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Morality, Power, and Authority

为政以德，譬如北辰，居其所而众星共之。
(He who exercises governance through virtue will be like the North Star keeping its position surrounded other stars.)

CONFUCIUS

The shift of the world center is an enduring topic in the theoretical study of international relations (IR). Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States were successively the world’s dominant states after the formation of a global system of states in the sixteenth century. Along with the changes of dominant state came occasional shifts of the world power center from one region to another. Scholars of IR have long sought to trace and explain how various great powers have risen and fallen relative to one another over the past five centuries.

There have been many explanations for the rise and fall of leading powers. The most well-known research on this issue is arguably that of Paul Kennedy, who attributes the decline of a hegemon to imperial overstretch, which in turn leads to a shift of the world
center. Imperial overstretch occurred when the global obligations as defined by policy makers far exceeded the hegemon’s defensive capability.\(^1\) Robert Gilpin, on the other hand, cites economic inadequacy as the cause of hegemonic decline. That is to say, the economic costs of maintaining a dominant power’s international status quo outstripped its financial capability.\(^2\) However, Richard Ned Lebow has raised an altogether different explanation, ascribing the decline of hegemonic powers to their hubris, contending that “behavior at odds with the accepted morality of the age undermines the standing, influence and even the hegemony of great powers.”\(^3\)

Like the above studies, most theoretical research has focused on answering one question, “Why does a hegemon decline?,” while taking little account of the other component of the issue, “How does another state rise?” It seems logical to assert that for the global center to shift, not only must the existing hegemon fall, but a new global power must rise. Yet attempts to answer this question wholly ignore the reasons for such a rise and its mechanism. Thus, the focus of this book is on offering explanations for the rising state component of the conundrum from the perspective of moral realism.\(^4\) This book wishes to raise a potential mechanism through which a rising state is able to replace the dominant state in a given interstate system. The theory created in this book suggests that when a rising state’s political leadership surpasses that of the dominant state, the power disparity between the two states reverses, rendering the rising state the new dominant state. In other words, when the rising state’s leadership is more capable and efficient than that of the dominant state and that of other contemporary major states, international influence is redistributed in a way that allows the rising state to eclipse the dominant state. To systematically explore the relationship between political leadership and redistribution of international power, the first chapter will clarify the concepts of morality, power, capability, and authority, because these are the resources of political leadership. Based on the distinctions between these concepts, we will analyze the influence of morality on power, capability, and authority.
THE ROLE OF MORALITY IN REALISM THEORY

As Jannika Brostrom has observed, each IR school responds differently to the task of pinpointing where morality belongs in theory building. Constructivists generally understand morality as part of the normative agenda of a political entity that is often linked to identity and ideas. Thus, they suggest that norms and interests are mutually constitutive as well as intersubjective. Liberalist IR scholars characterize moral forces as the ends in themselves and require a deontological methodology to explain policy learning and epistemic community building. The English school is divided on this issue between solidarists and pluralists. Although both take a normative approach to the study of morality, they have different views as to the function of norms. Solidarists regard the norm as an independent variable, while pluralists deem it the product of an anarchical system. Different from previous schools, realism approaches morality from an instrumental perspective. This standpoint, however, is often misunderstood.

Misunderstandings of IR Realism

Since Hans J. Morgenthau modernized the classical realist theory of international relations, many scholars have mistakenly assumed that realism denies any moral influence on the conduct of states. For example, Kenneth W. Thompson and W. David Clinton observed, “It has proved particularly thorny in the realist tradition, not least because that tradition has so often been misunderstood as denying any connection between moral principles and the practical responsibilities of statecraft. At no realist has the charge been leveled more often than Morgenthau.” However, as Brostrom has noted, the classical realist works of Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, and George Kennan all stress the relationship between morality and power. After a close scrutiny of classical realist writings, Lebow argues that “‘classical’ realism, as presented by Thucydides, Carl Von Clausewitz and Hans J. Morgenthau, was very much concerned with questions of justice.”

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Here we review Morgenthau’s *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* to see how he discusses the function and effect of morality in international affairs. He says, “A discussion of international morality must guard against the two extremes of either overrating the influence of ethics upon international politics or underestimating it by denying that statesmen and diplomats are moved by anything but considerations of material power.” Among his six principles of political realism, principles 4 and 5 are about morality. The fourth principle demonstrates that political realism admits the great importance of moral political actions by asserting, “Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place. The individual may say for himself: ‘Fiat justitia, pereat mundus’ (Let justice be done, even if the world perish),’ but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care.” The fifth principle reiterates this point, stating that “political realism refuses to identify the moral aspirations of a particular nation with the moral laws that govern the universe.”

It is clear from the above citation that classical realism neither denies the role of morality nor ignores its effect on state capability or power. What scholars must avoid is conflating the morality of a single nation with international morality. Morgenthau opposed the waging of war based on a state’s particular moral values. Nor did he support attempts to export political values to the world as a whole through the vehicle of war. It was from that perspective that he opposed America’s initiation of war for the sake of human rights. This idea has a strong impact on my theory, which defines the morality of political leadership at the universal level rather than at the national level.

To make matters worse, the doctrine of realism is misunderstood not only by idealists, legalists, moralists, liberalists, and constructivists, but also by certain realist theorists. For the sake of developing a scientific rather than a normative theory, Kenneth Waltz expunged morality from his theory in *Theory of International Politics*. After his reformulation of realism, many realists followed suit in constructing
IR theories. John Mearsheimer, a leading offensive realist scholar, argues against the incorporation of morality into theoretical models, saying, “It should be emphasized that many realists have strong moral preferences and are driven by deep moral convictions. Realism is not a normative theory, however, and it provides no criteria for moral judgment. Instead, realism merely seeks to explain how the world works.” During our dialogue in 2013 he insisted, “It is critically important that a real realist resists the seductions of any unrealistic consciences and never over-expand into other unfamiliar realms.” However, not all realist theorists agree to the expulsion of morality from realist theory. For example, Edward Hallett Carr, an early classical IR realist, said, “If, however, it is utopian to ignore the element of power, it is an unreal kind of realism which ignores the element of morality in any world order.” This sentiment is echoed by Mark R. Amstutz, who, after careful study of realist theories, said, “However, most realists do not deny morality. Indeed, they assume with Aristotle that politics is rooted in ethics.” Gilpin, moreover, said, “I would argue that a moral commitment lies at the heart of realism.”

Mearsheimer’s rejection of incorporating morality into realism theory stems from Morgenthau’s claim that “moral principles cannot be applied to actions,” while ignoring the caveat “in their abstract universal formulation.” In this context, Morgenthau has claimed that applying moral principles to action can avoid dangerous pitfalls if “filtered through the concrete circumstance of time and place.” Moral realism’s proposal of comparing state action to universally accepted moral codes works off of such a “filter.”

Since nothing in the world is immutable, universal morality also changes through the course of history. Therefore, the analyses in this book will be conducted according to the moral standards of the relevant historical period in a given international system. The analyses will focus on how the moral actions of states affect policy choices by examining the following relationships: the impact of moral actions on national capability; the varying degrees of adherence by types of state leadership to moral standards; and the impact of types of international leadership on international norms.
Instrumental Morality in Moral Realism

The theory created in this book follows in the footsteps of classical realism in that it analyzes states’ moral behavior from the perspectives of international power, national capability, and national interest. Classical realist Carr asserts, “Just as within the state every government, though it needs power as a basis of its authority, also needs the moral basis of the consent of the governed, so an international order cannot be based on power alone, for the simple reason that mankind will in the long run always revolt against naked power.”

Similarly, moral realism regards morality as of equal importance to policy making as power, capability, and interest. There are two ways to study national interests within realist theories: logical deductive and empirical inductive. Because this research aims at establishing a new realist theory, issues and instances related to national interests in this book fall under the former category.

When speaking about morality many theorists take a value-based approach, but moral realism adopts an instrumentally based approach. For example, Brostrom defines moral realism as a way of understanding a calculation of national interest that imbues concerns about morality. He says that “it is in fact possible to treat morality as instrumental. This means that it can be seen as part of the rational decision-making process in a state’s foreign policy, with the potential to produce specific outcomes.” Lebow has a similar view, contending that “ethics are not only instrumentally important, but it is impossible to formulate interests intelligently outside of some language of justice.” I would go a step further by saying that the benefits of adopting a moral foreign policy stem from strategy preferences rather than calculations of national interest. Moral realism’s emphasis on strategic preferences is rooted in the common agreement among realists that national interests are determined objectively and defined by a state’s material capability. Therefore, the role of morality is to influence policy makers’ concerns about how national interests should be achieved rather than what national interests ought to be. In a concrete situation policy makers sometimes have to decide which interest should take priority. The core
of policy making, therefore, lies in making strategic decisions on how to achieve interest maximization. However, whether an interest is major or minor is determined by objective reality rather than by morality. As such, I would define moral realism as the approach to understanding a major power’s behavior when morality is a contributing factor to its leadership’s strategic preferences. Certain realist theories ignore the impact of a national leader’s moral concerns on decision making—an approach that is at odds with moral realism.

LEVELS AND COMPONENTS OF MORALITY

To avoid any semantic disputes, it would be best first of all to define morality, as IR scholars all too often debate concepts according to different understandings of the same word. Furthermore, lay understandings of what morality means will further confuse matters. Before addressing the logic of moral realist theory, therefore, it is necessary to clarify the levels and components of morality as applicable to IR theories.

Governmental Morality as the Standard

Discussions in this book of a state’s morality are not structured on any arbitrary set of standards, but rather on the actions that the state undertakes irrespective of the individual policy maker’s motivations or personal beliefs. When the state’s actions accord with universally accepted codes it is deemed moral, and when the reverse is true, it is deemed immoral. Thus, determining whether or not the action of a state is moral entails an assessment of that action according to universally accepted codes. This assessment does not require any subjective perception but depends on giving yes or no answers to questions that determine whether the action under scrutiny is moral or not. If there are more “yes” than “no” answers, then the action is moral; if “no” is the predominant answer, then the action is not moral.

Judging whether or not the act of a policy maker is moral means first of all determining which set of codes is applicable to that action.

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This is decided by the status of the person committing the act. As such, the morality judgment is made on one of the three levels: personal, governmental, and international. For example, an everyday citizen is expected to provide for his or her dependents' health care. Although it would be commendable if this person were to go beyond his or her personal responsibility and help others in this respect, no one would accuse this person of immoral behavior if he or she did not endeavor to provide for the health care of people other than his or her family members. This is because the acts of an individual citizen are judged according to morals at the personal level. However, it is not acceptable for the leader of a state to consider solely his or her family's welfare, as that leader is expected to enact policies that will provide health care coverage for all citizens of the state. Yet, at the same time, no one expects a state leader to be concerned about the health care issues of other nations. The reason for these two differing expectations is that a state leader is judged at the governmental level. The third level would apply, for instance, to the leader of the World Health Organization. Tasked with providing health care for people across the globe, the international leader is expected to implement health care policies that are beneficial to all people, regardless of national borders or the interests of individual countries. This leader’s actions, therefore, are judged according to morals at the international level.

To avoid dissension, therefore, and because moral realism is a theory that specifically addresses international relations, discussions in this book of “morality” refer solely to governmental morality, whereby leaders’ actions will be judged according to the accepted codes of conduct pertaining to national interests and national capability. There has been a widely accepted distinction in the Western world, in both ancient and modern times, between public and private morality. Niebuhr distinguished between the moral behavior of individuals versus social groups in his observation that personal morality is sublimated, along with the individual ego, into the group, which then re-expresses this egoism at a higher level. Such conflating of public and private morals can lead to dissension over which codes of morality apply. This difference is illustrated by the debate...
over President Clinton’s impeachment. Some people thought Clinton’s private behavior did not constitute grounds for impeachment; others disagreed. Different levels of moral code are at the root of disagreement in that discussion.

When talking about “governmental morality,” we are referring to what Max Weber called the “ethic of responsibility,” which requires, “one . . . to give an account of foreseeable results of one’s action.” Nannerl Keohane says that “the ‘ethic of responsibility’ is a form of consequentialist morality as distinct from the Kantian deontological approach.” In this book, governmental morality addresses such concepts as the responsibility to protect national interests, the duty to practice international norms, and strategic credibility with regard to allies. The government’s responsibility to the country it represents and the people it governs is the core of governmental morality. For instance, many Americans criticize Donald Trump’s foreign policies as “less than out of a sense of moral responsibility,” because these policies create a global leadership vacuum for China to fill, undermine American strategic relations with traditional allies, unite American competitors and adversaries, and drive major powers to sell some of their stock in Washington.

**Universality of Governmental Morality**

In addition to the morality level, it is also necessary to clarify the components universally applicable to the morality under discussion. The components of morality can be categorized as national and universal codes. Differing from national morality (such as American, Chinese, or Japanese political culture), universal morality (such as patriotism, obligation, or justice) is accepted by all members, even adversaries, of a given international system. Therefore, we will use universal codes to judge the morality of a state’s leadership. Governmental morality thus refers to those universal moral codes.

The existence of universally accepted moral codes may, at a glance, seem to disregard cultural differences and so evoke worries about imperialist tendencies. However, our growing understanding of the biological basis of psychology and sociology makes more and

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more apparent that human behavior is as much determined by will as it is by nature. Research shows that different cultures actually share certain similar moral foundations. Jesse Graham and colleagues, a group of cultural psychologists, offered an evolutionary explanation of why moral judgments are often so similar across cultures. Their model, the Moral Foundations Theory, proposes that the ever-popular tabula rasa hypothesis—that humans are born as a blank state—is wrong. Our evolutionary history has shaped the human propensity to place value on five ethical foundations, and it is on these five basic building blocks that each tribe/culture developed a moral narrative. These five foundations are care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation. All humans, irrespective of cultural backgrounds, universally revere the first component of the dyad and despise the second. Individuals who do not possess these moral foundations, aka sociopaths, are rejected by the social group. In short, humans are evolutionarily predisposed to morals and to being moral, and the moral foundation is the same across the species.

Because international morality is still formed by humans, we can find the same foundations underlying universally accepted codes of conduct. For example, the Geneva Conventions address the concept of care/harm in international disputes (i.e., war); the WTO addresses concepts of fairness/cheating on the subject of international trade; strategic alliances such as NATO are built on the foundation of loyalty/betrayal; the hierarchical structure of the UN submits to the concepts of authority/subversion; and international environmental efforts, such as the Paris Climate Accord, apply the concept of sanctity/degradation to planetary health. It is because morality is built on shared moral foundations that we are able to agree to these international moral codes. While the specifics may constantly change, the underlying values do not. This book considers these universal moral foundations “universal morality.”

Qualitative differences, however, exist among universally accepted codes of governmental morality with regard to adherence. Some codes, such as maintaining good terms with one’s allies, showing diplomatic courtesy to state leaders, ensuring the personal safety
of diplomatic envoys, and paying off foreign debts, constitute basic morality and are easy for states to follow and practice. But the higher demands of altruistic actions, such as providing continuous foreign aid, are much harder to fulfill. As most states generally practice the moral codes that are easier to keep to rather than the more difficult ones, the former have wider impact on state behavior. Therefore, as realists, we judge the morality of political leadership according to the easily executed, universal governmental morals, as opposed to the more demanding ones.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN POWER, CAPABILITY, AND AUTHORITY

In English-language IR writings, the term “power” can simultaneously refer to social influence, material capability, and political authority, even though the functions of these three elements differ significantly. This is because the English language defines “power” in a multitude of ways, including control, authority, ability, capability, might, and influence. The interchangeability between power, capability, and authority, therefore, makes it difficult for people to understand the functions of the three resources of leadership capability. It consequently becomes impossible to understand the influence that morality has on each of them.

Differences between Power and Capability

The phrase “balance of power” is a typical example of the simultaneous reference to influence and capability. Although frequently used, there is no consensus among IR scholars as to whether it refers to a balance of political influence or of physical capability. Morgenthau recognized this problem and employed two differing expressions—power and elements of power (referring to capability)—to differentiate the two meanings of power as it is used in Politics among Nations. This differentiation, however, is still not clear, because the phrase “elements of power” may also refer to “elements of capability.” Frankly, the term “power” remains vague in Morgenthau’s book,
wherein it alternately means influence and capability, or in some cases carries both meanings. Noting that “the concept of power is one of the most troublesome in the field of international relations,” Gilpin defines power as the capability of states yet still cannot avoid using “power” in reference to influence when he says, “In time, the differential growth in power of the various states in the system causes a fundamental redistribution of power in the system.”33 The vague usage of “power” has loitered in IR theories for decades. As late as 2007, William Wohlforth’s writing still concerned the “problem with conflating power-as-resources with power-as-influence.”34

This vagueness amounts to a theoretical shortcoming in Morgenthau’s discourse. When defining national interests by power, he fails to distinguish whether power is a type of national interest or its foundation. In other words, if power refers to influence on other states, then it is a type of national interest; if it refers to capability, then it is the foundation of national interest.35 Since Morgenthau did not rigorously distinguish between the nature of power and of capability, therefore, he was unable to demonstrate clearly the relationship between morality and power.

To avoid any confusion of logic in theory building stemming from unclear semantics as regards the “meaning of power,” this book makes a rigorous distinction between power and capability. When discussing power, we refer only to influence, such as police power. When discussing capability, we refer to strength, as in the competitiveness of athletes. This differentiation between power and capability allows us to avoid the circular logic that defines national interest by power while simultaneously regarding power as a national interest. When we define power as influence, we consider power a factor of national interest, and usually the most important one. National interests are usually categorized under the domains of politics, security, economy, and culture. Power is often viewed as a factor of political interest, such as the veto power of permanent members of the UN Security Council. When capability is defined as strength, it serves as the basis for defining national interests, including power. The extent of a state’s power in the domain of each national interest is determined by the capability of the related component. Therefore,
when analyzing a country's holistic strategic interests, we should do so according to its comprehensive capability (CC).

A state's comprehensive capability includes both material and nonmaterial resources, especially that of political capability. Like national interests, comprehensive capability is divided into four domains: politics, military, economy, and culture. In this model, political capability functions as an operational element, and the other three (military, economy, and culture) are resource elements. In other words, political capability exerts a multiplicative effect on the sum of the other three elements. Should political capability decrease to zero, then the effect of the other three is reduced to nothing. Mathematically, this can be expressed as: \( CC = (M+E+C) \cdot P \), where M is military, E is economy, C is culture, and P is political capability. Political capability is mainly determined by the efficiency of state leadership, which is mainly determined by two factors: the political direction of reform and the extent of its execution. When the direction of reform is correct, a larger extent of reform leads to an increase in P, and when the direction is wrong, the effect is reversed. Reform is both a descriptive term and a prescriptive one; it embraces a moral dimension and is antithetical to retrogression. On this account, reform refers to changes in a positive direction, while changes in a bad direction constitute retrogression.

In this formula, “political capability” is different from the “soft power” as coined by Nye. Nye’s “soft power” rests on three basic resources: culture, political value, and foreign policies. These three resources engender the attractiveness of a country’s government model, which influences other countries’ actions without the use of hard power. However, a country’s attractiveness is based on the deeds of that country’s leadership rather than on its culture and political value. Therefore, I would argue that political leadership, rather than political value, is the core element of soft power. As such, I would combine political value and culture into one variable, and put foreign policies into the variable called “political capability.” This is because foreign policy is decided by political leadership, while political value informs, but does not determine, the policy making of the leadership. This argument can explain why US soft
power declined so dramatically after the Trump administration had been in office for only half a year, even though American culture and political values remained the same. Nye may also have realized that the two concepts of “hard power” and “soft power” alone do not adequately explain the efficiency of leadership, and consequently he coined the term “smart power.” He said, “In practice, effective leadership requires a mixture of soft and hard power skills that I call smart power.”38 Because foreign policy making is the main skill of operating resources of soft and hard powers, Nye actually treats foreign policy as both smart power and a resource of soft power, namely, picking out a resource of soft power as smart power. The concept of smart power confuses the relations between different types of state capability rather than clarifies them. In fact, if we accept the concept of “smart power,” it implies that the attractiveness of “soft power” depends on leadership’s manipulation of soft power, rather than on culture or political values.

The practical reason for the theoretical distinction between power and capability is that by defining national interests according to a state’s capability we can avoid misjudgments that lead to catastrophic policies. The comprehensive capability of states can be categorized into four international status groups: dominant, rising, regional, and small states. A dominant state’s main interest is to maintain its position in the world, while that of a rising state is to gain more international power. A regional or subregional state’s main strategic interest is to maintain dominance in its own region rather than gain world supremacy. Survival is the main strategic interest of a small state. Post–Cold War history illustrates how changes in the capability of the United States, Russia, and China redefined their main strategic interests.

When, after the Cold War, the United States became the sole world superpower, it targeted global dominance as its priority interest. Russia, as successor to the collapsed Soviet Union, did not possess Soviet capability and consequently did not contend for global hegemony, as had its predecessor, instead establishing itself as a regional power in the Eurasian neighborhood. As a rising state, China became the second-largest world economy in 2010, and this
changed China’s main strategic interest from economic prosperity to national rejuvenation in 2012.\footnote{39}

Accepting that national strategic interests are defined by comprehensive capability sets the objective boundaries of national interests. Clearly defined boundaries can help statesmen and scholars to avoid unrealistic ambitions, and allow them to agree on a common standard. Take the George W. Bush administration as an example. In response to 9/11, having set absolute security as the target of its national interest, it attempted to eradicate terrorism. But as this goal was far beyond the capability of American national capability, the Bush administration’s counterterrorism campaign failed. In fact, terrorism now seems to have become as commonplace as burglary or theft, with no foreseeable solution in the future. This is because the United States may have the capability to reduce external terrorist threats to the American homeland, but it lacks the capability to eliminate terrorists from the world entirely. By overreaching its capability, therefore, America’s war on terror not only failed to achieve its goals but also undermined the country’s national capability.

Similarly, underestimating the capability of opposing countries can lead to an underestimation of the bottom line of their national interests, which also results in failed policies. The Sino-Japanese dispute over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands in 2012 is a typical example. In 2012, the naval might of China was approximately equal to Japan’s; therefore, it would have been beneficial for both sides to maintain the status quo of the islands and shelve the disputes.\footnote{40} Nevertheless, having underestimated Chinese naval capability, the Japanese government ignored China’s determination to protect its sovereignty over the islands. On September 11, 2012, the Japanese government nationalized its control over the islands.\footnote{41} Japan’s nationalization of these islands was unacceptable to China, and it accordingly reciprocated Japan’s hard-line position on this issue by announcing its territorial sea baseline and air defense identification zone, as well as official maritime and air navigations.\footnote{42} Because Japan misidentified its own interests over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands by considering its ambitions rather than its military capability,
the country made an erroneous decision that resulted in a long-lasting confrontation between Japan and China.

Differences between Power and Authority

In English-language writings, “power” and “authority” are often used indiscriminately. Even scholars who are aware of the semantic distinction between these two concepts still regard them as being the same in nature. For instance, David Lake says, “Authority is, simply stated, rightful rule. That is, an authoritative ruler has the right to command subordinates to perform certain actions and, because the commands are rightful, the ruled have a duty to comply. In this way, authority is a type of power over others.”43 Therefore, many people regard obtaining power as equal to gaining authority. In the Chinese language, the two concepts, wherein quanli (权力, power) means legitimate coercive rights or duty while quanwei (权威, authority) means prestige or popular trust, are quite removed from each other. This book will use the Chinese connotation of these two terms in explaining the role and types of political leadership.

Both power and authority are resources that a leadership can wield to influence others, but they function through different means. Power enforces behavior through coercion, while authority entices others to follow an idea based on trust in it. One daily life example that highlights the difference is the way in which police officers and medical practitioners change people’s behavior. The former represents power, the latter authority. Motorists obey police officers because police power forces them to; patients take advice from physicians because of trust in their medical knowledge as proven by their credentials. These principles also apply to international leadership. For instance, the United States possesses the dominating power as the “World’s Police Force” based on its unmatched military force since the end of the Cold War. The EU, meanwhile, provides authoritative leadership in dealing with climate change, based on its higher achievements in reducing carbon dioxide emissions in the 2010s than other international actors.
When discussing leadership authority, Max Weber’s definition springs to the mind of many scholars, but the concept of authority in this book is not the same as Weber’s. Weber categorizes authority into three types: rational, traditional, and charismatic. In regard to the basis of charismatic leadership, he says that “it is the charismatically qualified leader such as who is obeyed by virtue of personal trust in him.” That means men do not obey him by tradition or status, but because they believe in him. According to Weber, rational and traditional authorities rest on status and tradition respectively, rather than on others’ confidence in the leadership. Yet both status and tradition are actually defined by power. In this book, the concept of authority bears similarity to Weber’s charismatic authority, but not to the other two types, because it is defined by followers’ confidence in the qualities of a leadership.

When we define the source of power as force and the source of authority as the confidence of its followers, we may argue that authority can increase one’s power naturally, but that power cannot automatically improve one’s authority. Therefore, it is possible for a leading state to increase its international power by promoting its material capability, but such promoted material capability cannot automatically establish the international authority of that state when other states do not accept its leadership. The improvement of a leading state’s international authority entails winning more external support, which automatically increases that state’s international influence, or international power.

We can expand on this point from the perspective of strategic credibility. Strategic credibility is an important part of international authority and is gained through moral actions. An important element of strategic credibility is honoring commitments to other countries, especially allies. Protecting allies and punishing countries that disturb international order are regarded as moral actions of leading states. Therefore, a leading state’s strategic credibility implies consistency between its promises and its actions. Its allies will follow its leadership willingly when they trust its promises, and its enemies will be cautious to challenge it when they believe that it will determinatively maintain international order. Therefore, a
leading state that has improved its strategic credibility enjoys international authority and stands the best chance of winning diplomatic conflicts. Such victories mean more international support, and more international power. For the same reason, those with poor strategic credibility will often suffer diplomatic defeats. For example, in March 2018, the UK blamed Russia for the poisoning of a former spy and his daughter in Salisbury, England, and expelled twenty-three Russian diplomats in retaliation. This policy gained support from more than twenty countries, including eighteen EU states, the United States, and Canada, through their collective expulsion of Russian diplomats. This collective effort represents a significant diplomatic victory for the UK and defeat for Russia. The UK later stated that there was no substantive evidence to prove Russia’s alleged murder attempt, and the two victims recovered after treatment in hospital. However, these facts illustrate how much Russia suffered from its poor strategic credibility.

The difference between authority and power implies that one leading state could enjoy higher international authority than another, even when both wield the same level of international power. In some cases, a state’s international authority may decline even as its international power increases. For example, the United States continuously improved its international power as the sole superpower after the Cold War until the financial crisis of 2008. Yet its international authority suffered a dramatic decline after its launch of the war in Iraq in 2003 without UN authorization. In particular, the disproving of America’s sorry excuse that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction irreparably damaged America’s strategic credibility.

The decline of American international authority started with George W. Bush rather than Trump. The 2008 financial crisis exposed Wall Street’s fraud to the world. The Standard and Poor’s Financial Services LLC accordingly reduced the United States’ credit rating from AAA to AA+ in 2011. In the same year, President Obama abandoned Mohammed Hosni Mubarak, former president of Egypt and long-term ally of America, in the Middle East amid the Arab Spring revolutionary wave. As Herb Keinon, an

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American-born Israeli journalist, said, “All of these treacheries largely repudiated America’s reputation among its allies, and even staggered Israel’s belief in Washington’s strategic credit.” This series of actions has led to the situation wherein America’s international authority in the twenty-first century is much lower than it was in the 1990s.

These cases do not signify that America is the only leading state to adopt irresponsible foreign policy. In fact, all major powers, including China, Russia, France, the UK, Germany, and India, have undertaken actions since the end of World War II that have undermined their international credibility. Some may have records even more notorious than that of the United States. Here I merely argue that immoral actions will reduce a major power’s international authority, regardless of how powerful the state may be.

**INFLUENCE OF MORALITY AND STRATEGIC CREDIBILITY**

The previous discussion analyzed the differences between capability, power, and authority—the three resources of leadership. Owing to their special characters, morality shapes them through different approaches. The lowest level of international morality is strategic credibility; thus, high strategic credibility becomes a precondition for a leading state to establish international authority. A strong power without basic strategic credit cannot hope to establish its authority in an international community.

**Influence of Morality through Different Approaches**

Morality can directly affect the power of states, because moral actions increase the legitimacy of a state’s leadership, thereby giving that state more influence. Morality also can affect a state’s capability but may achieve this effect only indirectly. That is to say, a state’s morality first trickles down to other factors through its influence, which then changes other actors’ support for or opposition to it, so culminating in changes to that state’s capability. Morality has direct influence on a state’s power, but the direction of that influence...
depends on whether or not that state’s actions are consistent with universally accepted moral codes.

Palestine can be used to illustrate the phenomenon whereby moral actions increase a state’s power but not its capability. Palestine’s protest against Israel’s settlement policy of occupying Palestinian territory was in line with international moral codes of conduct. Accordingly, Palestine received both sympathy and political support from the international community, as seen from the seventy-seven UN resolutions from 1955 to 2013 that condemned Israel. Palestine’s moral actions, therefore, enhanced the legitimacy of its claim of sovereignty but nevertheless failed to increase Palestine’s capability to the extent needed to protect its territorial sovereignty. Consequently, Palestine remains vulnerable to Israeli encroachments on its borders.

Japan, by contrast, can be used as an example of how immoral actions decrease a state’s power but not its capability. In 2013, Shinzo Abe, the Japanese prime minister, made formal visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, where World War II Class-A war criminals are enshrined. His actions, which go against international moral codes and are thus considered immoral, provoked international wrath—from China, South Korea, and even America and Europe. However, although the Abe government’s immoral actions considerably damaged Japan’s international image, causing a reduction in Japanese international political power, Japanese capability remained constant. Moreover, its defense expenditure increased by 3 percent in the year 2013.

The influence of morality on a state’s capability varies according to whether such influence gained or undermined it. Adherence to international moral codes enhances the legitimacy of a leading state’s mobilization of support both at home and abroad. This raises the state’s international power, which then transforms into its material capability. This is particularly visible in the creation of alliance networks. For instance, the United States formed a strong multinational force to save Kuwait from Saddam Hussein’s annexation and punished the aggressor in January 1991. America’s decision conformed to the principles of territorial integrity backed by the UN.
Charter and was considered moral by international standards. As a result, the United States gained thirty-four nations as allies, which increased its material capability in the Gulf War.

By contrast, the Saddam Hussein government of Iraq violated international law, an act that was considered immoral by international standards. It consequently lost the support of the general public both at home and abroad, and the military disparity between Iraq and the United States considerably broadened. This case signifies that even if immoral actions do not undermine a state’s absolute capability, they may considerably weaken its relative capability.

Although authority and power are two different matters, morality has direct influence on both. The direction of morality’s influence on a leading state’s authority is also determined according to whether or not that state’s actions are consistent with universally accepted moral codes. Moral actions improve its authority, and immoral actions undermine it. The international power of a leading state will increase according to the moral foundation on which it lays to build up its authority. History shows that leading states that have established a high authority have a greater chance of maintaining international leadership than those with lesser authority. On the current decline of America’s international leadership, Steven Metz, a professor from the US Army War College, says, “It is difficult to defeat the US, but it is possible to thwart it by seizing the ethical high ground and manipulating the fault lines in the American political system. . . . Perhaps the biggest lesson of all, though, is that moral ambiguity hinders, even paralyzes the United States.”

Strategic Credibility and Leading by Example

Strategic credibility is the lowest level of international morality, and a prerequisite to a leading power’s establishment of international authority. Levels of morality are mainly decided by the cost of observing it. Low-level moral codes, such as not lying, not deceiving, and not stealing, can be observed at low cost or no cost, while high-level moral codes, such as charity, altruism, and helpfulness, require a high cost of personal interests. Because observance of low-level
moral codes is less costly, doing so becomes easier and more popular than adhering to high-level moral codes. Therefore, it is possible to trust those who do not practice high-level moral codes, but impossible to trust those who do not observe codes of a low level. Strategic credibility is a moral code on the same low level as not lying; hence no country without it can obtain other states’ trust. It has therefore become the precondition whereby a leading state can establish authority in an international community.

Strategic credibility is a universally accepted moral code among states, crossing the boundaries of civilization, culture, politics, and governments. In the same way as a credible person is considered moral by other people, a credible state is also considered moral by other states. The strategic credibility of a leading state signifies to other members of a given international community a reliable leadership. Through credible behaviors, a leading state earns the strategic confidence of others in it, so lending it greater international authority and ultimately greater power. On the importance to a leading state of strategic credibility, Nye says, “Soft power depends on credibility, and when governments are perceived as manipulative and information is seen as propaganda, credibility is destroyed.”

The level of a leading state’s strategic credibility relates positively to its international status and the durability of its leadership. History shows that a lack of strategic credibility is generally at the root of short-lived interstate leadership. Noting this phenomenon, Xunzi said, “Accordingly, one who uses the state to establish justice will be a sage king; one who establishes trust will be a hegemon; and one who establishes a record of expediency and opportunism will perish.” Xunzi’s statement implies that international authority cannot be forced on other states but rather requires other states’ voluntary acceptance.

The example a leading state sets is instrumental to other states’ voluntary acceptance of its leadership. In Chinese traditional culture, *yishen zuoze* (以身作则, leading by example), rather than giving orders, is a main facet of leadership doctrine and relates to Confucius’s argument “It is known that people proactively come to learn
rites from masters, but it is never heard that masters proactively go to educate others about rites” (Li wen lai xue, bu wen wang jiao, 礼闻来学，不闻往教). In other words, when people seek to learn from someone, it is because they regard him or her as an example. Some of the early American political thinkers also advocated expounding moral principles through example. For instance, John Quincy Adams argued that “it was not for the United States to impose its own principles of government upon the rest of mankind, but, rather, to attract the rest of mankind through the example of the United States,” while Thomas Paine said that “those universal principles the United States had put into practice should not be exported by fire and sword, but presented to the rest of the world through successful example.”

These American thinkers’ cognizance of the risk of war in trying to spread morality by force was at the root of their opposition to that kind of foreign policy. However, this thought holds little sway in modern American IR studies. Since Woodrow Wilson, more and more American thinkers have sought to make the world safe for democracy by transforming it according to the will of the United States. This ideology, known as the Wilsonian conception of democracy and human rights, has had a strong impact on American foreign policy since World War I. After World War II, America became fixated on waging war in the name of democracy. The United States’ persistent and prolonged practice of warring against nondemocratic countries has caused certain American IR scholars to conflate the implementation of universal morality with the export of democracy by force. This has contributed to diminished consideration of the distinction between international authority and international power.

**SUMMARY**

Realism has long been misunderstood as an IR theory that ignores the role of morality in international politics. In fact, classical realism theorists never ignored the functions of morality in their studies on
international relations. Resuming classical realism’s concern about morality, this book attributes the success of a rising state to its political leadership that adopts foreign policy according to universal moral codes. There are three levels of morality judgment: individual, governmental, and international. Governmental morality refers to a government’s responsibility to the interests of the people it rules. Therefore, it is a public rather than a private morality, as well as a universal rather than a national morality.

This book defines capability as strength and power as influence. This distinction lays a foundation for modeling political leadership as an operational factor that determines the growth or decline of a state’s comprehensive capability. The military, the economy, and the culture function as the resource elements of comprehensive capability, which changes according to the efficiency of political leadership—an operational capability. The efficiency of operational capability is mainly determined by the direction and execution of political reforms initiated by the government. Reform politically embraces a moral dimension and is antithetical to retrogression. This implies that the political leadership of a state that is able to implement more and deeper reforms improves that state’s comprehensive capability faster than does the political leadership of other states.

The distinction between power and authority helps our understanding of the durability of an international leadership. Power is based on brute force, and authority is based on others’ trust. Both are the resources of a leadership, but the latter entails voluntary acceptance of that leadership, which the former cannot achieve. It is possible for a leading state to improve its international power by improving its international authority, but not necessarily the other way round. That is why a leadership with high authority lasts longer than one of low or zero authority. Strategic credibility is the lowest level of international morality, and thus the prerequisite to establishing international authority.

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