jintao. Xi defines the "Chinese Dream" as "Achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and it is the greatest dream of the Chinese nation in modern times." He claims this is to fulfil the desires of the Chinese people, but critics argue this is actually top-down and directed by the state (Ferdinand, 2016; Mohanty, 2013). While few specifics are described, the core goal of the "Chinese Dream" according to Chinese social commentary is: by milestones of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China in 2021, and the 100th anniversary of the founding of the PRC in 2049, to gradually and successfully achieve rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The manifestations of this are national prosperity, national revitalization, and people's happiness, achieved by taking the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

What gives the idea of the Chinese Dream (which seems about as vague as "make America great again") a potentially more concrete manifestation is President Xi's endorsement of a major role for classical Chinese traditions in the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. His speech opening the Fifth International Conference on Confucianism displays exceptional depth of knowledge on the origins and cultural evolution of Confucianism over the course of history (Xi, 2014). It goes far beyond official mainstream education on Confucianism in Chinese-language teaching for the PRC, which only briefly covers Confucius, Mencius, and classic writings more than 2,000 years old, in a manner that is superficial, abstract, and disconnected from Chinese society today (Xie et al., 2021a).

By contrast, Xi (2014) views Confucianism as important nutrition for the healthy development of Chinese nationality. He locates it in centuries of development, and in the exchange of ideas along the silk road. His three-point summary of what is special about Confucianism is dialectical and cosmopolitan. Chin et al. (2018) argue that "a diverse set of conflicting yet complementary dynamics [yin–yang dialectics] is the most distinctive characteristic of Chinese understanding about strategy" (p. 684), and Xi presents such an understanding in full. Paraphrasing his speech, (1) the relationship of Confucianism and other historical schools of thought is simultaneously oppositional and unified, in competition while borrowing from one another, in harmony and yet not the same (和而不同); (2) the ability of Confucianism and other historical schools of thought to keep changing to suit society's needs over time has given them endurance; and (3) these traditions have played a central role in cultivating individuals' and society's moral qualities so that the relationship between the person and society, and the means for governing society, are bound together, as a mutually beneficial and interconnected whole (see Yang, 2010, for the

psychological practices of 中庸—the middle way—useful in interpreting how Xi has formulated these points).

The last point is central to why Xi thinks that Confucianism and other ancient Chinese schools of thought can play a role in fulfilling the Chinese Dream. It is a sophisticated statement of collectivism: not in the way Westerners conceive of it, as a fixed state, but as Chinese conceive of it, as a dynamic relationship between the person and the state. Xi interprets Confucianism as the basis for the traditional conception of the Chinese state as family writ large (see Fong, 2004; Liu et al., 2010). He invokes a conception of the relationship between the Chinese individual and state based on ancient Chinese philosophy, including ideas that center around an ontology of the moral mind (Heaven and Humanity in Union [天人合一] and the cultivation of benevolence [仁]), central elements of the Song-Ming rational school of Confucianism (see Liu, 1998, 2003, 2021a).

Though Confucian philosophy was extraordinarily sophisticated, it had no way to restrain the arbitrary exercise of power by the state (or its ruler) except for the threat of losing the Mandate of Heaven (i.e., overthrow). Confucianism is dedicated to moral education, wherein dedication and moral rectitude are cultivated among scholar officials (and the ruling class). That is why Confucianism is loved by both good and bad governors. The good governors use it as a self-cultivation tool (see Liu & Liu, 2021), whereas bad governors also use it, but as a tool to cultivate others to serve them.

Such a didactic and dialectic is perfect for the Communist Party of China (CPC), which is in need of a renewal of core beliefs and values. Given how far the China of today has strayed from doctrinaire Marxism, but is also unwilling to turn to Western-style reforms, it is not surprising it would turn to its own traditions for renewal. Singapore has demonstrated that a single party can rule well and have the state prosper for more than half a century; Xi is attempting to position China for similar success, by fighting corruption through top-down control rather than legal transparency (see Quah, 2001). President Xi may be aiming to revitalize moral character-based governance, as was typical when Confucianism was the official ruling ideology of China (Liu et al., 2010). By employing Chinese traditions, he strengthens the legitimacy and ability of the CPC to govern without taking the Western pathway of legal transparency and institutionalized democracy. Whether this pathway is viable will be tested in years to come. For while there may be multiple forms of modernity (Tu, 2000), Singapore and other East Asian states have embraced far more hybridity with the West than China (for empirical evidence, see Zhang et al., 2019).

In keeping with the principle of national sovereignty previously articulated, Xi (2014) argues that the cultural traditions of Chinese civilization provide an alternative, culture-specific pathway toward twenty-first-century reform: invaluable for dealing with the wicked problems of contemporary Chinese society, like the wealth gap between rich and poor, materialism, lowered ethics and morality, and tension between people and nature. But he only provides exhortations to think forward on how to profitably join tradition to present-day needs, rather than offering specifics. We suggest that education curriculum reform might be a step forward. Including more vivid stories of Chinese culture heroes like Confucius in ancient times or Zeng Guofan in more modern times (Liu & Liu, 2021) in school textbooks, with exercises that encourage discussions between children and parents, and a national conversation between Chinese families and official educators on potentially cosmopolitan ideals embedded in Chinese traditions could be a fruitful direction. The type of dialogue Xi is asking for could be undertaken at the civilizational level as well, as Confucianism today is more of a philosophy than a religion, and can be open to hybridity and dialogue with other traditions (Liu, 2000, 2003).

Xi (2014) closes his speech by arguing for historical trajectories in development. He proposes four principles for managing cultural diversity between states that are in many ways consistent with Western principles for managing cultural diversity within states, and with aspects of cosmopolitanism at the individual level. First, he argues for maintaining the cultural diversity of different civilizations. Second, he argues that the civilization and civilizational values of each country should be respected, and uniformity should not be imposed. Third, there should be progress in the mutuality of civilizations learning and borrowing from one another. Fourth, he advocates scientifically investigating the utility and value of cultural traditions. Note that all these principles relate to collectives.

Accordingly, we understand this as one of the strongest statements of a collectivist argument for cosmopolitanism that we have read from a political leader in recent years. A hundred years ago, Dr. Sun Yat-sen (孙中山) also considered China's national development as a global issue, but his cosmopolitanism was more indirect. It closely responded to the far more desperate domestic and international problems for China at the time. Sun's cosmopolitanism was about putting China's development in the context of world development (including the place of human rights in that path). "Unless the Chinese question can be settled peacefully, another world war greater and more terrible than the one just past [the Balkan Peninsula] will be inevitable" (Sun, 1922, p. 107). According to Sun, if China could become united and strong, "the present spheres of influence can be abolished; the international capitalistic competition can be gotten rid of, and last, but not least, the struggle between capital and labor can be avoided" (Sun, 1922, p. 107). Sun did not propose cosmopolitanism explicitly: rather his emphasis was on how to lift China out of poverty and weakness. He emphasized democracy and human rights in his approach, and his thesis was

that China's rise would help the entire global situation, including the struggle between capital and labor. However, even though China is strong now, that struggle is as ferocious and troubled as it has ever been (Firebaugh, 2002; Lonergan & Blyth, 2020).

Xi started his term as president from a more stable, secure, and prosperous situation in China than Sun ever faced. The major speeches we have analyzed are from his first term as paramount leader, where his goal was to consolidate power and to make himself known on the world stage. We speculate that this position, and the possibilities within it, made Xi think more about the responsibility of China in the context of the wellness of the world rather than just China, as specified by Mencius: "If poor, they attended to their own virtue in solitude; if advanced to dignity, they made the whole kingdom virtuous as well" (穷则独善其身，达则兼济天下，见《孟子·尽心上》)."

This mirrors debates that the first author heard as a young man from his father, Shu-hsien Liu, who acted as a representative of Confucian philosophy at the first Parliament of World Religions organized by Catholic theologian Hans Küng (1997; see also https://parliamentofreligions.org/program-areas/global-ethic). At that forum, East Asians and other majority world representatives argued that a genuinely global ethic would require a collectivist charter of human responsibilities to complement the existing individualistic charter of human rights. The importance of such a perspective is brought into prominence by the pandemic-stricken world of the early 2020s, where rampant and excessive individualism has proven to be an impediment to fighting COVID-19 (Liu, 2021b). China used its early success in managing the pandemic as an argument for its more authoritarian system (Zhao, 2021). Its initial successes, however, relied more on lockdowns than on vaccination of the vulnerable, and this has put it in a more precarious position now (Yuan, 2022). Further, the optimistic cosmopolitanism articulated by President Xi's in his first term has been tempered subsequently by opposition from the USA, premised around human rights violations (see Stone & Wan, 2022).

But putting current politics to one side, cosmopolitanists should be able to agree that some balancing of rights and responsibilities between individuals and collectives is needed to achieve a truly global form of consciousness in the long term (see Liu & Macdonald, 2016). Xi (2014) may be arguing for something along these lines when he argued that, even though Confucianism became the dominant philosophy and ideology of China after the Han dynasty, there was always pluralism and multiplicity in its development. Through this, he claims that there is diversity in Confucianism's cultural DNA that holds value for the world (Xi, 2017a): "The Swiss army knife embodies Swiss craftsmanship. When I first got one, I was amazed that it has so many functions. I cannot help thinking how wonderful it would be if an exquisite Swiss army knife could be made for our world. When there is a problem, we can use one of the tools on the knife to fix it. I believe that with unremitting efforts of the international community, such a knife can be made." Nathan and Zhang (2021) challenge this assertion of multiple functionalities by arguing that politicized Confucianism in Chinese history has been resolutely hierarchical. But a rejoinder to this dialogue would be to consider spiritual Confucianism (Liu, 2003, chapter 2) as existing side by side with politicized Confucianism throughout Chinese history (for a concrete example, see Liu & Liu, 2021).

At the very least, the emerging Chinese perspective suggests that collectivist cosmopolitanism could serve as the yin, a more implicit and developmental complement to the yang of an explicit and fully formed individualistic cosmopolitanism from Western civilization, as compared to the zero-sum game formulation that dominates international politics at the moment. The Western view emphasizes a core of shared values (Küng, 1997) and a conception of human rights (Brock, 2013) that privileges the individual. China's vision of collectivist cosmopolitanism places more emphasis on the uniqueness of each culture's traditions in providing a historical trajectory for development, where each individual is bound to a cultural matrix of symbolic resources that make him or her part of a morally inscribed collective: with a duty to contribute to this collective, and share its insights by working collaboratively with, and learning from, other such collectives. This perspective is less well developed at the moment, but in accord with the yin–yang cosmology characteristic of Chinese philosophy, it may contain fruitful seeds for the future (Liu, 2017; Wong, 2006). These seeds might have to grow stronger to establish a positive dialectic between the two approaches if East and West are to avoid warfare in the future (on the linear possibilities for war, see Allison, 2017; for a peaceful but dialectical rejoinder, see Liu, 2022, chapters 7–8).

Conclusion

No one culture or civilization has all the answers when it comes to offering solutions to the world's wicked problems. Without question, China's contribution to major world challenges has not been, and will not be, in the domain of improving human rights for individuals. Its contribution will be at the level of the collective: perhaps through the long-term strategy of the BRI, and hopefully through its consistent advocacy of peaceful national development. As Western civilization ponders the rise of China, individuals and policymakers within Western collectives should consider whether negative mass media accounts about China are accurate projections of its threat to their way of life, or merely a challenge to Western hegemony. If it is the latter, then steps should be taken against steering the world toward a self-fulfilling prophecy where anxieties over macro-uncertainties and fear of loss of status and power lead to war (Allison, 2017).

Communications between East and West can be a trial (Kim & Gudykunst, 1988). The Chinese emphasis on

top-down pronouncements, and their devotion to facework and in-group harmony is largely alien to Western communications, which tends to be more direct (Bond & Hwang, 1986). The uncontrolled internet of the West versus the controlled internet of China is another barrier that makes honest communication difficult.

But there are other factors on the positive side of the ledger toward global cosmopolitanism and world peace: (1) China's economic development follows according to the framework of the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 1993; Xi, 2017a), and as such, is more liberal than Marxist economics; (2) China does not attempt to export political ideology but rather, labor and material products for purchase—because of this, its realistic interests are generally in the direction of trade, not conquest; (3) President Xi, the paramount leader of China, has repeatedly expounded on the principle of national sovereignty, and a culture-specific historical trajectory for development that makes the resurgence of traditions like Confucianism part of the plan for maintaining internal stability and external harmony for China; (4) actually existing cosmopolitanism can be observed and measured at the individual level, and there is no necessary barrier between having a cosmopolitan orientation and having an adherence to existing loyalties at the national level. This offers an opportunity for cosmopolitanists to engage with China on a solid and common philosophical ground of a commitment to humanity that cannot be changed at a whim (Liu, 1998; 2003), and can be appealed to for justice (Liu & Liu, 2003). From the perspective of Confucianism, authority can be either benevolent (Liu et al., 2010) or suffocating (Xie et al., 2021b). Rather than excoriate China for its failings, cosmopolitanists should consider how they might build bridges between East and West, through understanding and connecting up individualist and collectivist views of cosmopolitanism. Even the slightest greening of the BRI could have huge implications for slowing climate change, and the first connections could be made by individuals, working on specific projects, making a difference for a locality. But more than this, the facework of President Xi in opening up a collectivist space for global development could be reciprocated with moves from individualism-oriented cosmopolitanists, to build a more grounded theory and practice of actually existing cosmopolitanism, in an increasingly multilateral, but also contested world.

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