

Yali Li*

A Transcultural Interpretation of Key Concepts in China-US Relations: Hegemony, Democracy, Individualism and Collectivism

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Abstract: China-US bilateral relations suffer from periodical setbacks and transcultural communication has a positive role to play in improving those relations. As the largest two economies in the world today, both China and the United States draw inspiration from different traditions and cultures, rendering it difficult for the two countries to see eye to eye with each other when it comes to the key concepts of hegemony, democracy, individualism, and collectivism. Etymological roots, historical traditions, and national experiences help explain political realities and theoretical frameworks concerning these key concepts. For hegemony, force is emphasized for its role in US dominance or authority while China condemns hegemonism. For democracy, the means of the normative right to vote is highlighted in the US while the ends of people's needs and welfare are underscored in China. For individualism and collectivism, it is no longer viable to stand aloof and mind just one's own business, as the world is shrinking into a global village with intertwined destinies. A transcultural interpretation of key concepts in China-US relations can help enhance mutual understanding and facilitate dialogue through exchange and communication, hence contributing to the improvement of bilateral ties.

Keywords: transcultural; hegemony; democracy; individualism; collectivism

China-US relations are deemed as one of the most prominent bilateral relations in the world today (Zhang & Xu, 2021, p. 41). However, ever since the formal establishment of diplomatic ties between China and the United States of America in the late 1970s, the relationship has been bumpy with ups and downs, twists and turns, and even suffers from retrogression after President Trump takes office and pushes for his America First policy. The Biden Administration regards China as “the most serious competitor” and further underlines the confrontation with China, resulting in a new

***Corresponding author: Yali Li**, Department of English, School of Foreign Languages, University of International Relations, No. 12, Poshangcun, Haidian District, Beijing, China, E-mail: yali1949@sina.com. <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-7689-8865>

dilemma in China-US relations (Wu, 2021, p. 37). Despite economic conflicts, technological competition, political and ideological differences, cultural misunderstandings should also be factored in troubled China-US relations. This paper seeks to address the question of China-US cultural mindsets by analyzing the differences in their respective understanding of several core cultural concepts, attempting to explore the reasons behind the dilemma of China-US relations and offer policy recommendations to improve the relations.

The China-US relationship is a hot topic in academic research and the related literature is very rich. Searching the phrase “the US-China relations” on JSTOR, a digital library providing open access to more than 12,000,000 research articles, books, pictures, and primary sources in 75 disciplines, results in 5694 papers as of August 26, 2023. Searching the phrase “the China-US relations” on CNKI, the most visited Chinese academic database, results in 8410 papers as of August 26, 2023. Most of these papers are from the angles of foreign policies, government relations, economic and business ties, strategic competition, party politics, big-power relations, geopolitics, security strategies, great-power rivalry, etc., and few are from transcultural perspectives. Searching the phrase “transcultural interpretation of the US-China relations” on JSTOR, only one result is produced which is irrelevant. Searching the phrase “transcultural interpretation of the China-US relations” on CNKI, only six results are produced, three of which are irrelevant, indicating ample room for approaching the China-US relations from a transcultural perspective.

In the Chinese academic and intellectual discourse as regards China-US relations, the most prominent high-profile key concepts are probably hegemony, democracy, individualism, and collectivism, the first two frequently discussed in politics and the last two in transcultural studies. Searching these four concepts on JSTOR and CNKI, the numbers of results produced are 14,360; 120,677; 61,348; 2659 and 571; 8896; 7015; 3872 respectively, with democracy most discussed on both databases and collectivism least discussed on JSTOR and hegemony least discussed on CNKI, which partly reveals the attention gap between English-writing authors and Chinese-writing authors. Hence this article devotes itself to a transcultural interpretation of these concepts in the hope of paving a new path to improving the China-US relations through better understanding of each other in those respects.

1 On Hegemony

Ever since the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, the United States has been playing a dominant role in the world. Being the world’s only superpower or the hegemon, it occupies a conspicuous place in political discourse and economic arena, bolstered by military might and technological advancement. However, the past

decade has witnessed a shrinking gap between China and the US, prompting Western academia and media to utter an outcry for increasingly prominent bipolarity between China and the US. Some even label China with the term hegemon, which is a misnomer. The American and Chinese idea of hegemon or hegemony differs due to their diverging historical tradition as well as political reality, as once again demonstrated by the recent performance of the respective governments in their response to the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The lexical origin of hegemony provides a cultural clue to the understanding of why the US is a hegemon in the literal denotation of that word whereas China is not. The word “hegemony” comes into the English vocabulary from the Greek word “hēgemonia”, a noun derived from the verb “hēgeisthai” (meaning “to lead”), from which the word exegesis (meaning “exposition” or “explanation”) is hence derived. As an abstract and conceptual noun, “hēgemonia” first and foremost appears in one of Herodotus’ works to describe leadership and authority of a close alliance of city-states for a common military and political end, a position of honor accorded first to Sparta in its resistance to the Persian invasion of ancient Greece (Anderson, 2017, p. 1).

According to the definition by Merriam-Webster, hegemony means preponderant influence or authority over others, implying ideological, economic, cultural, or social influence exerted by an overwhelmingly dominant group. The synonyms for hegemony include ascendancy, ascendancy, dominance, dominion, domination, imperium, preeminence, predominance, reign, sovereignty, and supremacy. Words interrelated to hegemony include arm, lordship, primacy, superiority, scepter, authority, chokehold, clutch, hold, command, grip, mastery, takeover, sway, direction, jurisdiction, clout, management, might, eminence, pull, weight, moment, importance, prerogative, right, privilege, and the list seems inexhaustible.

The word hegemony was first introduced into the English vocabulary in the middle of the 16th century, a time when an up-and-coming Elizabethan England was scrambling for its rightful place in Europe, in reference to the control and dominion once wielded by a number of ancient Greek states, and it is re-applied in the following centuries as more nations subsequently rise to power. By the mid-20th century, it has acquired a new sense referring to the cultural or social influence wielded by a predominant member over the others of its kind, for instance the domination within an industrial sector by a certain business conglomerate over other smaller businesses. European intellectuals have long been debating the consequence of the hegemony of the US pop culture around the world.

Hegemony, in a more generic sense, is meant by Antonio Gramsci as how a ruling group establishes as well as maintains its rule. Hegemony is basically rule by consent, or the intellectual and cultural leadership achieved by a certain class, stratum, class fraction, or social group, as part and parcel of a larger project of domination or

class rule (Robinson, 2005, p. 560). According to Gramsci, the concept of hegemony emphasizes the importance of the way the ruling class controls institutions such as the press, radio, and trade unions, advocating persuasion, consent, and doctrinal flexibility. In a general sense, ideology is, for Gramsci, no less “concrete” or important than the economic structure of a society, for the very reason that “economy” as a pure “substratum” simply does not exist (Frosini, 2017, p. 193). In short, the concept of hegemony by Gramsci summarizes and recapitulates in Western thought the eternal argument between rhetoric and philosophy, politics and knowledge, and power and dialectic. In Gramsci’s hegemony, the antinomy is inherent, which symbolizes a bold attempt to reconcile the demand of philosophy with the requirement of political action. Hence, Gramsci’s hegemony is many-layered, multiform, and complex, characterized by differentiated yet interwoven polarities (Fontana, 2005, p. 97).

Several differing strands of Western research are explicitly devoted to the scrutiny of hegemony in the post-war Anglophone international relation theories, most trying to justify hegemony, to say the least. These include not only power-transition and hegemonic-stability theory, which constitute a major focus for academia, but also neo-Gramscian and English School variants. Among them, neo-Gramscian approach proves the most distinctive. For studying hegemony, most of the international relations frameworks focus on the relations among nation states and other political entities. Many deem international politics as earmarked by the rise and fall of dominant powers. Some emphasize political dynamics, some the processes of economic change, and some both (Ikenberry & Nexon, 2019, p. 400).

In the study of hegemony, the US is often the specimen under scrutiny. According to American scholars, their hegemony inspires in turn anger, admiration, intimidation, despair and retaliation. Is their hegemonic world viable? How will its order be maintained? What is the future of their hegemonic world? The answers to these questions depend on one’s worldview. Many scholars view this world in the domination or clockwork model. Others view it in terms of a web or self-organizing model. Current US policies work within the first paradigm (Bausch, 2004, pp. 39–51). In the US, theoretical queries about the functioning of the character and logic of American global leadership and the world economy initially drive the research of interstate hegemony. The literature can be divided into several phases.

The first phase offers structural arguments on material capabilities and systemic outcomes. In the hegemonic-stability variant, it argues that the providing of international public goods requires the role of a leading state—a state both able and willing to perform the role of an international quasi-government and thus deploy its superior military and economic resources to create such goods. The most fundamental form of the theory contends that, firstly, open-trade regimes are a form of international public goods and, secondly, they depend on a hegemonic power. Within its early formations, the United Kingdom successfully adopted this

role by repealing the Corn Laws and using carrots and sticks of formerly-closed and now open economic system. During the inter-war period, London once attempted to play a similar role but failed to do so. Since 1945, the US has replaced the UK as the latest international hegemon, which played a crucial role in establishing and maintaining the Bretton Woods system, including the collection of international banks forming the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (later WTO).

Any expectation of the US provision of international public goods may prove to be wishful thinking from its partners. Various iterations of hegemonic studies focus on such essential topics as the stability of hegemonic order, the cause and intensity of wars during hegemonic transitions, and the connections between hegemonic powers and their providing of international public goods. More extensive understanding of public goods is incorporated. This includes the provision of international security and the absence of great-power wars. It is always the dominant powers that set the game rules for their systems: They allocate prestige and status, underwrite the economic orders, and regulate terms of foreign policies. Hegemonic powers seek these policies not just out of altruism but simply rather a desire to shape and maintain an international system which serves their own interests and values. US President Bill Clinton writes in the preface to *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, issued by the White House in the July of 1994: “Never has American leadership been more essential—to navigate the shoals of the world’s new dangers and to capitalize on its opportunities. American assets are unique: our military strength, our dynamic economy, our powerful ideals, and, above all, our people. We can and must make the difference through our engagement, but our involvement must be carefully tailored to serve our interests and priorities”. The strategy displays a blunt announcement of the American goals: to credibly guarantee security with their military forces ready to fight; to bolster US economic revitalization; and to promote democracy worldwide. During his fruitful presidential campaign, Donald Trump repeatedly argued against the existing international order which weakened the United States, claiming previous US presidents and diplomats stroke horrible international deals on alliances, trade, and arms control. He made it very clear that he saw allies as “business partners” and the relationships with them in transactional terms: “Pay up or we won’t protect you” (McFaul, 2016).

The Cold War period also witnessed the parallel progress of power-transition theory, which holds that the most stable and typical distribution of power involves a dominant player standing atop a pyramid of power. The clear priority of a preeminent power can deter lower-tier states from provoking major-power wars as well as render the preeminent power safe and secure enough to avoid initiating such conflicts itself. Major-power and system-wide wars can occur during power transitions when rising powers attain substantial power to threaten dominant powers. In the

power-transition theories, system-wide and major-power wars begin either while declining powers launch preventative wars against rising ones or while challengers feel bold enough to initiate such wars themselves. The result is, however, always major power conflicts that either end with new leading powers or the re-establishment of the incumbent as dominant powers. This is when China becomes relevant in the eyes of some western scholars.

Those Western scholars, from their understanding of hegemony, finally come in sight of a similar notion in ancient China to denote military leadership and primacy of a city-state league: the “ruler of the dominant state was given the title of ‘senior’ or ‘hegemon’ (*ba*) by the Zhou king, who charged him to defend what was left of the Zhou realm. Formally these leagues were hierarchical groupings of independent states, bound together through treaties” that in turn, were confirmed by historically specific practices (Lewis, 2000, p. 365). Whichever the terminology, this example suggests that the essential idea of hegemonic powers is likely to appear in various historical settings; and hegemony can probably constitute a ubiquitous feature of the international relations, if broadly understood.

Worth mentioning here is the idea of hegemony reflected in *Guanzi*, a colossal collection of sayings and propositions of various thinkers before the Qin Dynasty. This book is believed to have been compiled by Guan Zhong (723–645 BCE), a well-known philosopher, economist, statesman, and strategist. The discussions on hegemony in this book are mainly strategic comments on how to govern a nation, comments that contain many aspects of modern theories of hegemony as well as many unique thoughts deeply rooted in the Chinese tradition (Wang, 2007, p. 35). The essence of hegemony in *Guanzi* is about the deep correlation between morality and power and the high relevance of domestic policies with international policies.

Another name often associated with the Chinese concept of hegemony is Shang Yang (circa 390–338 BCE), a central figure of Legalism which is the state ideology of the Qin Dynasty. His ideas of hegemony are mainly reflected in the following three thoughts: the inseparable relationship between farming and war, the primacy of the rule of law, and the necessity of centralized powers in monarchy. Among them, the dialectical relation between farming and war is a prerequisite for hegemony; the thought of rule of law is an essential guarantee for hegemony; the thought of centralized powers in monarchy is the cornerstone of hegemonic thought (Li, 2008, p. 78).

Hegemonic thoughts in ancient China can also be found in the *History of Warring States*, a book arguably compiled at the closing period of the Western Han Dynasty by Liu Xiang (77–6 BCE). The main content of the book is about the competition for hegemony, which is believed to be based on the overall strength of a nation. As political power is considered the core element of the overall strength of hegemons, and it primarily relies on talent policies, the competition for talent forms the foundation of hegemonic competition. With an emphasis on strength, attention is

also paid to the role of norms among nations. Norms are the basis of hegemonic legitimacy, and compliance with these norms can provide legitimacy for hegemons to use force abroad. Therefore, hegemonic powers must establish new norms despite the associated risks. (Yan & Huang, 2008, p. 79). This book mainly discusses the two strategies of annexation and alliance, both of which are premised on war. The hegemonic thinking in the book is relevant to the current understanding of strength, system, and grand strategy in modern international relations.

Some scholars noticed the restriction on hegemony in China. In his book *The United States and China*, Fairbank (1983, p. 57) introduces the ancient Chinese notion of government by moral prestige. The Mandate of Heaven, for example, goes back to the early Zhou period. According to the Chinese classic *Book of History*, the wickedness of the last emperor of the Shang, who was no doubt a tyrant, caused Heaven to warrant a mandate to the Zhou to topple him and depose his dynasty since the Shang people had failed in overthrowing that tyrant. As later modified, this ancient idea evolved into the famous concept of the “right of rebellion”, meaning the last resort of the public against a tyrannical government. It emphasizes good conducts or virtues of the rulers as ethical sanction for sustaining his rule. Bad conducts on his part invalidate that sanction. As Heaven withdraws its Mandate, people are justified in supplanting the dynasty if they can. The Chinese literati have censured bad government and rebels have risen against it in terms of this theory. It has also reinforced the belief that the ruler should be advised by learned people to ensure his right conduct. This is a great political invention, providing ancient Chinese rulers with a rational and ethical sanction for the exercise of their authority, at a time when most rulers of empires rely mainly upon religious sanction.

The apothegms and aphorisms of the Four Books depict paternal government as the key to social order and the defense of the state. “If your majesty,” says Mencius to King Hui, “will indeed dispense a benevolent government to the people, being sparing in the use of punishments and fines, and making the taxes and levies light, so causing that the fields shall be plowed deep, diligently weeded, and that the strong-bodied during their days of leisure shall cultivate their filial piety, fraternal respectfulness, sincerity, and truthfulness, serving thereby at home their fathers and elder brothers and, abroad, their elders and superiors—you will then have a people who can be employed, with sticks which they have prepared, to oppose the strong mail and sharp weapons of the troops of Ch’in and Ch’u” (Fairbank, 1983, p. 63). That victory lies in where the popular will inclines.

The sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a touchstone for international responsibility of the US and China. In face of the serious crisis, human beings once again stand at a crossroads. Which road to take? Manufacture political disputes, or uphold rationality and science? Seek isolation, or strengthen

coordination and unity? Pursue unilateralism, or promote multilateral cooperation? The US and China have made different choices.

At an age when global unity is most needed to fight against the pandemic, the US, however, still pursues an agenda of unilateralism, isolationism, and “America first”, threatening and bullying international organizations, cruelly treating asylum seekers, and wantonly imposing sanctions, thus making itself the biggest troublemaker to global stability and security. The Trump Administration tries every means in its toolbox to scapegoat the World Health Organization, such as fabricating false charges against that organization and eventually withdrawing from WHO, just in order to shirk responsibility for its disastrous anti-pandemic policies. At a crucial time when COVID-19 spreads globally and endangers health, well-being, and human life, countries all over the world should join hands in their response to the pandemic to safeguard global public health security. Nevertheless, during the pandemic, the US government still imposes unilateral sanctions upon countries such as Cuba, Syria, Venezuela, and Iran, which makes it hard for the sanctioned countries to promptly access anti-pandemic medical supplies in need, hence aggravating the humanitarian crisis.

In sharp contrast, even while China is under tremendous pressure of coronavirus control at home, much Chinese assistance to the international community has been timely provided, including goggles, masks, ventilators and protective suits, as well as provision of support for worldwide virus prevention and control through promptly sharing experience and information with the international community. It is firmly believed throughout China that all nations ought to make choices that are both right and righteous for the essential interests of all humanity and the ultimate wellbeing of future generations, as defeating that epidemic demands solidarity, mutual help, and hearty cooperation among all nations. To achieve the vision and mission of a global community of shared future for mankind, it is hoped that countries can support one another and join hands in containing the spread of that virus and protect the wellbeing and health of people all over the world. From the outset, exchange and cooperation with the international community have been encouraged and fostered in China in the form of shared information, enhanced high-level communication, and hearty cooperation in scientific and technological research with other countries and international organizations. Much has been achieved in China to provide help and contribute strength and ingenuity to the global fight against that coronavirus.

Different interpretations of the term hegemony help explain the sharp contrast between the US and China in their respective policies both at home and abroad. With this term scrutinized, the next move of the two countries in the face of future crises can be better anticipated. As order and governance occupy a prominent place in the overlapping realm of US and Chinese concepts of hegemony, it is high time that

hegemony was redefined in a post-COVID-19 era to accommodate transcultural implications, the most urgent of which is to find a way out of this pandemic by providing the needed public goods to people worldwide to restore order by way of good governance and multilateral cooperation. In face of the common challenge to mankind, it is hard for any country to resort to hegemony to secure its absolute security without taking into consideration the well-being of other countries.

2 On Democracy

Democracy is another ambiguous term imbued with diverging definitions in American and Chinese political and cultural landscapes. The US, having claimed the moral high grounds, finds it increasingly difficult to continue the myth of glamorizing the face value of this term, whereas China, guided by its people-centered ideology, reaps the benefits of sincerely putting the people first. This argument has been partly echoed by Fukuyama (2011, p. 16; p. 26) in his attention to political anxieties resulting from many species of governance failure plaguing “democratic” countries and in his taking China as a handy paradigm of state formation and asking why other civilizations do not follow the path it sets.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, democracy denotes a system of government in which all the peoples of a nation can vote to select their representatives, such as in a parliamentary democracy. Hence it can refer to a country that has this system of government, such as in some Western “democracies”. It can also be used as an uncountable noun, suggesting equal and fair treatment of everyone in any organizations, etc., and their innate right to participate in making decisions. Democracy thus begins with a very humble and limited sense of the right to vote in elections, later assembling more positive associations to its core idea along the way.

In Western political theories, democracy is often traced back to ancient Greece, where dem(o) means people, as in demagoguery, demography. The US and Europe often brag about their democratic traditions, seemingly justifying why the West is at the forefront of the world in terms of scientific and technological development, industrialization, and especially military capabilities. However, this is not the case. Ancient Greece had a total population of less than one million, with thousands of city-states scattered along the eastern Mediterranean coast. The populations of these city-states range from just a few hundred to tens of thousands. Herbert George Wells states in his book *The Outline of History* that there are few city-states in ancient Greece boasting a population of more than 50,000. Even if there are “big” city-states with a population of more than that number, half or more of the residents are slaves and foreigners, and two-thirds of the free people are women and children, who unfortunately enjoy no democracy (Wu, 2021, p. 248).

As far as its essence goes, the so-called ancient Greek democracy is close to the primitive tribal democracy and does not have much classical or universal significance. For instance, it usually takes just half a day for a battle between ancient Greek city-states to decide the winner, which is nothing more than a village communal fighting with weapons. Western countries, including the US, relentlessly deify Greek democracy and its military tradition and culture, and regard it as the source of American and European political culture, which not only whitewashes the political, cultural, and military origins of the US and Europe but also falsifies the history of the political system. The opening of new seafaring routes and the following waves of colonization stimulated Europeans to pursue more advanced firearms and ships, thus igniting the process of scientific and technological innovation and the Industrial Revolution, which incorporates certain historical contingency and bears no direct causality with any superiority of their democratic system. Europe was dominated by feudalism until the Napoleonic Wars, which were essentially the wars of European feudal monarchs against a revolutionary France. In other words, Europe carried out the technological and industrial revolution first, while later emerged the establishment of Western-style democracy, not the other way around (Parker, 1991).

Since the 19th century, Europe and the US, with advanced science and technology and early industrialization, accelerated the process of global expansion, turning most parts of Asia and Africa into their colonies and semi-colonies. This process enables Europe and the US to accumulate wealth, establish so-called democratic systems, and play with “democratic games”, including the introduction of universal suffrage (Lin, 2020:, p. 45). Fukuyama (2011, p. 397) analyzes with regret: “Thus the European path to modernization was not a spasmodic burst of change across all dimensions of development but rather a series of piecemeal shifts over nearly fifteen hundred years. In this peculiar sequence, individualism on a social level could precede capitalism; rules of law could precede the formation of a modern state; and feudalism, in the form of strong pockets of local resistance to a central authority, could be the foundation of modern democracy”. This is an open acknowledgment that the European Industrial Revolution is not the “outcome” of Western democratic politics.

The lack of government authority, low efficiency, and mobilization in dealing with crises are natural defects of the separation of power and the one-person-one-vote democracy in the West. Because of this, Germany, Japan, and other latecomers, in their take-off stage of modernization, all pursue typical dictatorship, autocracy, and even totalitarianism, instead of Western classic democratic systems. Even the US and Britain chose to strengthen the authority of the government in every major crisis, such as during the Second World War. Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s opposition to American political tradition was endorsed by being elected four times in a row as the US President. Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington have to admit that

democracy is “not always conducive to political stability” (Fukuyama, 2011, p. 397). Huntington is best known for his claim that “political order ought to receive priority over democratization, a development strategy that came to be known as the ‘authoritarian transition’. This was the path followed by Turkey, South Korea, and Indonesia, which modernized economically under authoritarian rulers and only later opened up their political systems to democratic contestation” (Fukuyama, 2011, p. 397).

However, China enjoys a time-honored political tradition of people-centered ideology, an extremely important resource in Chinese traditional culture, which emerged during the transition between the Shang and Zhou Dynasties. The people-centered thought has transformed valuing heaven and gods to respecting morality and protecting the people, and then from valuing the people over heaven to valuing the people over the kings. For example, the Confucian aristocracy of merit or talent comes closer to the original Greek idea of aristocracy, “government by the best”, than do the subsequent European hereditary aristocracies of birth. Over the years, China has ushered in a brand new phase of development, and its nature has also changed from primitive society to class society, which is manifested in slave society, feudal society, and the new People’s Republic, where people finally become masters of the country. People-centered thought has always existed and exerted an essential role in the progress and change of the national political system, especially in the 20th century.

Dr. Sun Yat-sen advocates the “Three Principles of the People”, namely the Principles of Nationalism, Democracy, and People’s Livelihood, the democratic revolutionary program, and the essence and high generalization of his democratic thought. The Three Principles of the People feature two stages, the old Three Principles of the People and the new Three Principles of the People. Dr. Sun Yat-sen envisages that through the implementation of the Three Principles of the People, Chinese people can make the best use of their talents, land can be made the best use of its potential, things can be made the best use of their goods, and goods can flow smoothly, thus realizing a *Datong* society in which the country is prosperous and the people are contented. The principle of Democracy implements democratic politics shared by ordinary civilians while avoiding the abuses of the Western systems in Europe and America. The Chinese people are endowed with four (political) powers of election, dismissal, creation, and re-adjudication in managing government affairs, while the government has five (administrative) powers of legislation, judicature, administration, examination, and supervision in governing the country. The core concept emphasizes the distinction between direct civil rights and power; that is, the government has the power to govern while the people have the political power to rule. Three Principles of the People are the summary and generalization of Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s series of thoughts and practical experiences to save the nation from peril

and explore China's way to modernization. After rising to theory, these thoughts and experiences play a key role in guiding and promoting the revolutionary actions of Dr. Sun Yat-sen himself and his followers. Despite the innate limitations of the times, the Three Principles of the People are the spiritual heritage of the Chinese people and a great force to inspire the Chinese to revive their country.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) adds a new chapter, socialist democracy, to this time-honored tradition of people-centered ideology. As a household Chinese proverb goes, it is better to go home and grow sweet potatoes than to be an official without acting on behalf of the people, and the Chinese communists have a track record of putting this into good practice. The current Chinese development path is a choice of the times and of the people. China is already the second-largest economy in the world, and the living standards of 1.4 billion Chinese people continue to improve. People are creators of history, a fundamental force that determines the future of a country. The CPC comes from the people, has its roots in the people, and serves the people (Xi, 2020, p. 161). At the ceremony that commemorates the bicentenary birth of Karl Marx on May 4, 2018, President Xi (2020, p. 162) solemnly promises to “always uphold our fundamental stance of siding with the people, and striving for the wellbeing of the people as our ultimate mission. We must remain committed to the principle of serving the people wholeheartedly, and carry out the mass line”.

The COVID-19 pandemic provides a testing ground for how much the governments have considered the people. According to the data from the WHO (2022), as of 18 November 2022, the number of confirmed cases exceeds 633 million (633, 601,048), and the number of deaths reported to WHO breaks 6.59 million (6, 596,542) due to COVID-19 pneumonia. On top of that, countries have also paid huge costs, and the world economy has shown a great contraction never seen ever since the end of the Cold War. From the perspective of the loss of both wealth and human life, COVID-19 pneumonia wreaks havoc all over the world and its consequences are no different from another world war in a sense, a “new world war” between human beings and COVID-19.

Although Europe and North America boast the highly developed nations in the world, with high per capita wealth, advanced medical technology, and facilities, they fail to effectively curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. As of 18 November 2022, according to the WHO (2022), there were more than 359,000,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 pneumonia in Europe and the US, accounting for 57 % of the total confirmed cases in the world; their number of deaths exceeds 3.19 million, accounting for 48 % of the global confirmed death. The total population of Europe and the US is less than one billion, less than 1/2 of the total population of East Asia, and only 1/8 of the total world population.

The US, which has always deemed itself exceptional or superior, sees its epidemic situation going out of control, exacerbated by social division, inter-ethnic

conflicts, and political disorder, which further deteriorates human rights violations in that country. The epidemic goes rampant and turns into a human tragedy owing to the reckless official response. By the end of November 2022, the United States, home to less than 5 % of the world's population, accounts for almost 1/6 of the confirmed COVID-19 cases in the world and nearly 1/5 of the global deaths from that virus. More than 1,000,000 Americans have lost their lives to the disease, according to the World Health Organization Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard (WHO, 2022).

Compared with the social impact of the two World Wars on mankind, the consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic may be more profound, which will eventually affect people's political and cultural views as well as international relations. Western countries have taken pains to claim that their democratic system is the model for other nations to emulate. Winston Churchill, a former British Prime Minister, once declared that although the Western democratic system is not the most perfect political system in human history, it is the system with the least shortcomings so far. With the end of the Cold War, Western countries even interpreted the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the ensuing drastic changes in Eastern Europe as full victory of the Western democratic system, contending that liberal democracy is a presupposition and has become a generally accepted political notion at the very beginning of the 21st century, setting off waves of so-called democratization. Francis Fukuyama even concocts the notion of the end of history, claiming that Western democracy should replace other types of systems and become the only political choice for the whole world. The Clinton Administration and its successors even set out to expand democracy worldwide, which is regarded as the central goal of the national security strategy of the US (Mei, 1996, p. 244).

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has conspicuously exposed the fundamental weakness of Western democracy, which fails the big test, as Prof. Lin (2020) analyzes the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on world politics taking into account Fukuyama's political anxieties. In terms of the total number of confirmed cases and reported deaths, and the proportion in population, Western countries hand in a much worse report card than China, which was first hard hit by the virus without warning. The true efficacy of Western democracy is thus revealed, with its halo vanishing like the emperor's new clothes, which are not there in the first place. In this regard, Western democracy is just a political luxury or game that only rich countries can afford to squander, according to Prof. Lin (2020). Maybe this game is viable only when the West is on the rise in peace, but not when it is in crisis. Maybe this game is viable only for an affluent West but not for the underdeveloped non-West. It is difficult for the West, which suffers systematic failures in dealing with the pandemic, to promote its democracy all over the world as arrogantly as at the early days of the end of the Cold War.

In the book, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*, Francis Fukuyama warns of the democratic decline in the very first decade of the 21st century, expressing anxiety about defects of Western democracy, such as weakness, lack of authority, low efficiency and rigidity. He unexpectedly sings high praise of China, which is “the first world civilization to create a modern country, a model for the formation of the country and a pioneer in developing the national system”. He also gives credit to the efficiency, ability, and institution of the governance of the Chinese system. The essence of the so-called political decline, which he repeatedly mentions in his book, is to admit that Western democracy is mired in an efficiency dilemma, and cannot make decisions quickly and effectively or smoothly exercise state authority. The Western failure in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic partly explains Fukuyama’s sharp turn in his evaluation of Western democracy: It is not just a failure to deal with a healthcare crisis, but a political, institutional, and even systematic failure, which will make it more difficult to sell democracy on the world market.

In the post-COVID-19 world, a vast number of non-Western countries will freely choose and develop their own political and economic systems according to their national conditions, historical cultures, and political traditions, instead of being forced to copy Western democracy. The models and paths of world political and economic development will become more diversified, and people of all countries will be able to choose for themselves. The poor performance of Western countries in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic deals a heavy blow to their democratic institution and superiority syndrome and will further accelerate the power transfer in the world.

Playing different music to the two sides of the Pacific, democracy is a word worth further study in both its form and essence. After all, actions speak louder than words and it is the result that finally counts. In times of trouble, efficiency is running against the odds to save lives. In the post-epidemic era, the ultimate touchstone of democracy is whether a government responds in a timely fashion to people’s aspirations to hold on to dear life and to restore normalcy. Regardless of how democracy is defined or understood in the US and China, this word denotes respect for life, underlining the guidelines of people first. Both US democracy and Chinese democracy are faced with the same test of COVID-19, and the stage is set for their cooperation rather than competition.

3 On Individualism and Collectivism

Widely recognized as a pair of useful and powerful constructs in comparing cultures and their influence on communication at cultural levels, individualism-collectivism is one of the four dimensions proposed by the Dutch anthropologist Hofstede (1983, p. 46) as an effective applicable framework for classifying cultural patterns. He

conducted a large-scale research project, mobilizing 116,000 questionnaires, regarding job-related value frameworks of matched samples of industrial workers in 50 countries and three regions at two points in time. Almost half of the variance in the mean scores of those countries can be expounded by four fundamental dimensions, herein labeled uncertainty avoidance, power distance, femininity versus masculinity, and collectivism versus individualism. These dimensions are offered as a pattern for cultivating hypotheses in cross-cultural organizational researches. According to him, individualism pertains to a society in which the tie between individuals is quite loose: everyone is expected just to take care of oneself and one's close family. Collectivism, as its opposite, pertains to a society in which people from birth onward are intertwined into strong cohesive in-groups, which continue to protect people throughout their lifetime in exchange for unwavering loyalty (Li, 2016, pp. 49–50). The individualism-collectivism dimension is also a convenient perspective to analyze the West and the East, as many of the Western cultures stress individualism while most of the Asian cultures are group-oriented, which could be explained by the geographical, social, economic, and natural conditions.

As a social and political philosophy, individualism underscores the moral value of an individual: the human self is regarded as a unique, isolated, and atomistic entity or rational being, autonomous, free, and independent of all others. Alexis de Tocqueville, a 19th-century French aristocratic political philosopher, describes individualism in terms of certain kind of moderate selfishness which disposes human beings to be concerned only with their immediate circle of friends and family (Britannica, 2022). According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the term individualism per se, and its equivalents in other tongues, like socialism and other-isms, date back to the 19th century.

However, the individualism orientation in the West can be traced back to Plato almost 2500 years ago, when the development of the nuclear family structure started to be related to the unique culture of ancient Greece. Living in a mountainous land which is surrounded by and cut through into numerous islands by the Mediterranean, the Greek people learn to engage in activities on the ocean, where the lonely, adventurous, and risky sea traveling and fighting for survival in the unpredictable natural circumstances shape the ancient Greeks into isolated and free individuals. They develop a unique relationship with nature and a unique vision of the world and the universe. The arrival of Christianity causes individualism to rise and flourish, as this religion sanctions an individualistic quest for salvation. In the Renaissance period after Europe emerged from the Middle Ages, the value of individualism was rediscovered in opposing the hierarchical control of the Church, especially by the Reformation pioneers. In the ensuing Enlightenment period, the notion of personal freedom and independence is underscored as the Enlightenment was influenced by scientists, who developed atomistic physics and thus held an

atomistic worldview. According to this view, the most important foundation is the atomistic individual, who has an intrinsic capability and freedom to dare to know as an individualistic being. Individual self-interest becomes endorsed in such a way that Adam Smith, in his masterpiece, *The Wealth of Nations*, glorifies self-interest as a driving force for an ideal society. Lying at the very core of Western culture, individualism is thus promoted to constitute the defining characteristics of modernity in the West, celebrated and applauded as a blessing and elevated to the status of a national religion. Anything that violates a person's right to think for oneself, judge for oneself, make one's own decisions, and live one's own life as one sees fit, is not only morally wrong but sacrilegious (Jia, 2019, pp. 80–82).

Individualism in the West is deeply rooted in their religion. The rise of modern inward individualism, as a result of a transformation of outward individualism in the early years of Christianity, is brought about by an evolving State-Church relationship. Buss (2000, pp. 1–25) traces the evolution of modern individualism from outward individualism of the early Hellenistic time to the new notion of the person in the shattered world of early Christianity, subsequently further to the gradual rise of inward individualism within a uniformed culture, which occurs after the Papal Revolution, and then to its bloom, together with its corollary, the ethic personality, at the dawn of the European Reformation, finally pointing to a logical response to this transformation within German Lutheran tradition.

Although the concept of the individual might seem straightforward, there are still many ways to interpret it, both in practice and in theory. As a result of the upheaval of the French Revolution, individualism is pejoratively used in France to denote the sources of anarchy and social dissolution, as well as the elevation of individual interests above those of the collective. The negative connotation of the term is employed by French nationalists, socialists, liberals, conservatives, and reactionaries alike, despite their diverging opinions of a desirable and feasible social order. In neighboring Germany, the notions of self-realization and individual uniqueness (*Einzigkeit*)—in other words, the rosy side of individuality—contribute to the popular cult of individual geniuses and are subsequently transformed into a somehow organic theory of deadly nationalism. According to this idea, the society and state are by no means artificial constructs established through a social contract, but instead self-sufficient and largely unique cultural wholes. In the United Kingdom, individualism encompasses economic liberalism in various versions, including both moderate state-interventionist and laissez-faire approaches, and religious nonconformity, especially nonconformity with the Church of England. In the United States, individualism, by the 19th century, constitutes part of the central American ideology, incorporating the influence of the philosophy of natural rights, Jeffersonianism, and New England Puritanism. American individualism is universalistic and idealistic but acquires a harsher edge as it becomes immersed with certain elements of social

Darwinism. During his 1928 presidential campaign, Herbert Hoover extols “rugged individualism”, which is closely associated with traditional American values, such as capitalism, limited government, and personal freedom. Individualism used to exhibit charming national variations, but during the 20th century its various interpretations have largely merged to emphasize the individual will at the cost of the public benefits.

Often contrasted with individualism, collectivism signifies any of the several types of social organizations, in which an individual is seen as being subordinate to a social collectivity, such as a social class, a race, a nation, or a state. Collectivism is believed to be deeply rooted in what is called the extended family structure which stresses solidarity and hierarchy and is related to the development of agricultural culture in the East. As in the handy case of China, the Yellow River, considered a principal source of the Chinese agricultural civilization, is regarded on the one hand as a blessing to the people living alongside it, since it provides them with fertile land, warm weather, and thick forest, which enables the Chinese to develop agriculture and livestock for a stable and peaceful family life. On the other hand, the Yellow River is also considered to be a curse to the people, as it inflicts enormous disasters, such as huge floods and storms. The implication is most obvious: People have to pool their wisdom and efforts to overcome natural disasters collectively. Bigger and bigger groups with the family as the center are established, from a village to a bigger local tribe, then to a still bigger state, and at last to the biggest group or what is called the nation. Since the nation embodies the interests of its citizens and the collective identity, its needs ought to take precedence over the right of an individual. The agricultural development along the Yellow River calls forth in China the holistic humanistic view of the world, the unity between humans and nature in particular. In time, a collective culture comes into being, which envisions being humans as being relational, communal, or collective in human relations, and being humans as a process of forming one body with earth, heaven, and myriad things. This is an anthropocosmic worldview, which sees the human self as a dynamic and inclusive intercultural process of ceaseless self-extension and integration with different others, so much so that one will become a member of different social, cultural, economic, ecological, and eventually anthropocosmic communities (Jia, 2019, p. 81).

Chinese religions and philosophies also reinforce collectivist tendencies in society. As Fairbank (1983, p. 71) notes, an individual in China, first of all, has to claim their status or rights within the social scene, among their fellow individuals. Confucius says, “If I am not to be a man among men, then what am I to be?” The Confucian emphasis on the individual’s conduct supporting the social order is only the outward half of the story. The other inward half stresses the individual’s self-cultivation. But this has meant from early times the fulfillment of one’s personality by living as “an individual among individuals,” in proper relations with those around

them and so according to moral principles. Selfishness is to be curbed by duty, and duty is defined in social terms. Mencius says, “Between father and son there should be affection; between sovereign and minister, righteousness; between husband and wife, attention to their separate functions; between old and young, a proper order; and between friends, fidelity”. Thus the Chinese define themselves by their relations to others and to the Tao and Way which make them all interdependent through the web of reciprocal obligations. This by no means diminishes the importance of conscience and morality. On the contrary, trying to stay within the bounds of orthodoxy might intensify the individual’s moral problems, but these problems are perceived as “situation-centered”, in Francis L. K. Hsu’s phrase, not “individual-centered” as in America. As household proverbs go, the Chinese value collectivism: A near neighbor is better than a distant cousin; Value justice above profits; It is hard to achieve both loyalty and filial piety ... Justice here implies public benefits whereas profits only refer to personal gains. Loyalty means safeguarding public interests whereas filial piety means safeguarding personal interests only.

Collectivism has featured varying degrees of expression during the past two centuries in such movements as communism and socialism. Among them the least collectivist is probably social democracy, which only seeks to mitigate the inequity of unrestrained capitalism by public ownerships, redistribution of income, government regulations, and varying degrees of planning. In his preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx (1970, p. 92) provides one of the most succinct statements of the collectivist view of the primacy of social interaction: “It is not the consciousness of people that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness”. As a socialist country, China finds collectivism naturally compatible with its historically collectivist inclination.

Both individualism and collectivism have played their part in the history of the West and the East. However, the recent test of the COVID-19 pandemic has proved the merit of collectivism over individualism. The US pandemic control and prevention measures are, to say the least, chaotic in the beginning, which confuse the public at home. Initially, beyond what measures individual states have taken, there are no unified national guidelines or organized efforts to reopen the country. As regards pandemic control and prevention policies, the US public health officials say one thing when governors say another and still the US president says something else entirely. What’s more, after the experts already call for federal leadership, the then US president leaves it to states and cities to solve national problems with hospital supplies and testing on their own. After the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people should wear masks in public, the US president still refuses to do so for months and even at one point ridiculously advocates injecting bleach as an adequate treatment. Many ordinary Americans also refuse to wear masks, quoting their constitutional rights to do what they want with their own lives

as long as it does not interfere with their neighbor's pursuit of happiness. Another chaotic arena occurs in the procurement of materials related to fighting COVID-19. On the international front, the US pursues a policy of "America First" by monopolizing COVID-19 immunization production capacity, enforcing export controls, and intercepting anti-pandemic materials from other countries, including its allies. On the domestic front, despite the US federal government's coordination and intervention, the states scramble for medical materials in a most ugly manner, ignoring and stampeding the rights and interests of their fellow citizens.

On the contrary, the Chinese believe that this is a terrible war that human beings have to fight and win all together. Faced with this devastating, unexpected, and unknown disease, China mitigate and even contain its spread and follows a dynamic zero-COVID policy in a scientifically based and targeted manner, making painstaking efforts to ensure people's safety. All 1.4 billion Chinese nationals have exhibited enormous solidarity and tenacity in constructing a defensive rampart which demonstrates their will and power in face of natural disasters on such a large scale. For instance, hundreds of millions of Chinese people change their Spring Festival travel plans and stay at home in quarantine for months. Having firmly forged the belief that the world is in essence a global community of shared future and every country should act as a reasonable and responsible member, China has long been fighting, shoulder to shoulder, with the rest of the international community. In a fair, transparent, responsible, and open manner and in accordance with the laws and regulations, China timely issues notifications to the outside world about the onset of a brand new pandemic, and without reserve shares its expertise and experience in curbing the spread of that virus and treating the infected. Great empathy is entertained on the Chinese part with victims well beyond its borders and much has been done to provide humanitarian aids in support of other countries' endeavors to contain the pandemic.

Poverty alleviation is another arena that demonstrates the collective efforts of Americans and the Chinese alike. Long being a chronic affliction of human societies, poverty, whose associated problems include diseases, hunger, and social conflicts, poses a common challenge for the whole world and proves to be a serious impediment to human pursuit of better life. The history of human beings is, in a sense, a history of ongoing struggle against poverty, the eradication of which has long been a wish to be fulfilled.

The US "War on Poverty" is well-intended yet constrained by its hegemonic ambitions in Southeast Asia. Lyndon B. Johnson, the 36th US president, is well known for his signature project of the "Great Society" legislation, which is intended to expand Medicaid, Medicare, aid to education, public services, civil rights, urban and rural development, and "War on Poverty". Thanks to the booming economy in his reign, the "War on Poverty" facilitates millions of Americans' rising above the

poverty line. Johnson advocates that Americans should build a “Great Society” which can help eliminate the hardships of the poor. However, wars in Southeast Asia soon begin to overshadow his domestic efforts. The money he has earmarked for fighting the “War on Poverty” is thus diverted to the battle fields in Vietnam. Regardless of his vision of a “Great Society”, his administration is haunted by the specter of Vietnam. By the time he leaves the White House, he has to go in the vain hope of leaving a legacy of domestic reform behind.

With uneven development and weak foundations, China, as one of the most populous developing countries in the world, has long been suffering from poverty at a level of severity and a scale of size rarely seen elsewhere. No wonder the Chinese poverty alleviation program defies the wildest imagination. Yet with the guidance of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese are united in their heroic fight against poverty with unwavering will and faith, benefiting a large number of people in human history. At a meeting held on February 25, 2021 to honor the Chinese model fighters against poverty and to mark the Chinese achievements in poverty alleviation, President Xi (2022, p. 143) solemnly declares: “... that through the efforts of the whole Party and the entire nation, China has secured a complete victory in its fight against absolute poverty in this important year, with the centenary of the Communist Party of China fast approaching.” China succeeds, 10 years ahead of schedule, in achieving the poverty reduction goal set in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, hence gaining wide acclaim from the international community.

However, to label the West and the East with individualism and collectivism is too simplistic and even naïve. Each side displays both isms and there is a tendency for the two sides to communicate and learn from each other. For instance, changes can be noted in contemporary Asia, where people are becoming more self-conscious and self-oriented. They choose to start their own family after getting married, respect privacy, go Dutch with friends, and attribute more to individual efforts in the face of achievements.

There is also a long line of reflection and retrospection on individualism, or rather collectivism, in the West. In Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Du Contrat Social* dwells the earliest influential modern expression of collectivist ideas in the West, which argues that only in submission to the general will of the community can an individual find one’s liberty and true being. The German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, in the early 19th century, maintains that individuals can realize their liberty and true being only in submission to the regulations and laws of the nation states, which to him are probably the best embodiment of social morality. Alexis de Tocqueville writes in his book *Democracy in America* that by leading “each citizen to isolate oneself from one’s fellows and to draw apart with one’s family and friends,” individualism saps the “virtues of public life,” for which civic virtue and association are a

suitable remedy. In short, individualism, with its endorsement of personal enjoyment and its neglect of public attachment and communal involvement, has long been criticized from both secular and religious perspectives and both the left and the right. Most prominent critiques have been made by proponents of communitarianism, who associate individualism with selfishness and narcissism.

Tipping individualism against collectivism in generalizing national characteristics is not logically flawless but it does provide a contour profile of the overall mentality of a nation. It is always wise to correct mistakes if one has made any and guard against them if one has not.

4 Conclusion

Cultural differences are believed to affect the political form, mutual understanding, and policy choice of nations. Cultural differences between China and the United States will also affect mutual understanding and policy implications towards each other. Hans-Georg Gadamer highlights the role of prejudice in understanding and offers a conversation between the interpreter and the text as a way to achieve understanding (Dockhorn & Brown, 1980, pp. 171–172). Jürgen Habermas proposes a theory of communicative action so as to provide the foundation for people to achieve mutual understanding and conformity using dialog and consultation. Habermas (1997, p. 137) insists on dealing with the differences and conflicts between different values and morals, and even between different cultural traditions, from the standpoint of mutual understanding, tolerance, and reconciliation.

Being an immigrant country, the US oozes hegemony from every pore. When Europeans first landed in America, they sought survival and development by driving out the indigenous people and seizing Mexican land. From the outset, they are used to realizing their interests through hegemony. Later they seized the Philippines by force and interfered with China's internal affairs, which is flagrant hegemony. With Confucianism as the guiding principle of the nation, China practices what it preaches: being kind to others, taking the whole universe as one family, building a harmonious society, and treating others the way it would like to be treated. Likewise, when dealing with international issues, China will never do to other countries what it would not have done to itself. Imposing one's will on others spells hegemony, which is condemned in China. Under such circumstances, different understandings of "hegemony" between China and the United States will subsequently affect bilateral relations, resulting in diverging views on international issues, and bilateral interests.

A holy term in politics and also a self-conferred badge, American democracy has dual faces. Domestically, to what extent democracy is practiced is under challenge:

inefficient pandemic response leading to tragic outcomes, minority groups devastated by racial discriminations, democracy disorders triggering political chaos, continuous social unrest undermining public safety, and growing wealth polarization aggravating social inequality. Internationally, American-style democracy is oversold by force: championing American values, discrediting others' democracy, trampling on rules resulting in many humanitarian disasters, and shirking responsibility and shifting the blame onto others. Socialist democracy in China means people are the masters of the state and the source of the governance. The Chinese government, bound to the people by an inseparable tie, makes solid efforts to address people's concerns, alleviate their grievances, and warm their hearts so that they will always have a strong sense of gain, happiness, and security (Xi, 2020, p. 164). The Chinese response to the pandemic and poverty alleviation serves as the best footnote to the mission of always putting the people first and never failing the people.

Individualism and collectivism can trace back their sources to how people see themselves in the universe. One of the striking contrasts between the two civilizations in the East and the West lies in a different relationship of man versus nature. On the Western stage man stands in the center, leaving the rest of nature to serve as his adversary or simply as a neutral background. Chinese people, however, are the most socially minded human beings, ever conscious of the interplay of personalities and social conventions around them (Fairbank, 1983, p. 14). The world today is going through momentous transformations unseen in a century. All countries should join hands in taking action to shape the future of humanity by addressing the governance deficit fairly and equitably, strengthening consultation to address the trust deficit, enhancing solidarity to address the peace deficit, and pursuing mutually beneficial cooperation to address the development deficit. None of these tasks can be fulfilled without the spirit of collectivism and multilateralism.

The previous discussion analyzes cultural differences between China and the United States concerning their respective understanding of hegemony, democracy, individualism, and collectivism. Fortunately, they are not structural problems and could be gradually overcome as the two peoples get to understand each other better through exchanges and communications, which will prove beneficial to the improvement of China-US relations. During the transition from the age of monologue to the age of global dialogue, transcultural communication plays an essential role in setting the dialogical stage for mutual respect in which dialogue can flourish; and transcultural communication is indispensable in keeping people alert to different needs of and unique gifts from diverse cultural histories.

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven home the idea that no country is an island entirely of itself; rather each country is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. The dialectical relationship between the individual and the collective should and could be better harnessed for the common good. To bridge cultural differences and

enhance mutual understanding, China and the US can take some concrete steps, such as promoting the teaching and learning of transcultural communication, improving linguistic proficiency and cultural awareness, resuming exchange of scholars and researchers, increasing the number of overseas students, and accelerating the frequency of mutual visits, both official and non-official. Only in this way can the China-US relations be improved for the benefit of the whole world. In short, transcultural communication can enhance understanding and cooperation, which will help all nations ride winds and tides in this turbulent era to build a community of shared future for mankind.

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