

The Problem of Universal Values in World Politics

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This article deals with the value orientation in global politics. The author starts and concludes the article with the reference to the 'great controversy' in the foreign affairs theory dealing with the following question: what is predominant – national interests as perceived by certain forces or cooperation based on universal interests? The author draws the conclusion that the almost century-long controversy is still unresolved. The reason is that in the contemporary world various social values coexist and compete with each other. The author gives a particular consideration to the Chinese and European value systems.

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The issue brought up in the title of the present article refers to the first great controversy in international relations theory that emerged as early as the first half of the last century. Let us revise the essence of that controversy. The matter is the essence of international processes. The liberal idealists claimed that those processes were based on moral and legal principles and values. Their opponents – the political realists – regarded international relations mainly as interactions between the states' national interests and their power balance. In practice, 'legalists-moralists' (the term coined by Hans Morgenthau) raised the question of the existence of some universal principles (values) that may and should form the basis of international relations.

In fact, there is nothing new about the issue of values. It was a hot point during the Cold War period. In the period after the end of the Cold War that subject stopped being relevant from the ideological perspective; however, it was not resolved properly. Only now the issue has become focused on philosophical and ontological components of the problem of a possibility to establish the world order on the basis of consistent principles (liberal democracy and 'democratic world') or, otherwise, competition and clashes of different value systems (as demonstrated by the foreign policy ideology of Iran, Venezuela and, to a certain degree, of Russia). Both approaches might seem simplified versions within the framework of the world order. One should point out that Max Weber wrote about the axiological nature of social knowledge, meaning, in particular, the value-related variety in the human society. However, referring to the value variety of particular socio-cultural groups, he did not imply the 'war' between those but rather emphasized pluralism within the social world order.

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Following Weber's logical postulations, we would refer to the value systems of the European and Chinese civilizations as most adequately reflecting the world perception

Globalistics and Globalization Studies 2013 184–190

within the European and non-European (Eastern) communities that have co-existed in human society for many centuries, sometimes clashing and other times peacefully co-existing (Bogaturov 2009: 333–355).

The analysis of the value basis within the Western and Eastern societies enables to provide a commentary regarding the common and specific features in the foreign policy ideology and foreign policy behaviors of the Western countries and China today.

The Western ideology is characteristic of the assertive, ‘aggressive’ foreign policy ideology that is associated with the attempts to spread its values across other regions. Thus, the ideology of American foreign policy is based on the exceptional nature of America and its unique mission in the world history. From the very beginning, the most important component of the American national identity was the conviction in exceptionalism of the societal and historical development of the USA and its role in the world history. One should note that the American nation was, in fact, a unique conglomeration of adventurers and truth-seekers, honest entrepreneurs and profiteers, which made it different from the slowly changing societies in the Old World, giving it a chance to consider itself ‘unique’.

At first, the essence of the American idea was the promise of freedom, democracy, material wealth, *etc.* not only to the Americans, but also to other people from any place on the Earth, provided that they agreed to accept the American values. Herman Melville, the 19th century American writer, provided a precise and clear definition of that mind-set:

... we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world... God has predestined, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls... Long enough, have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in us... (Melville 1850: 238–239)

The same idea was expressed by the prominent 20th century American politicians. As early as in December of 1945 Harry S. Truman, the USA President of that time, said: ‘Whether we like it or not, we must all recognize that the victory which we have won has placed upon the American people the continuing burden of responsibility for world leadership’ (Truman 1945). It is characteristic that many perceived the Truman Doctrine as a ‘world-wide equivalent of the Monroe Doctrine’. Identifying the objectives of the American foreign policy, Dwight Eisenhower said that the United States should become the permanent basis for the world government in order to enable achievement of the aspirations of all people for peace with justice in freedom (Eisenhower 1961). ‘History and our own achievements, – announced President Lyndon Johnson in 1965, – have thrust upon the principal responsibility for the protection of freedom on earth’ (Johnson 1965). While the Vice-President under Johnson’s administration, Hubert Humphrey pathetically stated: ‘I can see the true capital of the world in America of tomorrow’ (quoted in Gadzhiev 2007: 34–35).

As regards the West and, in particular, the United States, we should note a close convergence of the value component within the foreign policy and pragmatic national interests. For instance, the USA benefited from the instigation of ‘colour revolutions’ across the former Soviet Union not only in terms of Western-style democracy establishment, but also spreading its influence across the area dominated by Russia and rich in fossil fuel deposits. Another example is the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011. The military support of

the democratically spirited rebel fighters in Libya was presented as a fight against the genocide and anti-democratic regime of Muammar Gaddafi. However, when approached in the light of the national interests pursued by the Western countries (France, Great Britain, the USA and others), it becomes clear that the main objective was to maintain the positions in the country with abundant fossil fuel deposits. The same can be said about the Iraq war with the only difference being the rationale behind the war.

So, for instance, China's rationale behind foreign policy is of a completely different nature. The key component is not an aggressive lobbying of the country's values around the world, but rather 'a peaceful ascent to power' and 'a peaceful co-existence'. Hereby we provide an excerpt from the dispositions within teachings of Deng Xiaoping: 'observe cold bloodedly, strengthen your positions, decisively react to the changes, cover your capabilities and win time, learn not to attract time to yourself, never become a leader...'. (Deng Xiaoping 2007: 363). The guidance of Deng Xiaoping in general focused the Chinese efforts to establish 'a discreet diplomacy' or, as one may call it today, 'a soft power'. The Russian researcher Lukin collected the China's ideological stereotypes and 'dreams' of foreign policy in the following way:

1) China has always been treated like a 'sick person' by everybody. Great Britain, Russia, France, Japan, then the USSR and the USA that took away the territories, spoiled the country and ignored China's interests.

2) China has always been a peaceful country. Even at the time of the empire, the Chinese did not annex any territories, while all ethnic groups voluntarily joined the country and Beijing provided them with assistance and promoted development.

3) Nowadays, the USA is considered as China's enemy and other states – as the American puppet governments that surround the Celestial Empire and try to take away its rights to defend the legitimate interests.

4) China's economy has been developing fast, while the main challenge the country meets is the shortage of raw materials. In the future, there will be a sharpening struggle for the earth's mineral resources, and the Chinese army must be ready to defend the country's interests in any region of the world.

5) China has a long-lasting culture and effective economy that have proven its superiority over other countries' cultures and economies. Therefore, it must be China that will lead the world into the future, distribute the resources in common interest and shield the world against the other countries' endeavors, primarily those of the USA. To achieve that objective, China has to become the most powerful force.

6) China considers itself as defending the interests of developing countries that are oppressed by the Western countries (Lukin 2010).

However, the Chinese actual foreign policy does not always follow its foreign policy rationale. That is a manifestation of the dichotomy that is often seen in the East between the declared image (championed values) and reality.

On the one hand, China actually positions itself not as the global power (which it is already considered worldwide), but rather a regional power, abstaining from any commitments to address global threats or challenges and focusing on domestic issues. On the other hand, China's foreign policy aspirations cannot be any longer ignored by anybody, and, primarily, China itself. Those aspirations become the most evident at the regional level, may it be the relations with the Asian-Pacific region countries, with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or with the Far East.

Putting global foreign policy on the back burner, China is currently pursuing the following strategically important *regional objectives*:

- recognition by the world community of China's territorial integrity, including its rights to Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang;
- international recognition of China's 'privileged' rights within the area of the South China Sea (where oil-related interests of its nine regional neighbors overlap);
- extension of the dominant influence over Southeast Asia;
- solving the territorial disputes between China and neighboring states in favor of China (hereby, it is primarily the relations with India, which, despite the declared 'years of the Indian-Chinese friendship', are regarded by both countries as strategically competitive; in the short-term the countries do not intend to escalate the relations, maintaining 'slow normalization');
- securing the neighbor states' backing of China's positions in the disputes with the USA and other Western countries;
- the de-facto establishment of 'special relations' between China and Mongolia;
- taking a de-facto 'special position' in Central Asia;
- preventing any other country's joining the anti-Chinese coalitions and military confrontation with China;
- support of other countries' trade and investment policies favorable for China;
- recognition by the region's countries of China's leading regional role, manifested in the form of informal, but mandatory consultations with Beijing before any important foreign policy decisions are made;
- ensuring consent from other countries to receive the Chinese immigrants;
- securing 'special rights' of the Chinese minorities abroad, as well as the recognition of Beijing's rights to defend and support them;
- propagation of the Chinese language across Asia, promotion of bilingualism across the overseas ethnic Chinese diasporas (for more information see Voskresensky 2001).

China built up such influential capabilities in Southeast Asia, which no other power of the regional level has managed even to come up closely. In addition, those capabilities were set up in such a reasonable and cautious manner that they did not provoke any outright opposition on the part of other states, let alone the establishment of the anti-Chinese coalition. Today, an informal approval from China has become a mandatory prerequisite for implementation of any strategically important decision in the region.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization clearly demonstrates not only cooperation, but also a competition between Russia and China for the influence in Central Asia. Aside from official rhetoric and in spite of the active cooperation and aspirations for its expansion and qualitative build-up, Moscow and Beijing have been competing for the leadership in the SCO. China actively claims an economic and military-technical role in the affairs of the Central Asian SCO members – Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Its trump card is credits and supplies of cheap Chinese goods across Central Asia. This evokes the question: does China aspire to become a development locomotive for the region's countries in line with Kojima Akamatsu's 'flying geese' model?¹ In theory, Russia

¹ This model has been applied in Eastern Asia since the 1970s. It argues that one economy, like the first goose in a V-shaped formation, can lead other economies toward industrialization, passing older technologies down to the followers as its own incomes rise and it moves into newer technologies (Japan – South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong – Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia).

had an opportunity to take such a role in the 1990s, but the country's lack of political and economic resources prevented it from putting it into practice then, and now it is China that has taken up the leader's position. Competition for the leading position is evident not only in the economic, but also in military and operative spheres (Litovkin 2007).

Now we shall consider the policy pursued by China in *Russia's Far East*. Stepping back from official relations, we can clearly see that there are enough pitfalls in contacts between the two countries. Primarily, those are associated with China's acute domestic issues, while the country is inclined to solving such issues at the expense of its neighbor states, and, in particular, of Russia's territories adjacent to China. One should remind that the length of the Russian-Chinese border is about 4,200 kilometers. The population density across those Russian territories is rather low (with 7 million people residing in the Russian Far East), undeveloped infrastructure, loose connections with the centre, weak state institutions, scarce economic capacities combined with the abundance of natural resources (oil, gas, timber and others). In contrast, China's territories adjacent to the Russian borders are very densely populated (on the other side of the Amur, within the territory of three provinces there live approximately 300 million of the Chinese) and besides, they are characterized by soils of low fertility and the shortage of natural resources.

There are some intergovernmental Russia-China agreements, providing the possibilities for migration of the Chinese people to Russia and enabling a freedom of choice concerning the sphere and scale of activities. Those are unprecedented agreements. At the same time, China is moving towards practical implementation of various stimulating measures to promote migration of the Russian people to the Chinese territories. Simplified visa procedures, sales of flats, and free medical services (in contrast to the Chinese residents) have been attracting Russian citizens. There have appeared Russian communities in various cities of China.

China does not intend to nurture an aggressive plan towards Russia. But that does not mean at all that Russia can be complacent. Even if the Chinese military-political and economic expansion focuses on the basins of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, a growing demand for the resources required to enable a competitive advantage over its rivals (the USA, Japan, ASEAN countries, and India) is bound to draw Beijing's attention to Russia as the major source of those resources. And China will seek to gain them by any possible means – if not through soft power, then through the hard-line policies (Arbatov 2010: 141).

The country's adoption of the concept for 'strategic borders and life space' has raised significant concerns. The territorial and space boundaries are supposed to mean solely the limits, within which the state can 'effectively defend its interests' using the real power. 'Strategic borders of the life space' shall move in proportion to the growth of 'integral power of a state'. That said, in 2010 China's People's Liberation Army was to turn into the force 'guaranteeing the expansion of strategic borders and life space'. According to the Russian mass media, the expansion has been backed up with the historic rationale: the official Chinese history considers the Russian-Chinese relations as permanent Russian aggression, which, starting at least from the 16th century, resulted in Russia's annexation of China's original lands allegedly extending up to the Urals (as early as during the time of Peter the Great the Qing rulers in China would claim that the Russian-Chinese border should have been in the vicinity of the city of Tobolsk).

Summing up the above said concerning foreign policies of the Western countries and China, it is worth noting that analyzing the latter presents a larger problem in comparison with the policies of the USA and its European partners. The reason is that the ideology of Western foreign policy correlates with the pursued practical politics. In contrast, the Chinese foreign policy rationale and actual foreign policies significantly differ. The ideology has been established in the spirit of peace, cooperation and non-belligerency (in line with traditional values), while, in reality, the Chinese foreign policies are far from being peaceful.

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In conclusion we would like to return to the starting point of the present article. Unexpectedly, the disputes between the 'legalists-moralists' and realists have recently become a focus of the Russian academic literature. Alexander Chumakov, a prominent Russian expert in Global Studies, has published an article dealing with the issue of global governance (Chumakov 2010). As Chumakov believes, '...the main tools to have the most profound influence on public opinion and individuals' behavior are *morale and law*. One should also single out the *concepts* used to explicitly or implicitly govern social systems: *ideology, politics, economics, finance, culture, etc.* However, among those factors *morale and law* undoubtedly play a dominant role...' (*Ibid.*: 9). Chumakov cites Kant, and his article has, in fact, a large number of Kantian ideas.

In his well-known writing 'Perpetual Peace' (Kant 1966 [1795]), Kant assumes a possibility to achieve a non-belligerent community in international relations. He perceives the non-belligerent world as a global republic with the universal citizenship, with the international law forming the basis for the relations between parts of that republic. Kant actually seeks to remove interstate borders and establish the unified global republic-state.

With the account of Chumakov's ideas highlighted in his articles and their connections with Kant's thoughts, one should understand Kant's arguments to justify the possibilities of achieving such a 'peaceful' world order. Kant divided the arguments into the philosophical ('pure reason') and practical ones ('practical reason'). Holding true to his philosophical doctrine, he postulated that 'political maxims must not start *from the prosperity and happiness that are to be expected in each State...*, nor from the end which each of them makes the object of its will (not from the desire) as the highest (empirical) principle of politics; but they must proceed from the pure conception of the duty of Right or Justice (on the basis of *obligatory principle given a priori by pure reason*)' (Kant 1966: 300). Kant denoted that philosophical principle as 'categorical imperative', provided to each person on the basis of his or her natural status. If the contemporary people do not follow it, it is only because of the perversity of human nature.

Chumakov's assertion that 'morality and law undoubtedly play a dominant role...' is in line with the moral categorical imperative of Kant.

Kant's 'practical reason' was of much more realistic nature. Following that postulation, the great philosopher pointed to the following prerequisites of peace: culture as a 'great uniting factor', 'spirit of trade, incompatible with war' and military-political cooperation against the aggressor. Those maxims might not hold water in the face of in-depth criticism, but it is of importance that Kant highlighted their significance. In this connection, there is a need to note that Chumakov has turned out to be more realistic than Kant, asserting that morale and law take precedence over economy, politics, finance and culture.

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Thus, the first great controversy in foreign affairs theory concerning the significance of universal values and interests in foreign affairs has not been resolved yet. In our opinion, it will continue to be unsolved, until there is a pluralistic human society, representing a diversity of values and interests, their co-existence and rivalry.

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