

The Twilight of Liberal International Order and the Dawn of Heteronational Order: An Engagement with the Chinese Theory of Soft Power

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Abstract

International founding needs to be rethought in the age of heterogeneous power centers. Liberal institutions will increasingly face the soft power of international institutional projects that embody different values and political principles. The Chinese ordering of the world is such a challenge. Its own indigenous IR school is developing its own version of soft power theory, which I call character power. Based on the Mencian virtue governance, character power attempts to cultivate 'state character' to increase the Chinese international authority. Consequently, the procedural and universalist conception of international order is not sufficient for heteronational founding of order. The diverse push and pull of heterogeneous political principles need to be navigated through the meta-ethics of attraction that function as an interface for mutual transformability. As a new approach to soft power, the Mencian virtue governance also provides such an interface in its basic principle of cultivating commiserative capacity.

The Challenge of Heteronational Founding

If we assume the modern global institutional building began only after the high point of the European imperial power in the 19th century, it is safe to assume that the current global infrastructural institutions are largely based on the projection of the Euro-American political ideas, practices and ethos. The problem of cultural difference in the global institutional founding did not surface on the horizon of the IR disciplinary consciousness or could be easily suppressed with various means of coercion, cooptation and persuasion. It is true that there were a few spurts of upheavals caused by the revolutionary states. The threats by Soviet Union, Imperial Japan and Third Reich can qualify as heterocultural challenge to the prevailing Euro-American order depending on one's perspective. However, these challenges were ignored by dominant powers, as we can see in the frustration of Japan's racial equality advocacy and consequently led to the violent struggle for domination rather than any institutional process among the powers of the different cultures. Also, the postcolonial scholarship might point out the two-way heterogeneous circulation or the colonial dynamics of inside/outside despite the asymmetry of power during the 19th century expansion of European international society.¹ However, precisely due to the asymmetry, the heteocultural interactions had to be mediated through unconscious and repressed means.

In contrast, the contemporary global politics shows increasing signs of heterocultural institutional processes. The list of indicative signs is long: the notion of G2 and the rise of China, the expansion of global governance club from G7 to G20, the increasing heterocultural associations within the transnational civil society, and the ongoing difficulties in the negotiations with the so-called rogue states. Accordingly, the scholarly literature that deals with the new signification given to heterocultural institutional building is proliferating: two-way socialization processes and the norm diffusion from emerging powers, the role of rising powers in global governance, the multiplex of regional orders, and the prediction of multi-nodal global politics.² The diverse heterocultural challenges itself may not be a new phenomenon in international politics, but the unique conditions of the late modern world politics give it an unprecedented salience. First, the presence of nuclear weapons makes it all but impossible for the major cultural centers to engage in the violent struggle for domination. As Daniel Deudney's timely intervention shows, the tight violent interdependence of the nuclear era makes the Weberian security state unfit for the changing material context. The implication is the heterocultural centers of power such as the US, China and Russia will have to live with the uncomfortable other without means for the unilateral domination. Moreover, the new emerging powers are largely embedded in the dominant infrastructure of liberal institutions. The indispensability of the liberal international order led many analysts to predict the

¹ On the two-way heterocultural dynamics, see Liu 2004. On the exclusion of the non-western nations from the emerging international society, see Anghie 2007, 32-65, 100-118.

² Schweller and Pu 2011; Pu 2012; Kahler 2013; Acharya 2014; Womack 2014.

endurance of liberalism and the ultimate assimilation of the heterocultural powers within the system.

Yet, these conditions are not good news for the promoters of the liberal internationalism. Although the emerging powers heavily benefited from the liberal order, many powers harbor a deep-seated resentment toward the dominant liberal ideology that was largely imposed upon them as a *fait accompli* after the disastrous upheavals of the 20th century. The result is increasing obstructionism and the decay of the order without a possibility toward a violent regeneration that accompanied the previous rounds of hegemonic transition. Randall Schwaller, for example, predicts the new world of non-polarity and entropy rather than multipolarity after the collapse of *pax Americana*. Facing with the dispersion of its own power center and the challenges from the increasing number of heterocultural powers, the liberal international order is in a state of limbo; it is the only alternative in the global political arena without the sufficient support for its actual functioning. This is a moment of heterocultural international, in short hetero-national, founding, but the academic discipline and the policy making world lack means to produce a functioning order out of the dizzying mixture of the heterogeneous political surges.

It is against the background of heteronational founding that I suggest a re-reading of Nye's soft power and its context. That is to read Nye's soft power from the other side of the western and the non-western divide. Nye's soft power was a solution to the crisis of liberal international order that was happening due to the collapse of the cold war and the new trends of interdependence. Putting aside all conceptual connotations, we can think of Nye's soft power concept as an attempt to rebuild American leadership in a period when the global configuration of power forced the US to adopt a more multilateral approach than a unilateral one in re-fashioning the decades-old liberal global institutions. A leadership in a new institutional building inherently requires a certain dose of unilateral action. In the past, the unilateral actions of the US were justified in the name of security against the Soviet threat. With the threat largely gone, Nye needed to find a new mode of action that will transform the US initiative into the collective global action. His answer was soft power. However, soft power took an unexpected hetero-cultural turn after Nye's inception. With the liberal reform project increasingly in trouble, non-western powers began to assert their own soft power with the accompanying translations and transformations of the concept. They began to appropriate soft power to participate in heteronational founding on their own terms.

Soft power provides an opening into the thorny terrain of heteronational founding. In Nye's first formulation, it assumed the universality of the liberal principles, but it inadvertently undercut the universality by making it to rely on the fairly substantial dynamic of attraction. Accordingly, it allows multiple political principles compete with each other in attracting the minds of the world. I use the notion of soft power to explore the new problematic of heteronational founding. First, I will investigate the link between soft power and heteronational founding and make distinction

between the attraction through perfection and the one through revelation, of which the latter is crucial for heteronational founding. Next, I will trace the translations of soft power into what I call *character power* in the Chinese IR discourse. One source of character power theory will be consequently analyzed: *the Mencius*, a book of sayings by the ancient Chinese thinker. Lastly, a tentative Mencian ethics of attraction will be discussed.

Soft Power and Heteronational Founding

The Need for Soft Power in Institutional Building

In its initial formulation, soft power was a solution to the crisis of the liberal international order. Around the collapse of the cold war, a declinist discourse for the US hegemony and the liberal international order was prevalent. Against it, Nye formulated the notion of soft power as an untapped resource for the continuing US hegemony. The US can still maintain its world leadership by harnessing soft power, and with it the liberal order, too, will continue to prosper. The US should develop this co-optive power in the world of interdependence where the coercive form of power was becoming increasingly useless.³ By pointing out the more efficacious kind of state power, Nye was trying to show the endurance of American leadership and the need to bolster a new direction of the US foreign policy.

The need for institutional reforms was also acknowledged to boost the US soft power. John Ikenberry sums up five fundamental challenges to the liberal international order around the end of the cold war that required a substantial reorganization of the prevailing institutions: the absence of security providing role as the basis for legitimacy, the threat of the unipolarity to weaker states, the erosion of sovereignty norms, transnational non-state threats, the entrance of the non-western powers into the liberal international order.⁴ The postwar liberal institutions were unfit to meet these challenges; hence, a pressing need for a significant reform of global institutions. Nye suggests institutional reform as a means to strengthen soft power. The US should engage in institutional building more actively so that they can generate the co-optive form of power. The liberal institutions such as GATT and OECD embodies the liberal free market principles. Building institutions and enrolling other states in them means that these states' preferences and self-understanding would be shaped to follow the principles embodied in the institutions. Institutions are means to makes others want the US want.

However, what is curiously missing in Nye's account of institutions is the reverse relation between soft power and institutions; soft power is in fact necessary for building institutions. In

³ Nye 1990a, 153.

⁴ Ikenberry 2009, 79-80.

particular, the attraction of soft power is critical to initiating institutional reform. The notion of attraction is probably the most interesting and provoking element of soft power and thereby received many critical investigations. Nye attributes attractiveness to many aspects of a country; It stems from “an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority.”⁵ The attractiveness meant to magnetically draw other countries to what the US wants.

Nye’s is silent on the issue of attraction in the US institutional statecraft.⁶ It is almost as if liberal institutions are automatically attractive. The inattention is common in the liberal IR theorist. Even while he is pointing out the crisis of the liberal internationalism, Ikenberry think of the new liberal order to be established as long as the US is willing give up its hegemonic status. He hints at the possibility of rising powers to reject the liberal principles but do not explain how they can be attracted to the liberal principles other than the material interests of these states within the liberal order.⁷

This omission suggests an interesting logical problem. What is peculiar in institutional founding is that it requires a certain singular moment: the moment you need personal legitimacy without any established institutional basis. Borrowing from Ian Hurd’s classification, legitimacy is defined as “the normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed”; legitimacy is accepted without calculating self-interest.⁸ When there is any institution, it means states voluntarily submits to the constraint imposed by the institution, which is to say it has legitimacy over states. However, before an institution is built, the institutional entrepreneur has to rely on something other than the legitimacy of the institution since it is not yet built.⁹

This is where the notion of attraction enters. If the institutional entrepreneur wields attraction, then the other states might voluntarily submit to the new institution since they have faith in the work of the entrepreneur. If the liberal values and ethos of the US can solicit the voluntary submission of the heterogenous actors in global politics, then the liberal international order can be built and followed on the basis of the attractive US leadership. Soft power is a form of personal legitimacy. Couched in terms of legitimacy, the holder of soft power is an entity that has a durable and legitimate global leadership that is accepted by the broad audience of the world, regardless of whether they are state or non-state actors. To build institutions, you need soft power.

⁵ Nye 2004, 5-6.

⁶ In his subsequent book on soft power, any role of attraction in institutional building is also absent. Ibid.

⁷ Ikenberry 2009, 83-84.

⁸ Hurd 1999, 381, 385-387.

⁹ The recent literature on trust also deals with the difficulty of building an institution without previously established legitimacy and mutual trust. Rathbun 2011.

Two Attractions: Perfection and Revelation

However, the critiques of soft power reject the universal attraction of the liberal ethos and principles. The notion of attraction as the universal capability of a certain type of actors was the most heavily criticized part of the soft power thesis. The assumption that some traits of the US would be attractive universally to other actors presupposes some universality of liberal principles and ethos. This may well be true, but Nye does not provide any justification of his claim. A few constructivist scholars attacked his implicit assumption of universality by reconstructing how the universal claim of the US was constituted.

Janice Bially Mattern provided the sociolinguistic construction of attraction as an alternative to the universalistic concept of attraction.¹⁰ Since social actors are the product of narratives, norms and the other linguistic constructions, it is impossible to get the others want what I want without any form of verbal coercion. Since attraction already presupposes a legitimate interlocutor who shares the same culture, no universal attraction may succeed in converting someone whose life world does not share the same principle of legitimacy. In that case, the most efficient way is to exploit the vulnerability of the other's narrative construction so that it is left with no choice but to accept the representation of the world by the self. Without any accepted form of legitimacy, soft-power will always take a coercive form of representational force, and the promise of reduced coercion and voluntary submission to power will disappear.

While Mattern's deconstruction of universal attraction is valid, we need to, however, distinguish different forms of attraction to give justice to the complex phenomena of attraction. In fact, it is likely that Nye had in mind a situation where the US need to wield attraction to people who are not totally alien to the liberal principles and ethos. His emphasis on information, manipulation and public diplomacy points to the need to construct a minimum of common ground for the attractive traits of a country to work. However, this doesn't mean the liberal attraction would work automatically upon the diffusion of the liberal values. It still requires some exemplary work by the US; hence, his emphasis on the exemplary liberal politics within the US nation.¹¹ In short, Nye's attraction is constructed through *perfection*.

In contrast, Mattern's mutually alien interlocutors face each other without any common ground to evaluate one's performances. This is why the US had to rely on verbal fight to impose its narrative of the world. With the forceful rhetoric of the friend and enemy, the US forced the other states to voluntarily comply with its representation of the world, or they would lose the status of good actor. This is a form of attraction as far as there was no physical coercion was involved. However, it was also coercive because the US constituted the attractiveness of its narrative by

¹⁰ Mattern 2005.

¹¹ Nye 1990b.

eliminating the alternative forms of narrative that other states would have chosen if they were left without the dichotomous friend and enemy distinction.

However, Mattern's account of verbal fight begs two further questions. First is what is the nature of coerciveness in representational force. The supposed coercion in fact resides in the middle ground between persuasion through deliberation and coercion through violence. The coerciveness of the rhetorical force still preserved a modicum of choice as long as states such as Jordan functioned in the matrix of multiple narratives of its goodness. The US was able to 'compel' these states to choose its preferred narrative through its ingenious rhetoric of good and evil, but this does not eliminate all the alternatives such as one embraced by the Syrian dissenting groups.

Although in a degenerated form, the war on terror represents an aesthetic terrain in the moment of political founding. This was a role given to his lawgiver by Rousseau to overcome a paradox of founding. Political founding is a paradoxical work since a successful founding by a non-violent means requires civic virtue and accepted legitimacy that can be present only after the founding. Thus, in the moment of political foundation, the lawgiver need to rely on a compelling force of a higher order since there is not yet a common ground of legitimacy. In other word, an aesthetic force is required to reveal a form latent in the gathered crowd.¹² With its stark dichotomy, the war on terror rhetoric indeed founded a new era of transnational warfare against an amorphous entity. In a recent study of aesthetic dimension of soft power and the war on terror narrative, Ty Solomon similarly shows how the styles of discourse and the ideals of American nation enticed and cultivated the affective investment in the war-on-terror narrative.¹³ Since it reveals something that is unforeseen, I will call the aesthetic kind attraction through *revelation*.

While attraction through perfection suppose a common ground for legitimacy of a leader, attraction through revelation does not assume any such common ground. Weber's discussion of charismatic authority also hints at the similar distinction. As in legitimacy, authority of Weber involves voluntary submission.¹⁴ Unlike rational-legal authority and traditional authority, Charismatic authority relies on extraordinary and irrational character that goes beyond everyday routine.¹⁵ More specifically, it is based on:

Charismatic grounds--resting on devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him.¹⁶

¹² Frank 2014, 39-40.

¹³ Solomon 2014, 732-733.

¹⁴ Weber 1947, 324.

¹⁵ Ibid., 361.

¹⁶ Ibid., 329.

Charisma can be constituted either through exemplary character or revelation of a hidden order. In other words, Charisma is attained either by attraction through perfection or by attraction through revelation. When it is wielded through revelation, attraction does not presuppose any established sociolinguistic basis of legitimacy. The power of attraction may threaten the sociolinguistic ontological security of the other as long as it creates new norms and personalities that will then later become a new tradition. However, when the loss of the self is the result of voluntary submission, attraction does not coerce the followers. It compels.

In contrast, Nye's soft power is a case of attraction through perfection. The exceptional perfection of a certain virtue is often the essence of attraction in our everyday use of the term. Nye is referring to attraction through perfection when he emphasizes the need to perfect the liberal principles and institutions of the US. The critiques of Nye's soft power have claimed it straddles between the essentialist and constructivist understandings of attraction.¹⁷ However, it does involve both dimensions. Soft power understood as attraction through perfection is a construction of a perfected example within an accepted common ground.

The crisis of liberal institutions after the end of the cold war provoked a need for the renewed US leadership to refashion existing institutions to adapt in the changing environment. Since many liberal scholars including Nye assumed the exemplary performance of the US leadership was enough to garner supports for its institutional statecraft. One prominent example of such performance is the thesis of self-restraint.¹⁸

What is new in the institutional founding of the current period compared to the 1990s is that attraction through perfection seems increasingly insufficient. The anxiety caused by this insufficiency can be felt by the changing tone in the writings of the liberal institutionalists. Given the reality of the Chinese institutional statecraft such as AIIB, Ikenberry openly admits a role of institutional entrepreneur to China in his recent collaboration with Wang Jisi and Zhu Feng.¹⁹ However, in various recent articles, he reverts to the continuing dominance of the liberal international order without the US hegemony. He argues what's at crisis is the US hegemony not the liberal order per se.²⁰ The anxiety caused by the Chinese difference is quickly sealed by the deferred reintegration into the universal institutions of liberal democracy and capitalism. In short, there is no need to worry about heteronational founding.

However, there is already an emerging non-western movement to project its own political principles to the world. We need to ask what kind of attraction the non-Western states, in my case China, can wield and how it interact with the attraction of the US leadership. The Chinese political

¹⁷ Mattern 2005, 591.

¹⁸ Ikenberry 1999.

¹⁹ Ikenberry, Wang and Zhu 2015, 2.

²⁰ Ikenberry 2015.

tradition indeed has an ancient history of moral and political deliberation on the workings of attraction for ordering society. In Chinese political discourse, the attraction was thought in terms of etho-cracy(*dezhi*, 德治): rule by ethos. The suffix is from ethos(德), and the prefix from -cracy(治) as in demo-cracy. Ethocracy is the governance by the cultivation and diffusion of exceptional virtues. We can compare it with the familiar notion of meritocracy. Rather than being a rule by merit, the Chinese political discourse elaborated a rule by virtue or ethos.

Going beyond identifying the Chinese way of generating attraction, we also need to tackle how heterogeneous poles of attraction might interact. In other words, the politics of attraction need to confront the problem difference. Many critical theorists of IR demonstrated the assimilative tendency in the liberal IR theories including Nye's soft power. To avoid such tendency, any attractive power of a political tradition needs to come with an ethics of attraction that can respect heterogeneity of our shared world and history. Without the ethics of attraction, the Chinese soft power strategy will also fall into the trap of double movement of assimilating and dominating the different.²¹

In the following sections, I explore what the Chinese political tradition has to offer for heteronational founding. I will first review the contemporary Chinese IR debate on soft power in the light of the different types of attraction. How does the Chinese notion of soft power differ from Nye's? Does it call for a further analysis of different cases of attraction? In the following section, the Mencian ethocracy will be analyzed as the original inspiration for the contemporary Chinese theory. Finally, I will examine whether and how the Mencian ethocracy provides a ethics of attraction.

Character Consequentialism in the Chinese Soft Power: From Soft Power to Character Power

Soft power has been called upon by the Chinese theorists to solve their own strategic problem. As a new competitor in international ordering, China faces an even acuter need for the power of attraction. Being a culturally unique newcomer in the high politics of institutional building, everything it does is prone to the criticism of revisionism and is likely to be seen as the illegitimate challenge to the international norms. The strategic problem is summed in one of their most favorite strategic jargons: peaceful rise(*hepingjueqi* 和平崛起). Since it is benefiting from the existing liberal order it wants to be seen as a peaceful and responsible stakeholder. However, at the same time, just following existing political principles will endanger the unique identity of the Chinese

²¹ Inayatullah and Blaney 2004.

state and society and prevent it from becoming an institutional leader. The Chinese leadership thus wants to preserve and promote its unique identity and values without invoking the shadow of China threat. Thus, it is no wonder that the Chinese policy elites became increasingly interested in soft power as its global clout becomes larger and larger. China must rise peacefully, and to do that it needs soft power.

Chinese scholars say there are three main elements of the Chinese soft power: the ancient civilizational tradition of China, its economic development model, called Beijing consensus, and the various soft forms of foreign policy such as development aid and public diplomacy.²² As for the civilizational source, they typically denote the Confucian texts as a site to find inspirations for the Chinese soft power. The Confucian political tradition is perceived to be a promising solution to the China's soft power deficits. Both Western and Chinese observers think China is further away from the commanding position of the United States when measured in terms of soft power.²³ Many observers have paid attention to the potential soft power of the Confucian tradition and political thought.²⁴ One scholar explicitly built a Confucian foreign policy strategy based on the Neo-Confucian writings which in turn were based on the commentarial tradition on *the Mencius*.²⁵

I focus on the Confucian pathway to soft power for both empirical and theoretical reason. Empirically, its salience has significantly increased during the last decade of China's rise. The Confucian rhetoric is already at the heart of the Chinese propagandist rhetoric. For example, president Xi Jinping proclaimed the four principles of affinity, sincerity, mutual benefit, and inclusiveness for the Chinese peripheral diplomacy.²⁶ These four principles were derived from the four Chinese characters that are deemed to represent the essential relational ethics in the Chinese culture.²⁷ Without essentializing the Chinese culture or Confucianism, we can still view this different style of rhetoric and general perspective as an evidence for the influence of the Confucian tradition on the Chinese institutional statecraft.

The Confucian rhetoric has significance because it is a shared tradition among the different societies in the region; the Chinese Confucian rhetoric is likely to find a willing audience that is also eager to assert its cultural values. The prevalence of the Confucian tradition has a long history, and China is not even the first country who used the Confucian rhetoric to assert the regional leadership and its international legitimacy. During the early 20th century, some Japanese

²² Li 2009, 25-27.

²³ Nye 2012; Huang and Ding 2006.

²⁴ Bell 2009; Qin 2007.

²⁵ Zhang 2015.

²⁶ Swaine 2014.

²⁷ Among the four principles, David Kang's research shows *Inclusiveness* was a key to the absence of religious war in the traditional East Asian system. Kang 2014.

intellectuals also adopted the Confucian ideas such as Kingly Way(*wangdao*, 王道) as the propaganda and the international strategy for the rising Japanese nation-state.²⁸

Also, the Confucian path is the most theoretically interesting. There always been multiple entities called state(*guo*, 國) in the long history of the region, and the Confucian tradition offers a non-Western way of thinking about the relations between them without many problematic assumptions of the modern states system. Regarding soft power specifically, the Confucian tradition also offers a rich array of discourses on virtue, attraction, and the qualities of ideal rulers and governments that are directly comparable to the contemporary debate on soft power. We can think of the tradition as the repository of thousand years of deliberation on how to use soft power to govern the world. Although we should not fall into the pitfalls of cultural essentialism by saying that the Confucian politics has been always about interpersonal or familial ethics, it seems reasonable to say it had spent relatively more energy and efforts on elaborating the relation among ethics, virtues, and politics than the Western political tradition.

There is one particular way of thinking that I want to articulate, and that is likely to contribute to or transform our way of thinking soft power. This is the theory of character consequentialism which the comparative political theorist, PJ Ivanhoe, developed from his reading of Confucius and Mencius. Simply put, character consequentialism is an ethics whose main goal is to develop a character that is likely to produce good results for the public. It is orthogonal to the usual contrast between duty-based ethics and utilitarian consequentialism. The former obligates us to act according to a certain set of the universal rules whereas the latter suggests that we should follow a line of action that is likely to produce the greatest benefits for the greatest number of subjects. There is no room for considering the impact of such moral actions upon our characters. As in the duty-based ethics, moral life is a good in itself in character consequentialism, but pursuing moral life means developing one's own nature according to ethical guides rather than following moral rules and duties. Like consequentialism, character consequentialism evaluates one's moral action in terms of its public benefits, but the benefits come from the character built as the result of accumulated moral practices rather than from the immediate moral actions. Consequently, character consequentialism is concerned more with the long-term indirect effects of one's moral action and its impact upon the character of the self.²⁹

In Confucius and Mencius, character consequentialism is an ethical guideline for individual moral life. The Chinese IR theorists are using the same moral text for developing their national strategies, and due to their training as IR scholars they are making a very peculiar twist to this age old moral doctrine. The Confucian moral philosophy usually targeted individual agents, and even

²⁸ Brown 2007.

²⁹ Ivanhoe 1991, 61-67.

when it was applied to inter-state dynamic, the moral relations between states were usually mediated through those between individual rulers or dynastic courts. In contrast, the Chinese soft power debates are talking about the characters of states as if states are fully moral persons with unique characters. Soft power strategy is about developing ethically desirable state characters that will produce beneficial results both for the Chinese state and international community. It is as if they are turning the individual virtue ethics or the doctrines for the care of the self into an art of nation-state that takes the character of a nation-state as its long-term project.³⁰

A brief survey of official and academic discussions on the topic will show a clear tendency to strategize and moralize the national character. The four principles of peripheral diplomacy are interpersonal virtues that people develop or practice in their relation with others. The Chinese emphasis on the cultivating long-term relationship vis-à-vis the United States also indicates their concern with the social character of each state.³¹ Even the decades old principle of “hide brightness, nourish obscurity”(taoguangyanghui, 韬光养晦) portrays a posture of a wise person patiently waiting for its time to come. In a more recent article, Wang Jisi, the dean of the School of International Studies at Peking University, even transformed this strategy into the virtue of modesty and prudence(qianxujinshen, 谦虚谨慎).³²

In contrast, the debate on soft power and national strategy on the American side rarely strategizes a country's ethical character. Nye's discussion tried to harness the cultural and ideological resources of one's state for its strategic purposes; however, Nye's soft power result either from the given attributes of a state or the manipulative or communicative capacity of the diplomatic apparatus. When he talks about popularity of a state, he seems to suggest state character as something that strategy must work on, but there is hardly any systematic treatise on how to work on popularity of state.³³ He does discuss how to improve the exemplary character of the American democratic system to increase American soft power, but what's at stake is a domestic order of a state rather than its character as moral being embedded in the inter-state community.³⁴ The updated version of soft power, his notion of smart power, reaches closer to the discussion of smartness as state's character, but the smartness of state is defined as its ability and willingness to provide a public goods for the world. It is a name given to a state who executes certain functions and tasks but not a reference to an efficacy of its character.³⁵

³⁰ In this sense, it is an international analogue of Alasdair McIntyre's(2003) nation as project.

³¹ For example, Yan Xuetong(2010) complains about the hypocritical nature of the US-China relations.

³² Wang 2011.

³³ Nye 2004, 5.

³⁴ Ibid., 55-60.

³⁵ Armitage and Nye 2007.

In American academia, too, it is also hard to find the idea that states can develop its power by cultivating its character. The academic IR discipline has produced a variety of way to describe and categorize the different character of a state: status quo and revisionist states, great power and small power, hegemonic or imperial state, different strategic cultures of state(from Hobbesian to Kantian), liberal and authoritarian state, and normative power and rogue state. The adjective sometimes refers to a given attribute or a function of state and in others to a particular trait of its domestic regime; however, it hardly denotes a character or a virtue which a state can work on.³⁶

In the Chinese IR discourse, we can find an active strategization of state character. Yan Xuetong is a prominent example. Yan Xuetong is the most prominent realist IR scholar in China. For about a decade, he's been incorporating the ancient Chinese philosophical traditions with his classical realist strategic thought.³⁷ He is also one of a few Chinese scholars who is known to the American political science scholarship, and his main work on the ancient Chinese thought was translated into English.³⁸ Despite many criticisms he received, it is still worthwhile to analyze his thought to view how the Confucian tradition shape the contemporary discourse on the Chinese soft power.

Yan Xuetong promotes the notion of humane authority as the Chinese strategic ideal. Humane authority is Yan's translation of the concept *wang*(王). *Wang* was a universal ruler who ruled the world through his ideal virtues and governance in the Warring State Chinese political thoughts. Borrowing from the ancient philosopher, Xunzi, Yan contrasts *wang* with its oppositional counterpart: hegemony(which is also translation of another Chinese term *bai*, 霸). In Yan's scheme, *Wang* is the international leader who follows the universal moral principles in its interaction with all countries in the world whereas hegemony is the leader who follows its normative principles only when it deals with its allies.³⁹ Despite the significant overlap with the usual notion of hegemony, the emphasis in his theory of humane authority is put on the consistency of the character and exemplary force of the Chinese hegemony. It is hypocritical to apply norms only within the allied region, and it is what is wrong about the American hegemony. He also emphasizes the distinct emphasis on the character of state vis-à-vis the American theory of hegemonic intervention. For example, in his debate with John Mearsheimer, he argues China does

³⁶ An exception is the report from CNAS, *The Power of Balance: America in iAsia* by Kurt Campbell, Nirav Patel and Vikram J. Singh (available at <<https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/the-power-of-balance-america-in-iasia>>, accessed May 29, 2017).

³⁷ Now, Yan Xuetong leads his own small circle of the indigenous Chinese IR approach at Tsinghua university(Zhang 2012).

³⁸ Yan 2011.

³⁹ Yan 2014, 125-126.

not preach, as Americans do, its ideals but wields its soft power by its exemplary moral force without any intervention.⁴⁰

Clearing recognizing the strategic dilemma of the rising Chinese state, he argues the exemplary character of the Chinese state is central for the success of its rise. A new rising hegemon needs to establish its own new international order, and the peaceful way to do that is to diffuse it by the force of its exemplary character. In his word, “moral realism recognizes that regarding the reason why the rising state can establish a new set of international norms, the most important source is that it itself ardently practices the new norms, and as a result it has the effect of setting its own self as an example and standard.”⁴¹ Once the new order is established, the morality of the rising state raises the strategic trust conferred upon itself by international community. The trust, in turn, became translated into the international authority of the rising state which guarantees the stability of the new order.⁴² Developing exemplary character is a means to obtain the initial attractive power that is needed to establish an international order. The difference with Nye’s soft power is that the Chinese soft power relies not only on the exemplary work but also on the exemplary character which is to be carefully cultivated by the strategic works of the Chinese officials and academics.

Qin Yaqing’s theory of relational governance is another example of cultivating the Chinese state character. Qin’s relational governance theory taps into the fusion of private and public spheres to suggest an alternative form of global governance. In contrast to the usual notion of governance by the rule of law, Qin proposes the concept of relational governance. He defines it “as a process of negotiating socio-political arrangements that manage complex relationships in a community to produce order so that members behave in a reciprocal and cooperative fashion with mutual trust evolved over a shared understanding of social norms and human morality.”⁴³ His emphasis on human relations, trust, morality, family and the social sphere is the inter-subjective counterpart to Yan’s emphasis on the character of the state. To have a character means that you form a recognizable pattern of one’s self-portrait in the *gaze* of the others. Borrowing from Christopher Leigh Connery’s discussion of the pre-modern Chinese elite class, one’s character is the socio-textually determined subjective moral quality.⁴⁴ To have a character, you must have a social reference group that would collectively determine your character in the light of the accumulated record of your practices. That social sphere is now transposed to the relations between states; state now becomes like a real person who manages their everyday life through the full panoply of

⁴⁰ Mearsheimer and Yan 2013.

⁴¹ “道义现实主义认为，崛起国之所以能建立起新的国际规范，其最主要的原因是其身体力行执行新规范，即以身作则的作用”(Yan 2014, 125).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Qin 2011, 133.

⁴⁴ Connery 1998, 80.

complex social relationships. The social in this sense is more similar to the social as in *social media* with its connotations of multiple complex social relationships than the social as in social construction of identity. Put in another way, while constructivism merely gave interiority to state actor by giving it values and identities, Qin is giving relationality to the state with the accompanying theorization of the social character of the state. Having set the social background of the character of state actor, he also move on to analyze the importance of the virtuous character, the Chinese notion of profound person(*junzi*, 君子), for establishing and managing order.⁴⁵

It is as if the Chinese theorists have taken the concept of soft power beyond its conceptual limit. What they are talking about is *character power* than *soft power*. The source of authority, power, and attraction is now the character of state, which it can improve by working on itself. May we say the Chinese theory of soft power is a theory on the care of state-self? The merging of state-centrism in IR with the virtue-oriented Confucian philosophy had opened up a novel space of strategization for state. Not only that the leviathan has a body and a soul, and but also it can work on its own body and soul to prove its character to the others.

Character power is a way of generating attraction through exemplary virtue and characters. In contrast, Nye's soft power is based on attraction through exemplary work of providing public goods. Unlike the attraction through exemplary work, the Chinese character power theory focuses on developing attractive character. They are also based on the Confucian understanding of politics and order, and thus cannot be counted as the case of attraction through revelation of unheard pattern of the world. The fact that they combined Confucian ethics and state-centrism is itself a quite novel approach to world politics and might acquire attraction through revelation. Taking state as a person with distinctive character is a new approach to international politics and opens up a space for a creative ordering of the world. Such a novel way might well attract substantial followers in due course.

So far so good; however, it is difficult not to feel a certain dose of quirkiness in the ease with which both Yan and Qin identify state person with real person. The identification is so natural that they seem to be promoting a hyper state-centric theory: state actor with a complete personality. In fact, I argue, the Chinese theorists are distorting their intellectual source to suit their nationalist policies. Their state-centrism precluded them from linking character power of state to transnational society and from seeing that character power requires the integration of the three-levels of political analysis: individual self, state, and international sphere. Their opening to character power thus needs to be deepened through the engagement with the original Confucian text. *The Mencius* is an important source for many Chinese theorists. Reading the text will clarify two important logics behind the contemporary theory of character power. At the macrolevel, the moral politics of

⁴⁵ Qin 2011, 137.

Mencius is based on what I call a system of trickle-down economics of virtue. At the microlevel, it exploits human psycho-cognitive capacity, called *xin*(心), for the public by institutionalizing it.

The Mencian Ethocracy

Trickle-Down Economics of Virtue

Virtue, or ethos(*de* 德), is the key concept in understanding the conflation of the social and the international politics in the Chinese discourse. The Confucian tradition developed a unique lineage of ethocracy focusing on the developing of ethical character. The concept of virtue has been central to almost all varieties of the Chinese political philosophy. Thus, it is not productive to make a general argument that applies to them all. I only introduce one version of ethocracy which played a central role in the subsequent development of the Confucian tradition: the Mencian ethocracy. After Confucius's initial articulation of virtue and politics, Mencius heavily elaborated the cryptic dialogue of Confucius and provided his unique theory of governance and self-cultivation. Along with a few central citations from *The Analects*, I will show how Mencius developed a unique theory of ethocracy.⁴⁶

In one of the most famous phrase of *The Analects*, Confucius lays out the ideal vision of ethocracy as following.

The Master said, "One who rules through the power of Virtue is analogous to the Pole Star: it simply remains in its place and receives the homage of the myriad lesser stars."⁴⁷

As in the contemporary notion of soft power, the idea of attraction is central. The ruler just stays at the center, but a mythical gravity of its virtue makes the ruled turn toward his rule. Compared to the concept of soft power, this phrase emphasizes a paradoxical notion of passive activity. In Nye's formulation, the active construction of one's soft power is essential. One should actively increase its soft power through various means such as propaganda, national branding, and argumentative reasoning. The model of the Pole Star denies such active construction which was criticized by the critiques because it involves sociolinguistic forms of coercion. At the same time, the mythical attraction is not a given attribute because it requires the presence of an extraordinary virtue.

In a subsequent chapter, Confucius elaborates on the basis of this mythical power of virtue.

⁴⁶ *The Analects* is the collection of dialogue between Confucius and its diverse interlocutors such as feudal lords and his students. It has been worshipped as the most important classic in the Confucian tradition.

⁴⁷ Translation is from Confucius 2003, 8 translated by Edward Slingerland.

The Master said, “If you try to guide the common people with coercive regulations and keep them in line with punishments, the common people will become evasive and will have no sense of shame. If, however, you guide them with Virtue, and keep them in line by means of ritual, the people will have a sense of shame and will rectify themselves.”⁴⁸

Confucius discloses the affective base of the efficacy of virtue: the shame. If a ruler can utilize and inculcate the affect of shame, he will be able to govern people and keep them in order with their own accord. He suggests the virtue and ritual are the means by which a ruler harnesses the feeling of shame for the purpose of governance. What is remarkable in this chapter is that the emotional realm of shame is explicitly claimed as the target of governance. A ruler directly targets the emotion of others so that they will be attracted to his virtue out of the sense of shame. Also, the emotion is not just an attribute of an individual. It is something that circulates and diffuses in the society with the ideal ruler as the pivot of the circulation.

Building on *The Analects*, Mencius lays out his own theory of ethocracy. The two pillars of the Mencian ethocracy are, what I call, trickle-down economics of virtue and institutionalization of heart(*xin* 心). Trickle-down economics of virtue means if one educates and puts virtuous elites in the right place of governance, then the rest of the country will be given their due material wealth and chance to develop their own virtues. The people will be transformed on the premises that they enjoy minimal welfare and that they have the examples of the radiating virtues of their elites. Simply put, the superior virtue of the elites will trickle down to the people. The economics of virtue goes beyond the territorial borders, and the trickling down of virtue affects the whole transnational society of people. Then, the diffused virtue will confer the legitimacy to the world leadership of the virtuous elites at the center of the virtue economy.

The role of virtuous character as the pivot of political economy is what the Chinese theorists seems to have in mind when they argue that China can become a world leader by turning it into the virtuous international authority. If virtue can be accumulated and circulated, developing a virtuous state would mean accumulating radiating virtues in one’s society. However, the Chinese theorists also misses that the Mencian virtue economy forms a whole of political economy with the economy of material transactions. When we consider the whole picture of the Mencian political economy, the function of virtuous state seems very different.

To understand this unique model of political economy, it is necessary, first of all, to re-orient our usual perception of economic transaction. When we think of economy and transaction of goods, we usually do not include personal virtues and morality as goods in our economy. This is precisely what the Mencian political economy does. In the Mencian division of labor, human virtues are also

⁴⁸ Ibid., 8.

economic goods that are exchanged with the products of agriculture and other industries.⁴⁹ This notion of generalized economy presupposes a unique class that produces human virtues. Moreover, the existence of a class dedicated to the production of virtues means the prince or the state should support this class to maintain the circulation of human virtues in the economy. Since what this class(called *shi*(士) in the Confucian texts) produces has no direct advantage or material benefit to exchange with other goods, it is impossible for them to participate in the market economy on their own. However, without their production of human virtues, the generalized economy will collapse in the end. Thus, it is imperative for the public authority of the society to support the *shi* class materially by means of taxation or promotion of other voluntary supports for them.

Providing common good such as social ethics is widely appreciated as the source of attraction. We are often attracted to the virtuous people who perform disinterested services for the benefits of the public society. However, paradoxically, the public services can only endure where there are mechanisms for the material welfare of these public heroes so that they can maintain their material welfare while devoting their life to the public cause. The problem is solved within a state by the support of the state institutions for the providers of the public goods as we can also see in the contemporary practice of providing financial support for basic researches. However, it is far from clear whether and how the provider of the international public good can sustain its function without the support of a higher authority? The questions is absent in the Chinese theories of soft power.

While they see no tension between the increasing Chinese power and the commitment to the virtuous state character, the international version of the Mencian ethocracy is likely to be detrimental to the continued rise of the Chinese power. While soft power is a complementary power to hard material power, the attractiveness of the Mencian virtues is, in contrast, based on the delicate segregation of the producers of virtues from hard material power. Soft power overlaps with the governance by virtues as far as it also relies on the popularity that is based on the economic welfare and the subsequent stylization of life. However, unlike the Mencian virtues, the notion of soft power does not imply any tension between itself and the pursuit of hard power. Since the Mencian virtue is based on the freedom from both economic necessity and the pursuit of private material gains, the accumulation of hard power has to be curtailed to maximize the production of the Mencian virtues. In a simplified scheme, we can think of an inversed U-shaped graph of the Mencian virtue production as in Figure 1. The downward direction of the graph is especially important because the downward slope imply the Mencian production of virtue is designed to contribute to the public goods of society even at the expense of the producers of virtues. Thus,

⁴⁹ The term Mencius uses for this generalized economy is *tonggongyishi*(通功易事) meaning circulation of products and exchange of services. Mencius 2009, 64 translated by Irene Bloom.

there is an imperative restraint on the complementary relations between international virtues and hard power basis in the Mencian economy.

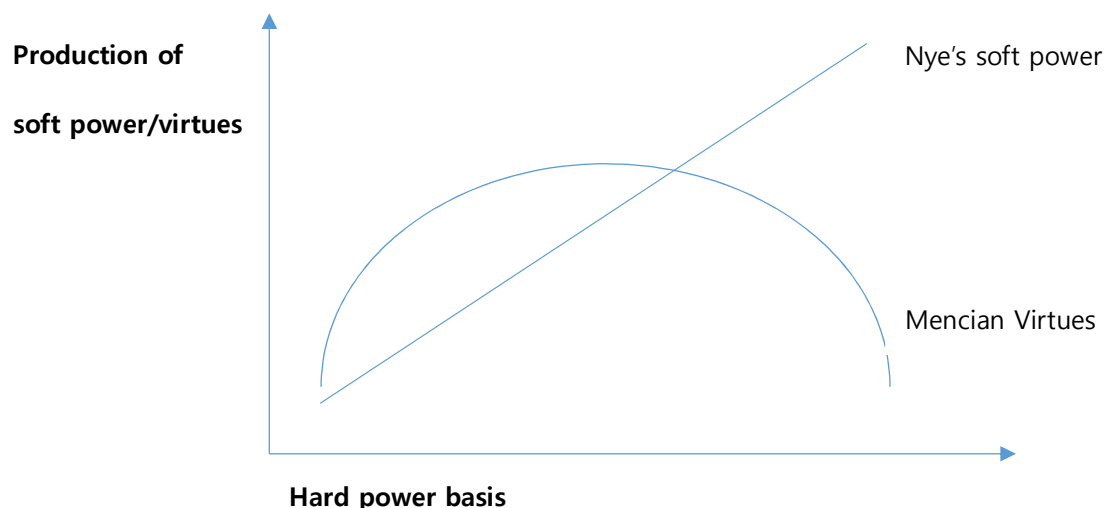


Figure 1. Relationship of soft power and hard power

This is why the Mencian ethocracy does not require an abundance of hard power as the necessary condition of a world leadership. Mencius often asserts that governing the world through virtue is easy and requires only a small fraction of total material power in the world.⁵⁰ Translated into the modern IR parlance, the Mencian ethocracy is a guide for a soft superpower in the world of hard power multipolarity. Perhaps, the closest historical example would be the early modern Choson Korea who had basically no functional state army even after the disaster of the Japanese invasion but prided itself with being the bastion of the East Asian civilization and ethics. Mencius explicitly argues the power drawn from the political economy of virtue can substitute the hard material power in the competition for the hegemony and world leadership.⁵¹ He argues the virtuous government will effectively turn the social force of another state against that state so that it becomes an ally in its struggle against the other state just as Nye's soft power is a tool to co-opt transnational non-state actors.⁵² A concept in IR would be the global governmentality suggested by Iver B. Neumann and Ole Jacob Sending. In their analysis, the Norwegian government forms a governing coalition with the social force, which is a governing actor on its own.⁵³ Likewise, in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 27.

⁵¹ Ibid., 5.

⁵² Ibid., 34-35.

⁵³ Sending and Neumann 2006.

the Mencian ethocracy, the virtuous government integrates with the social force of virtuous people to become a normative superpower.

Institutionalization of Heart

The above discussion lays out the macro-workings of the Mencian ethocracy. The other pillar of the ethocracy is the micro-foundation of self-cultivation that I call institutionalization of heart. I use heart as the translation of the Chinese concept *xin*(心). Heart means affective cognitive capacities of humans that provide emotional basis for the judgment in one's ethical life. While the macrodynamics of the virtue economics targets the realm of population and the circulation of various goods and characteristics in society, the microdynamics of institutionalization of heart transforms the individual subjectivity through the intensive application of disciplinary regimes to the body of each individual. The crucial implication is that the personal and private realms of human psyche are exploited for the benefits of the public, and this result in the conflation of the interpersonal realm with the political realm. The domain of human relationality such as friendship is the legitimate target for the political governance.⁵⁴ The attraction of a character is obtained through the voluntary submission to the regime of self-cultivation.

The main target of the Mencian self-cultivation is the four sprouts of human mind that Mencius claims are universal: "The mind's feeling of pity and compassion is the sprout of humaneness(*ren* 仁); the mind's feeling of shame and aversion is the sprout of rightness (*yi* 義); the mind's feeling of modesty and compliance is the sprout of propriety (*li* 禮); and the mind's sense of right and wrong is the sprout of wisdom (*zhi* 知)" (Bloom translated *xin* into mind).⁵⁵ Mencius expands the rudimentary conception of emotional basis of ethocracy in Confucius's treatment of shame to four fundamental categories of human heart. By identifying the four sprouts to be the equivalent of human body's two hands and two legs in the functioning of human body, Mencius proclaims the four sprouts to be the commanding elements that go beyond conscious human reasoning.⁵⁶ I argue that the argument constitutes an effective institutionalization of human heart in a unique textual formation. Combined with initial identification of emotion as the domain of governance, the Mencian four sprouts have reigned over the production of the Chinese subjects for centuries.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Mencius 2009, 114.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 35-36.

⁵⁷ Christopher Leigh Connery also has formulated the idea of the empire of the text to describe the textualization of the Chinese subjectivity since the early imperial China. Connery 1998.

The Mencian self-cultivation uses the four sprouts as universal public emotions that harmonize the human individual desire with the actions beneficial to the public. These sprouts lead human subject to the actions beneficial to the society, and all that is needed is to cultivate and enrich these emotions to have a stronger voice in human conduct. Accordingly, the good social action is thought to be an extension of a noble individual desire and freedom than to be an overcoming of the individual desire. If you cultivate your self well, then you will have a dual perspective on your own taste and desire that can find the potential public benefits in your everyday personal life. For example, in his legendary audience with King Xuan of Qi, Mencius makes an extraordinary claim that the trifle commiseration shown by the King to the sacrificial cow is the foundation of the world leadership. If one can develop this commiserating capacity and apply it to every aspect of government, one will be able to form the best possible government. This means that in every movement of his feeling the ruler should and can see that the destiny of public welfare is at stake.⁵⁸

Approached from the opposite direction, the Mencian self-cultivation also means the ruler should be able to drive his personal happiness in the well-being of public in general. Explaining the reason why the enjoyment of music by the king indicates the flourishing of the state, Mencius argues the genuine enjoyment of music lies in the sharing of the enjoyment with the general public.⁵⁹ Also, when he had an audience with King Xuan of Qi, Mencius recognized the legitimate pursuit of personal wealth and sexual satisfaction.⁶⁰ What he requests of the king in the examples is that the king should pursue his interests in a way that in the process the public also benefits from his pursuits of the private interests. The king should be able to raise its taste so that he can internalize the public enjoyment of music as his own personal enjoyment. Explaining why only the wise rulers can enjoy luxurious palaces, he argues that to take the enjoyment of the whole world to be his personal enjoyment is a sufficient condition to become a world leadership.⁶¹

This superimposition of public and private lives is the basic logic of the Mencian self-cultivation. Depending on one's perspective, it can be regarded as brutal colonization of private individual lives by the public sphere, or as liberation from the conflicting demands of private interests. Granted, Mencius took the latter view saying not to be reside in humanness(*ren*) is to become a slave of interests of the others.⁶²

Transferred into the international level, the institutionalization of heart offers a unique way of developing character power. State actor should be able to harmonize its national interest with the global interest and to develop the state apparatus dedicated to such a harmonization: perhaps, a

⁵⁸ Mencius 2009, 7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 13-14.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 19-20.

⁶¹ Ibid., 17.

⁶² Ibid., 36.

ministry of glocal interest? The attraction of such a state would depend on the universality of human commiserative capacity. Seeing a state dedicated to remedy human sufferings by reorganizing its own state structure, people with commiseration are expected to be attracted to and to confer authority to the state. Such an intertwining of the domestic and the international spheres is absent in any of the Chinese discussion on soft power and international morality. The morality of state is mainly a matter of foreign policy or the representatives of state in the various inter-state fora. Confined by its traditional notion of state and methodological nationalism, the Chinese theorists do not fully appreciate the significance of their theory of character power.

Combining both the macro and micro dynamics, the Mencian ethocracy calls for establishment of a class of virtuous states that are dedicated to the provision of public goods. This would mean a clear departure from the functionally undifferentiated world of the modern sovereign states. There would be states with ministries(or a substantial part of the citizen body) dedicated to promoting global interest in its domestic as well as foreign policies. Developing character power of a state would need a strategy for both national and global development. The original Mencian argument depicts a much more radical and novel departure from the familiar sovereign states system than those of the contemporary Chinese theorists. In a sense, it provides a middle path between narrow nationalism and impractical cosmopolitanism. While acknowledging the legitimate pursuit of national interest, it suggests that in the long-term, the development of the good state character can and should enhance both the national and the cosmopolitan political projects. Character power is not just a means to achieve international leadership but a way of caring about the state-self that is conducive to both the domestic and the international political life.

The Ethics of Attraction and Heteronational Founding: A Mencian Contribution?

So far, I've attempted to show there exists a Chinese way of governing world through soft power. With the heterogenous poles of attraction, the Chinese way also needs to confront the problem of difference. The nationalistic tendency of the Chinese IR theories is already prevalent and is one of the main obstacles that prevent the wider acceptance of the Chinese theory in the academic world.⁶³ To avoid the same assimilating tendency of the liberal universalism, it needs to find an ethics of attraction that will guides its heteronational founding.

Heteronational fouding is a domain of competition among diverse poles of attraction through revelation. I distinguished attraction through revelation from attraction through perfection. In the case of the former, attraction stems from an aesthetic and emotive force that goes beyond any common ground of evaluation. The situation of heterogeneous attractions lacks this common

⁶³ Kim 2016.

ground. In a sense, the absence is even more radical since the gathered people is not a formless mass as in Rousseau's founding moment but an assemblage of demarcated cultures with deeply entrenched identities. There might not even be any common aesthetic ground for attraction through revelation since even the aesthetic sensibility can differ across cultures.⁶⁴

Attraction through revelation contributes to heteronational founding since being compelled by a heterogeneous element, each culture will be provoked to explore the unforeseen possibility of ordering for themselves. When attraction was wielded through revelation, it does not mean a complete assimilation since the heterogeneous element will be imported with voluntary submission. However, without an ethics of attraction, attraction through revelation will be open to the danger of assimilating the other in one's own world. As we see in the case of war on terror rhetoric, there is no guarantee that attraction through revelation would not invoke more violence and assimilation of local orders. Therefore, what we need is an ethics of attraction that can function as an interface among different poles of attraction. In the moment of heteronational founding, it is not enough to rely on the particular form of procedural justice that feigns to be neutral and universal. As Nye and others have acknowledged, international institutions have power to reshape the domestic political environment through its disciplinary mechanism. Heteronational institutions is an arena where conflicting political principles wield its magnetic pull and push to obtain its functioning space. No universal procedural justice can solve this problem. Without an ethics of attraction, it will become another anarchical fight among contending assimilative powers.

Does the Mencian ethocracy deal any better with the problems of heterogenous founding and the ethics of attraction. Before discussing its contribution to the ethics of attraction, I argue it is at least a more modest form of attraction through perfection. The Mencian ethocracy is based on a general human capacity of commiseration to build its ethocracy and the power of attraction. The Mencian claims of universality is based on the very modest demand for some shared human traits. The universal applicability of Mencian ethocracy only demands that all humans would have the four sprouts of human virtues discussed above. It does not even demand for humans to be free of other hazardous human traits or more egotistic desires as we can see in his acknowledgement of sexual desires. In particular, empathy or human capacity for commiseration, one of the four sprouts, is such an universal organic trait that might be found even beyond the human species. Rousseau once remarked that our capability for commiseration is shared by animals such as horses and cows.⁶⁵ In a recent ethological study of endangered Avian species, Van Dooren also showed how these avian species are capable of showing distress at the sight of the death of its member and of developing even some cultural means of addressing this distress.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ For the historicity of human aesthetics sensibility, see Worringer 1953.

⁶⁵ Rousseau 2011, 39, 62.

⁶⁶ Van Dooren 2014, 137-138.

Nonetheless, it is still true that no matter how universal human capacity for certain feelings is, the way it is developed for harnessing character power depends on the different cultural contexts. As far as, the Mencian ethocracy aims at attraction through perfection it needs to rely on the Confucian understanding of political virtues. Perhaps, the most we can say is that the Mencian ethocracy is a culturally bound ethical regime with high general applicability as far as it relies on universally present human moral emotions. However, it is still a substantial progress than promoting a set of universal values to heterogeneous societies as in the universalization of the liberal democratic principles.

Moreover, the identification of commiseration as a governable human emotion is also valuable since it can function as affective base for developing an ethics of attraction. Naeem Inayatullah and David Blaney has once promoted an ethics of co-suffering as a basis for respecting the difference of the others.⁶⁷ However, our co-suffering capacity is not just a given attribute but also a perfectible trait. The Mencian ethocracy can be used as an initial cultural platform to develop an ethics of attraction according to the different cultural context of each society.

Developed in this direction, the Mencian ethocracy can have a function akin to agonistic respect in William Connolly's politics of identity/difference. Agonistic respect is a political ethos that guides democratic negotiation with the other. To restrain assimilative or annihilative mode of political negotiation while preserving the possibility toward reciprocal transformation, William Connolly invites us to cultivate the atheistic civic virtue of agonistic respect. It is agonistic since it affirms the resistance of identity toward difference and maintains inevitable distance from the heterogeneity in the world. At the same time, it is respectful since it exercises self-limit and acknowledges the possible value of the other for the self. It contests the certain claims of the other without allowing the privilege of incontestability to one's own faith.⁶⁸ Translated into the ethics of attraction, agonistic respect would mean developing one's own attraction through contestation and persuasion while allowing one's core identity to be disturbed by the attractive power of the other.

However, agonistic respect is not the only way to make one's self vulnerable to the other. It is often the overwhelming force of commiseration that makes us open to the existence of the different reality of the other and the need to transform our identity to address the problem of the other. What would be the ethics of attraction based on the Mencian ethocracy is not a subject I deal with here, but I believe the foregoing discussion would at least show the plausibility of such a direction. Also, if even the meta-ethics of attraction, in the end, has to rely on a certain basic trait as in Connolly's confession of nontheistic reverence, it is better to have multiple building blocks of such interfaces

⁶⁷ Inayatullah and Blaney 2004, 151-152.

⁶⁸ Connolly 1991, xxv-xxvi.

that will serve different societies in a flexible way.

The Way of Heteronational Founding: A Case for Theoretical Prudence

The idea of heteronational founding is a heretic one. Many people talk about the hegemonic order and the counter-hegemonic attempt by the Chinese power.⁶⁹ However, there is little attempt to explore seriously the possibility of the establishing heteronational order with multiple ideas on politics and order. However, not many dismisses the inevitable reality of intensifying heteronational interdependence. If we are to live with multiple centers of international orders, finding a way to navigate the tensions and complexities of heteronational finding would be a new political necessity.⁷⁰

The notion of attraction in Nye's soft power provided an opening to the exploration. However, the previous theorization of soft power is both indispensable and insufficient. The power of attraction is an indispensable element of heteronational founding. Without the attraction toward heterocultural sources of politics, the global institutional infrastructure will become increasingly dysfunctional and segregated. The secular liberal values of human dignity and individual freedom is indeed a legitimate source of attraction in many contexts. The promotion of liberal values in authoritarian context can indeed be noble and should be encouraged depending on the political contexts. In contrast to the constructivist critiques of Nye, I also believe the expansion of the liberal internationalism in the modern world partly stems from its intrinsic attraction vis-à-vis other civilizational traditions.

However, the power of attraction, particularly its unilateral version, is insufficient and problematic. There is no reason to assume the liberal democratic values are the only ideological political values with legitimate attraction. To cope with the challenge of heteronational founding, we need to affirm the multiple sources of attractive political values. To avoid confusion, it should be made clear that the affirming of multiple legitimate political values is different from the affirmation of multiple cultural attractions on the basis of the singular universality of liberal democracy. For example, Nye easily affirms the possible attraction of the Chinese culture on the premise that it embraces the liberal notion of civil society.⁷¹ The assumption that the procedural liberal politics can be separated from the substantive notion of culture has to be dropped in today's heteronational founding. Culture and politics are intrinsically intertwined, and there is no way to expand one's political values without endangering the cultural integrity of other life-ways. The

⁶⁹ A recent report by Ikenberry and his co-author also acknowledges the counter-hegemonic potential of the Chinese institutional statecraft(Ikenberry and Lim 2017).

⁷⁰ Brantley Womack's(2014) Multi-nodal world also predicts the inevitability of the multiples power centers.

⁷¹ Nye 2012.

attractive power of the liberal values may contribute to making world safe for democracy, but it will also threaten other forms of politics and culture.

Thus, the global institutional founding is contestation among substantial values in the heteronational context. Where there is no dominant national power, contending political centers will project their unique political values and practices to form global institutions as all the previous hegemonic powers have done in their turn. The difference today is that no hegemonic center can impose its rules of game to all the other heterocultural powers. They will have to learn how to build heterogeneous global order through heterocultural mediums of political negotiation that will certainly go beyond the familiar communicative and contractual mode of the Western political imagination. No monothetic, democratic or not, internationalism will suffice.

As an exploration of such alternative source of attraction, I examined the uniqueness of the Chinese character power theory in terms of its emphasis on the character of state while at the same time revealing its limit vis-à-vis the original promise of the Mencian ethocracy. The Chinese discourse of character power itself is a product of heteronational circulations that folds a heavy dose of nationalistic exceptionalism and postcolonial sentiment into the Chinese theory of international politics. There is no guarantee that the Chinese version of soft power theory will not fall into the same trap of exceptionalism and universalism, and many critiques of the Chinese IR already expressed their concerns on this point.⁷²

Accordingly, showing an alternative source of political attraction is not enough for heteronational founding. As the liberal politics of attraction has to respect the thorny problem of identity and difference, the Mencian ethocracy also need to show how it can develop its own ethics that develops the reciprocal respect for heteronational relations. Put in other words, it needs to show its capacity to build an heterocultural interface of virtue that would allow it to engage with the other on the premise of mutual transformability. This interface will be found in the anchoring of the Mencian politics in the human capacity of commiseration. The Mencian heterocultural interface then will show not just a new source of political attraction but also a different virtue ethics for the negotiation of identity and difference

To further the potential of the Mencian ethics of attraction, both Chinese and Western sides need to take a prudent approach to the Chinese intellectual tradition. On the one hand, many Chinese IR scholars are too rash in digging out theoretical resources from the Chinese tradition of philosophy and history. Their explorations are perfectly legitimate intellectual pursuits, but accompanied by the nationalistic aim of producing a uniquely Chinese theory, they often end up presenting parodic distortions of the original thesis with dubious assertion of the Chinese uniqueness. The result is

⁷² Zhang 2013; Callahan 2007; Callahan 2015.

often a decrease in the Chinese soft power and suspicions of the Chinese hegemonic ambition. On the other hand, many Western observers prematurely dismiss the possible contributions from the long history Chinese political theorizing. The Chinese tradition of politics and philosophy is as legitimate inspirational resource as any other classical tradition like the Greek philosophy that is available to the modern world. Therefore, there is no reasonable ground to reject, *a priori*, the archaeological explorations of the ancient Chinese wisdom to come up with a new way of engaging world politics and international relations. We still draw valuable political lessons from Aristotle or Plato despite the many features of Athenian politics such as slavery that do not fit the modern sensibility. Likewise, although the Chinese tradition may have apparent features of authoritarianism and hierarchy that go against the modern notion of equality and democracy, it is still a valuable source of political and international thought. What we need on both Chinese and Western sides is a grain of theoretical humility and prudence that would allow prolonged investigations of this uncharted branch of human wisdom.

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