

groups, and societies cannot be treated in the same ways as individuals: An individual direct experience of personal humiliation is very different from the collectively learned and externally imposed notion of “collective humiliation” marked by an event that happened a long time in the past. Hence, when writing about “a widespread feeling of humiliation [that] pervades Arab societies” (p. 150) or about “Italian perceptions of injustice” over the 1915 Treaty of London, which promised and then denied to Italy the possession of the Dalmatian coast and Fiume (p. 309), Midlarsky assumes that all “Arabs” and “Italians” shared this feeling of humiliation. However, an engagement with more sociologically grounded analyses, such as those by scholars of nationalism (i.e., Ernest Gellner, Michael Mann, John Breuilly or Rogers Brubaker), would show that in the early twentieth century, most citizens of Italy and the Middle East were illiterate peasants who had little or no comprehension of what a nation is and thus could not develop a coherent sense of collective humiliation.

It is important to distinguish between different social strata and show which groups were influenced by the narratives of “national humiliation” and which remained ignorant. To understand how these processes operate and how collective action is generated, one cannot take pronouncements and speeches of the extremist leaders at face value (p. 168). It is also crucial to look at the internal, societal factors that have shaped popular response to extremist political movements like fascism, Nazism, communism, nationalism, and Islamic radicalism. When tackling the problem of mortality salience, one has to differentiate between an individual’s sense of personal mortality and nationalist or religious visions that see nation-states and religions through the prism of collective immortality. By focusing on societies rather than just states, one would avoid a too symmetrical view of complex and messy historical realities that are often less visible from the overly externalized analysis.

To sum up, Midlarsky has produced an excellent, theoretically innovative, and empirically rich study. A more comprehensive engagement with the sociological dynamics involved would have made *Origins of Political Extremism* even better.

Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics. By Yuan-Kang Wang. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011. 328p. \$55.00.

Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power. By Yan Xuetong. Edited by Daniel A. Bell and Sun Zhe. Translated by Edmund Ryden. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. 312p. \$32.50.
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What can Chinese history tell us about the factors—both material and moral—that will shape China’s national secu-

rity strategy as it emerges on the world stage? Does evidence from the pre-Qin, Song, and Ming periods offer support for a unique “Chinese School” of international relations theory? The two books under review answer these questions, among others.

The primary argument in Yuan-Kang Wang’s *Harmony and War* is that Chinese national security strategy always has been, and always will be, guided by the material capabilities possessed by China and its primary competitors. Wang offers his structural-realist argument as an alternative to popular explanations of Chinese strategy that assign great importance to the cultural tradition of Confucian pacifism, as well as to those that, while agreeing with his assertion that Chinese leaders have historically adhered to the principles of *realpolitik*, attribute that pattern to an embedded sort of “cultural realism,” rather than the distribution of material capabilities (e.g., see Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History*, 1998). In short, Wang’s thesis is that despite any rhetoric that may suggest otherwise, Chinese leaders are not constrained by their Confucian ideals. Rather, they engage in aggressive use of military force and territorial expansion during times of relative strength, and pursue accommodation and emphasize harmony during times of relative inferiority.

The core of Wang’s book is an extensive and admirable analysis of historical documents from the Northern (960–1127) and Southern (1127–79) Song dynasties, as well as the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 use historical records of decision making and national security strategy in order to uncover the determinants of strategic choice during almost 700 years of Chinese history. Using what can be described as a loose method of process tracing, the author shows that Chinese leaders made strategic choices that were primarily guided by the relative balance of material capabilities, operationalized in terms of “troops, horses, grain production, government budget, fiscal balances, and domestic rebellions” (p. 32). For example, the material strength of the early Ming dynasty allowed it to undertake offensive warfare on land in places like Vietnam and at sea, particularly with the expeditions of Admiral Zheng He. As for Ming–Mongol relations, “the broad contour of Ming strategic choice was consistent with structural realist explanations. Chinese grand strategy went through three stages: from offensive to defensive and then to accommodation. This shift correlates with the balance of power between the Ming and the Mongols” (p. 143).

One of the subtle but significant strengths of the book is the way that the theories—Confucian pacifism, cultural realism, and structural realism—are tested. While Confucian pacifism and Wang’s structural realism can be easily distinguished because they predict divergent outcomes, the two realist theories are much harder to disentangle because they both predict the same outcome—Chinese

security strategy that is based on the principles of power politics. The difference between the cultural realist and structural realist arguments is only found when addressing the source (culture or structure) of the realpolitik approach. This separation, of course, is much harder to accomplish from the distant viewing platform upon which modern scholars of ancient history are relegated. For his success in this endeavor, the author deserves a great deal of credit.

Because the expectations of structural realism remain exceedingly salient throughout the historical analyses that form the core of *Harmony and War*, the basic message of Wang's final chapter on the future of Chinese national security strategy is convincing but entirely unsurprising: Regardless of cultural influences or leadership transitions, China will continue to preach accommodation and focus on internal economic development as long as it remains militarily and economically inferior to the United States. As the material balance shifts between those two countries, especially in East Asia, we should, however, expect to see leaders in Beijing favor more aggressive national security strategies. And, although it is possible to read more into Wang's concluding lament that "[p]roperly managing the U.S.-China security competition will be the most challenging task in the 21st Century" (p. 209), there is a slightly disappointing effect when such an ambitious historical analysis ends with an assessment that could emerge from the pens of much less talented scholars—or students.

Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power, edited by Daniel Bell, is largely comprised of several essays by the influential Chinese scholar and foreign policy advisor Yan Xuetong. Yan's central point is that leadership that is both competent and morally sound generates genuine, sustainable political power. After Bell's introduction, the second, third, and fourth chapters of Yan's book act as its lynchpin; it is in these pages that he unpacks the political philosophy of the pre-Qin period (lasting until 221 B.C.E.) by analyzing the work of Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, Han-feizi, and Xunzi, among other masters. He gives particular attention to Xunzi's (311–230 B.C.E.) conceptualization of hegemony toward the end of the Warring States period.

Throughout Yan's essays, his objectives are threefold: to juxtapose the various forms of rule in what he calls "fractured" systems (tyranny, hegemony, and humane authority); to show that there was a sort of consensus among the pre-Qin masters about the superior sustainability of rule by humane authority; and to offer a blueprint for modern Chinese leaders to replace what he sees as a U.S. system of hegemonic rule with a new era of Chinese leadership built upon humane authority. Such an era would be based on three principles: balance between responsibilities and rights among states, acknowledgment that developed states should adhere to global norms even more than developing countries, and the notion that the global system is "all under heaven as one" (p. 220). While the first and second prin-

ciples would merely remind an American scholar of Robert Zoellick's 2005 call for China to become a "responsible" stakeholder in the international system, one might imagine the third principle striking that same American scholar as either exceedingly idealistic or quite unnerving.

Where does the ability to rule by humane authority come from? According to Yan, the root of political power is found in a leadership class that is competent and morally informed. The benefits of meritocracy are extolled throughout the book, including references to the importance of an educated civil service, low levels of corruption, and the frequent infusion of new knowledge into the highest political echelons. The author's call for increased meritocracy and the evolution of political legitimacy culminates when he writes that, "[g]iven that democracy is the universal standard of political morality . . . China must make the moral principle of democracy one of those it promotes" (p. 219). Such an explicit call for a genuine multi-party electoral system in China serves as a direct challenge to the power of the so-called princeling class within China.

Like *Harmony and War*, *Ancient Chinese Thought* mixes rich historical analysis with modern policy prescription. But Yan surpasses Wang not only in the depth and nuance of his historical understanding but also in the force of his multi-dimensional argument. Viewed through a simple lens, this volume might appear as one more in a line of recent attempts to unpack the conceptual richness of "power" in the context of international relations. On a deeper level, however, Yan's work stands out due to the additional leverage he gains from new historical interpretation, from the relevance of his thesis on political legitimacy to domestic politics in a transitioning China, and from the contribution his new approach makes to what might be considered an emerging "Chinese School" of international relations. In fact, it is this last strength that serves as an initial point of conversation between these two books and their talented authors.

What we have in Wang and Yan are two self-identifying realist scholars who use the same basic assumptions about anarchy, states, and the pursuit of survival to nonetheless reach very different conclusions about the one concept that realists most typically agree upon—power. Wang is an avowed structural realist, and, not surprisingly, his work has led him to the conclusion that material capabilities are decisive in determining not only the outcome of wars but also the strategic decisions that precede them. In this way, his work serves as prime evidence that Western-based theories of international politics are, in fact, the most efficient way to understand Chinese strategic behavior, both historically and in the contemporary era. While Yan's decision to engage the concept of power through the lens of political leadership places him squarely under the umbrella of classical realist scholars, his conclusion that true political power is sustained by humane authority moves him to a unique position within the realist camp, where the judicious use of material capabilities, active pursuit of moral

responsibility, and the desire to rule by consent serve as three sides to the triangle of national interest.

This is not to say that *Ancient Chinese Thought* is immune to criticism. I suppose, however, that Yan's work is somewhat inoculated by the critical chapters contained within the book itself. Still, one point of contention is a familiar and important one: that Yan's historical analysis is misleading because it suggests excessive coherence in the political philosophy of the pre-Qin masters. Yang Qianru (pp. 147–60) notes in her critique that "Yan's exegesis of the political thought of pre-Qin masters is not sufficiently comprehensive" (p. 150). She goes on to argue: "Study of history is inevitably founded on reality, but when the fruits of its theory are used to serve actual politics it cannot respond to the needs of only one era, by taking a biased

view from history books or indulging in wishful thinking to explain things" (p. 160).

In many ways, this type of criticism can again be directed toward Wang who, despite his careful and thorough analysis of the Song and Ming dynasties, is unable to avoid the impression that he is in possession of a proverbial realist hammer that will, somehow, always find its nail. Perhaps this is the fate of any scholar that seeks to divine intentions from observable behavior and the balance of material capabilities. It is interesting to consider, given the simple motives that Wang assigns to seemingly complex decisions and Yan's position as an important political advisor, what sort of intentions the former might assign to the recent scholarship and policy prescriptions of the latter.