

## Book Review: Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers by Yan Xuetong

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**Xuetong, Yan, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. xvi + 260 pages, Hardcover, \$29.95.**

Over the years, international relations scholars frequently based their analyses on Hans Morgenthau' realist theory, which emphasizes power politics. Consequently, conducting diplomacy in the international arena was frequently understood to be amoral. The title under review runs contrary and may be viewed as a game changer for a new breed of international relations' scholars, who want to apply a humanistic face in conducting foreign policy. One of the pioneers of this line thinking is Yan Xuetong, professor of political science and dean of the Institute of International Relations at Tsinghua University in Beijing. In his new book, *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, the focal point is morality as an instrument of conducting foreign policy. The central questions that this book grapples with are: "why do great powers rise" and "how does a challenger actually displace the Hegemon?" Beyond these questions, Xuetong aims to demonstrate how China could displace United States and then become the great power.

Xuetong explains China's rise utilizing moral-realist theory combined with classical Chinese political theory (and ancient Chinese philosophies—which the books outlines well for novice Western readers) and places an emphasis on political leadership. To understand the rise of a world power, one should look at the quality of the country's leadership rather than specific strategies or events. Xuetong rationalizes that the stronger a rising state's political leadership, the more likely it is to displace a prevailing state in the international arena. He explains the mechanism by which a rising state can replace a dominant state and become a new world leader. The mechanism he proposes is the attribute of political power buttressed with "morally informed leadership." He also states "rulers who acted in accordance with moral norms, whenever possible

tended to win the race for over long-term.” With this viewpoint, Xuetong develops a moralist-realist theory that shifts the paradigm on international politics in conducting foreign policy based on morality.

According to Xuetong, the precondition of a rising state is to displace a leading state. Make no mistake, the rise of nations is still a zero-sum game, and the rise of one nation must be at the expense of another. To do this, the rising state must possess an effective leadership that establishes authority in the international arena and credibility among the actors on international arena. Simply put “the side that wins the most international support will win the competition.” He affirms winning depends on moral leadership. Xuetong points out in his analysis that the former Soviet Union lost the cold war because it lacked credibility and moral leadership. He also maintains that China will be different if it makes moves against United States because of its value-based leadership. Additionally, China will be more accepted by the international community than the current United States.

Xuetong examines leadership through the lens of morality, defining leadership as the ability to fulfill domestic responsibilities and to maintain international credibility. As a result, leaders define both international and domestic states. Based on their perception and interpretations, leaders build expectation, plans strategies, and direct the attentions of their governments. While the book supports this idea with examples of the United States varied recent record of moral leadership, it does not—unsurprisingly—convincingly delve into the issue of recent Chinese leaders’ morality in the domestic arena.

In *Leadership and the Rise of Great Powers*, the author gives insights to the challenges international actors will face in a bipolar world of China and America as emerging dominant powers. Yan Xuetong predicts the bipolarization will drive the world center from

Europe to East Asia. He envisages in the next ten years, the United States and China will be the only two superpowers, and, as a result, this will force lesser states to choose between the United States and China based on given issues.

He stresses that there will be less agreement or cooperation on issues such as climate change, counterterrorism, illegal immigration, and human trafficking. Over coming decades, Xuetong affirms, there will be no mainstream ideology to replace liberalism. Consequently, there will be different ideologies jockeying for regional domination. The author consoles readers that in the next two decades there is no likelihood that there will be a direct war between China and United States.

The shortcoming of Xuetong's book is that it eclipses United Kingdom and Russia. He does not recognize that they might have "the requisite standing in the world to become moral Superpowers." The book is an innovative, rich, audacious, and engaging narrative of history. It provides a compelling new approach to international relations. Yan Xuetong's book is an excellent addition for students of international relations, history, political science, and philosophy. It is highly recommended for graduate and undergraduate students as it provides a shift of focus from similar titles focused on "Eurocentric orthodoxies."

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