

Andreas Herberg-Rothe, Key-young Son (ed.), Order Wars and Floating Balance. How the Rising Powers Are Reshaping Our Worldview in the Twenty-First Century, London, New York (Routledge) 2018, XVI–238 p. (Routledge Advances in International Relations and Global Politics, 133), ISBN 978-1-138-05710-4, GBP 105,00.

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Far from having reached the end of history, we have entered a series of new dialectics of opposing world views. A crucial polarisation in values underlying just such a dialectic is that of the rights and freedoms of the individual, and the needs and requirements of societies as larger entities, with their emphasis on equality rather than unlimited freedoms of the individual. These divergent values crystallise especially around the two poles of »Western« and Asian values. It is thus most appropriate that this subject is tackled by a »Western« scholar, the German Andreas Herberg-Rothe, inter alia a specialist on Hegel, Clausewitz, Nietzsche and Lyotard, and an »Eastern« scholar, the Korean Key-young Son, specialist on Asian international relations.

The authors start from the premise that the current world order is based largely on a waning configuration of Western dominance and thus Western values that had triumphed at the end of both world wars. Eastern nations that do not fully subscribe to Western values with their emphasis on the freedoms of the individual are on the rise, however. We find ourselves in a transitional phase in which power and dominance are being drained away from the West and, in view of their economic strength, flowing to the civilisations of Asia.

Andreas Herberg-Rothe and Key-young Son plead for the creation of a new »floating balance« between East and West. The East seeks harmony, the West seeks peace: the two should co-operate in preparing a smooth transition on the base of peace and harmony to a new distribution of power in the world. To preserve the freedom of the individual on the one hand and equality for all civilisations and humankind as a whole, the authors prescribe the quest for a »floating balance or harmony of both«, rather than a prioritisation of one over the other: »In the end, [the] ›modern west‹ with its emphasis on rational discourses and [the] ›old east‹ with its emphasis on harmony« need to »save each other from their retrospective shortcomings in a globalized world by initiating a dialogue between the civilisations« (p. 130).

Andreas Herberg-Rothe and Key-young Son build on key thinkers from the rich philosophical traditions of Europe and East Asia to explore synergies and convergences in this endeavour. For the West, we are encouraged to look at the teachings of Aristotle, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, John Locke, Immanuel Kant but also Carl von Clausewitz, Hannah Arendt and John Rawls from quite a new angle. Confucius, Laozi, Xunzi, Yu-wei K'ang and Zhu Xi are evoked for the East, but also contemporary scholars like Zhao Tingyang, Xuetong Yan and Lee Kuan Yew, clearly authors whose writings merit much wider study and circulation.



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It is worth pondering what freedoms individuals enjoy in the West – these include, in our capitalist society, the right to blight the lives of many of others with impunity: »The financial crisis showed us that the liberty of a few speculators leads to the deprivation of the liberties and the way of living of millions, if not billions of people.« One does not even have to turn to Eastern philosophers but to Kant and John Stuart Mill to argue that the liberties of individuals should end where they impinge on the basic needs of others, or to John Locke to argue that the right to property should be based upon real labour – and not »casino capitalism« (p. 128 f.).

Indeed, we are pondering even without any Asian prompting what has gone wrong in our societies where the income gaps within the social market economies of many European countries have increased over recent decades, or where up to a century after women's equality was constitutionally established, we still find sexual harassment and unequal treatment in many places. Or, looking further afield, Americans are beginning to ask themselves, in the light of seemingly endless series of gunmen massacring school children, how the right and liberty to carry arms can be placed above the right to safety.

What the book does not address in equal measure is the pernicious lure of capitalism which has led post-communist states in Europe import what is worst from the West, and is leading Chinese and Koreans alike to neglect their own philosophers' admonitions to seek harmony and equality, rather than status expressed through luxury articles. All sides, it seems, must still learn how to unite to face common threats such as »global warming, chronic financial crises, [and] the widening gap between rich and poor« (p. 216). All civilisations, it can be rightly argued, stand to gain from pondering the messages of this volume.



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