

Resolving the “Matteo Ricci Puzzle”: Top-Level Design of the Grand Canal of China Based on the Ternary Leadership Theory

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Guided by the ternary leadership theory from the perspective of social psychology, this paper explores the impacts of authoritarian, benevolent, and moral leadership on the top design of the Grand Canal of China in terms of its water management practice, while providing reference for resolving the “Matteo Ricci Puzzle”. The research findings are threefold: first, authoritarian as it is, the central government of China formulates relevant laws and regulations to provide legal system insurance for the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt, thus providing the blueprint for constructing the “bright cultural belt, green ecological belt and colorful tourism belt of the Grand Canal”. Second, led by the Central Government, sticking to benevolent and moral leadership, China advocates scientific water management concepts and methods, and gives long-term and comprehensive care to the well-being of the people along the banks of the Grand Canal. Finally, the top-level design of the Grand Canal of China is based on the ternary leadership theory rooted in social psychology and has formulated a set of properly-scheduled, reasonably-coordinated, and flexibly-operated management system for the fundamental interests of the people and long-term goals of the country.

Keywords: social psychology, ternary leadership theory, top design, management of the Grand Canal of China, Matteo Ricci’s puzzle

Introduction

To many Westerners, ancient China in the Far East has mostly been a mystery. Even those like Matteo Ricci, an Italian missionary who knew the Chinese language, made friends with the Chinese people at all levels, and personally made field trips all the way north along the Grand Canal, found himself unable to “clearly classify China’s regime and governance practice according to the traditional theoretical analysis framework of Western politics” (Cao & Liu, 2017, p. 9). First of all, Matteo Ricci knew that China had an emperor, which seemed to be a monarchy, but the emperor lived in the inner palace and did not directly manage the country and the people. Secondly, he found that it is the scholar bureaucrats that really handle the management of the country at all levels, which seems to be an aristocratic regime, but most of China’s scholar bureaucrats come from the bottom of the

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society, even from poor families. Finally, he further learned that the Chinese scholar bureaucrats entered their official careers by taking the imperial examination, which seems to be more like a democracy. However, Chinese scholar bureaucrats must first obey the orders of the emperor and their superiors, so they are also different from the Western nobles and their elected representatives. Matteo Ricci was thus falling into continuous perplexity, which he left unresolved, out of desperation, as the “Matteo Ricci’s Puzzle” in his book entitled *Notes of Matteo Ricci in China*. Ever since then, the perplexity has continuously affected Western scholars such as Montesquieu and Hegel as well as Chinese scholars such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. The “Matteo Ricci’s Puzzle”, in a sense, “has plagued our own judgment and consciousness of problem resolution for more than 400 years” (Cao & Liu, 2017, p. 10).

In any way, the governance of China is different from the regime of Western society, and it is hard to understand the motivating forces that make China reveal basically a picture of national peace and harmony in the majority of the Chinese history. This perplexity has become a political puzzle that has plagued Western civilization for hundreds of years. Today, despite convenient transportation and frequent exchanges between China and the West, massive information carried by big data, and various answers to specific questions displayed on Internet-connected screens at your fingertips, the Western mainstream society still examines the increasingly rising China through Said’s (1978) *Orientalism*. Ironically, instead of helping to clarify the “Matteo Ricci puzzle”, modern science and technology have boosted the bombardment of Western media with negative reports of “China Threat” for the past several decades.

Therefore, it is of dual significance to resolve the “Matteo Ricci puzzle” which can both urge the Chinese people to remain vigilant and facilitate foreigners to understand the essence of China. Under the macro guidance of the indigenous Chinese ternary leadership theory from the perspective of social psychology, this paper investigates present-day China’s water control strategies and measures such as the Grand Canal Economic Belt, Grand Canal Cultural Park, and new navigation of the Grand Canal from the three dimensions of authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, and moral leadership, so as to reveal the unique role of the top-level design in the formulation of the relevant macro strategic policies of new China and, at the same time, provide useful references for resolving the “Matteo Ricci puzzle”.

The Development Basis of the Chinese Leadership Theory

Leadership refers to the process of influencing individuals or groups in an organization in order to achieve organizational goals under certain conditions. The quality of leadership “has a direct impact on the effectiveness of an organization’s output or efficacy by 45%-65%” (Northouse, 2001, p. 4). By the 1940s, Western scholars mainly focused on the theoretical research of leadership traits, advocating the innate theory of leadership. Excellent leaders have insight into phenomena that others can’t perceive. They can find problems that others can’t find and have rich imagination and extraordinary charm in problem solving. Because of the close relationship between leadership traits and the effectiveness of leadership behavior, this theoretical research has made outstanding contributions to the maximization of leader behavior efficiency.

From the late 1940s to the late 1960s, Western scholars shifted from studying the internal characteristics of leaders to external behavior. They found that leadership effectiveness is related to both leadership behavior and leadership style. Therefore, based on the theoretical research of leadership behavior, they put forward the classification of various leadership styles, among which the more popular ones are authoritative leadership,

democratic leadership, and laissez faire leadership proposed by White and Lippitt (1960). From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, scholars mainly focused on the contingency theories of leadership. It was found that leadership effectiveness is not only related to personal quality and behavior, but also related to the surrounding environment. Fiedler (1962) put forward the “Contingency model of leadership effectiveness”, which emphasizes that effective group performance depends on the organic combination of leaders’ style and their control over the situation. Therefore, wise leaders should change their leadership styles in time according to different environments. The main leadership styles include command type, persuasion type, participation type, authorization type, guidance type, support type, achievement-oriented type, and so on.

Since the 1980s, Western academic circles have focused on the theoretical research of leadership style. American scholars such as Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) found that leaders usually use different leadership styles, and these different leadership styles have different effects on group members’ job performance and job satisfaction. They found that the most effective leadership styles include autocratic, democratic, and laissez faire. However, Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2002) found that at least six leadership styles are related to group work performance, namely: foresight, relationship, democracy, coaching, demonstration, and command. With the development and progress of the times, more new leadership theories emerge endlessly, such as attribution theory of leadership, super-leadership theory, and E-leadership theory, to name a few. Since the West emphasizes democracy and equality in legal principle, relevant theoretical studies are mostly based on the equal status between superiors and subordinates, exploring the relationship of rights, duties and obligations, compliance and so on.

Most domestic leadership studies begin with “learning from Western leadership research routines” (Zhang, et al., 2017, p. 37). These studies should not only test whether the introduced Western leadership theory is applicable to the Oriental society, but also investigate whether the construction of native leadership theory is rooted in China’s cultural soil. The long history of China has bred the Chinese cultural circle with Confucian culture as the core, and shaped the unique social mentality and code of conduct of Chinese. Organizational leaders or superiors and their subordinates are established in a clear superior subordinate relationship and role routine from the beginning. Therefore, Oriental society, especially Chinese society, is different from the West in terms of value system and code of conduct involving management and leadership. In the 1960s, after a one-year case study of a Taiwanese business enterprise, Silin (1976) found that the management mode of the enterprise was similar to that of parents managing family members. The concept of “paternalistic leadership” was first formally put forward by Redding in 1990 based on more than 20 years of follow-up research on Chinese family businesses in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Philippines (Redding, 1990). The research results of Westwood in 1997 coincide with the above two, confirming that the leadership style of Chinese family enterprises has an obvious family leadership style (Westwood, 1997).

Since the founding of new China in 1949, the centralized top-level design has always existed and gradually got improved from the initial immaturity. As an engineering term, top-level design refers to the overall consideration of all levels and elements of a project to seek ways to solve major problems at the highest level from the overall perspective. The CPC Central Committee first mentioned “top-level design” in the proposal of the 12th Five Year Plan, making it a new term of political reform, which means “the overall planning of all aspects, levels and elements of a task or a project from the perspective of system theory, so as to concentrate effective resources and achieve objectives efficiently and quickly” (He, 2016, p. 1). In the case of China, “top-level design” specifically refers to making strategic, systematic, and practical overall arrangements and

deployment on the target model, system model, and major basic areas of national security led by a decision-making body composed of elite groups on the basis of people’s concerns, professional argumentation, and grass-roots suggestions (Wang & Peng, 2018).

Based on the test of practice, China’s “top-level design” includes five levels of logic programs and six basic features according to Wang and Di (2013). The five-layer logic program includes: first, the “target model design” conforms to the national conditions and the wishes of the people, and conforms to the development trend at home and abroad. Second, the “system and mechanism design” is based on the law of social development and the principle of strategic management. Third, the “key area design” follows its own development law and mutual relationship. The fourth and fifth “major engineering design” and “key project design” make full use of the means and paths of information processing, model construction, and data analysis. The six characteristics include objectivity, rationality, feasibility, acceptability, dynamics, and multi-agent game. The first five characteristics are self-evident, and the “multi-agent game” of the last refers to the collective design and mutual game process participated by leaders, management, experts, scholars, and stakeholders to deal with the seemingly “impossible tasks” of complex giant systems regardless of being “soft” and/or “hard”.

To sum up, Western leadership theory is the product of Western society, which has developed from general leadership morphology and leadership ecology into leadership dynamics. Following the Western leadership research routines, scholars found that the unique social structure in the East is different from the West in both value system and code of conduct. Therefore, Oriental leadership theories involving management are mostly rooted in the cultural soil of Confucianism, which is characteristic of paternalistic leadership in family enterprises. In the process of its gradual improvement, China’s “top-level design” tested by experiments has already acquired five levels of logical procedures and six basic features.

The Ternary Leadership Theory as Rooted in Social Psychology

Social psychology is the scientific study of how people’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others (Allport, 1985, p. 1). Social psychologists typically explain human behavior as a result of the interaction of mental states and immediate social situations. In his book entitled *Social Psychology*, Luo (2008) pointed out that “social psychology is the psychological activity that people present in their interactions”, which has three areas of research focus:

first, individual social psychology and social behavior, such as social cognition, social attitude and social motivation; second, interpersonal psychology and behavior, such as interpersonal relationship, interpersonal communication and interpersonal influence; finally, group social psychology, such as mass psychology and national psychology. (Luo, 2008, p. 2)

With the gradual deepening and expansion of social psychology research, researchers have shifted from the power structure variable to the power psychological variable. Based on their study results, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, and Magee (2003) claimed,

power can be conceived not only as an aspect of social structure but also as a cognitive structure that can be activated by an appropriate environmental stimulus. Thus, the possession of power in one context can lead to action in an unrelated context. (Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003, p. 453)

Combined with the previous research results, especially those related to social psychology, Taiwan scholars, Cheng, Zhou, and Farh (2000) put forward the indigenous ternary leadership theory based on the reality of Chinese society. The theory comprises the following three dimensions:

Authoritarian Leadership

Authoritarian leadership means that leaders appoint people on merit, convince people by virtue, concentrate on their rights, respect seniority, shoulder clear responsibilities, and keep rules strictly for reward and punishment. Authoritarian leadership based on authority and awe is conducive to the high concentration on and effective operation of decision-making power, but it is detrimental to the autonomy and participation of subordinates to some extent. The negative effect of authoritarian leadership is generally manifested as: (1) the authoritarian style of manipulating information and controlling subordinates; (2) belittling subordinates' abilities, ignoring subordinates' suggestions and contributions; (3) using the contribution of subordinates to maintain their authoritative image; (4) emphasizing performance and publicly reprimanding the teaching behavior of subordinates. In response, subordinates of authoritarian leaders generally show obedience, awe, and shame. The negative effect of authoritarian leadership can produce a positive effect by means of authority and kindness, demonstrating superb leadership ability, reasonable reward and punishment, and being opposite to things and people.

Benevolent Leadership

Benevolent leadership refers to the individual, comprehensive, and long-term care and kindness of leaders to their subordinates and their family members. Benevolent leadership in the West is more reflected in the care and attention to the well-being of subordinates, while the care of benevolent leadership in the East is not only reflected at the work level, but often extended to the private life of subordinates. The kindness of benevolent leadership is mainly manifested in two forms: individual care and maintenance of face. Individual care includes treating subordinates as family members; ensuring work, emergency help, and overall care; and encouraging counseling measures. Maintaining face includes avoiding humiliation and allowing for unforeseen circumstances. In return, subordinates will show gratitude and reward: gratitude includes remembering kindness and always being grateful; and reward includes the behavior of sacrificing oneself, showing professionalism, meeting expectations, and working hard.

Moral Leadership

Moral leadership means that leaders lead by example to win the admiration and imitation of their subordinates through their own good quality and moral behavior. Specifically, moral leadership includes distinguishing between public and private and setting an example. The former is reflected by equal treatment and sacrificing private interests, and the latter is usually reflected by setting an example. The response of subordinates to moral leadership is identification and imitation. The former is expressed by identifying and internalizing value and goal, and the latter is expressed by imitating the behavior of leaders. On this basis, Hu and Yuan (2017) put forward the concept of moral leadership. By moral leadership, the two scholars refer to “a process or activity in which leaders uphold the humanistic concept, cultivate their internal virtues, take ethical decision-making as the core, and naturally form community values and organizational cohesion” (p. 1118). During the process, leaders try to “reach a psychological contract with their subordinates so as to jointly realize the dual leadership goals of giving consideration to both productivity and humanity” (p. 1118). The two scholars believe that in practice, moral leadership forms a reciprocal mechanism around the value order of emotion, reason, and law through the interactive regulation of explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Here, it is necessary to distinguish “virtue” from “morality”, as the two words are different in connotation. While the former is an internal character and the source of the latter, the latter is an external character and the practice of the former. Therefore, moral leadership

is adopted as a dimension of the ternary leadership theory to emphasize the practice or performance of virtues in the type of leadership.

It is clear that the native ternary leadership theory is rooted in Confucianism and Legalism of the traditional Chinese culture. It is closely related to the cultural characteristics of collectivism and high power distance. It has been widely used in Chinese social organizations at all levels for a long time. Some scholars show their concern that there may be a negative relationship among the three dimensions. If they operate as a whole at the same time, it cannot be completely effective. However, if it is applied separately and independently, unexpected innovative results can be produced (Wang & Cheng, 2010). Some other scholars believe that authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, and moral leadership can hardly co-exist completely and independently, as there is an interactive relationship between the three, namely, (1) the interaction between benevolent leadership and authoritarian leadership; (2) the interaction between moral leadership and authoritarian leadership; and (3) the interaction between benevolent leadership and moral leadership (Zhou & Long, 2005). Moreover, the empirical test results show that “there is an interactive relationship between (1) and (2), but the interactive effect is not very obvious;” however, “there is not only an interactive relationship between benevolent leadership and moral leadership, but also the interactive effect between them is very significant” (H. Li, Ding, & X. J. Li, 2014, p. 1005). We believe that no matter the three dimensions of the indigenous ternary leadership theory are used independently or together, we should first conduct a comprehensive examination of a series of factors such as leaders, subordinates, tasks, and their respective characteristics, and then we can draw relevant conclusions.

Since then, Cheng, Zhou, and Farh (2000) have compiled a paternalistic leadership scale (PLS) for their paternalistic leadership ternary theory, in which 13 questions test authoritarian leadership, 11 questions test benevolent leadership, and nine questions test moral leadership. From the application process and effect of the scale in schools and enterprises, “the internal consistency and constructive validity of the three dimensions are basically satisfactory” (Zhou & Long, 2005, p. 232). In fact, the above-mentioned three theories were tested by Chen, Yang, and Jiang (2012), and their Cronbach values are 0.80, 0.85, and 0.84 respectively, indicating that the theory has good reliability and validity. Since the ternary theory of paternalistic leadership is rooted in the traditional thoughts of “Confucianism” and “legalism” of the ancient Chinese culture, it has been extensively applied to examine Chinese social businesses and organizations from the past to modern times. Below, we apply the three dimensions of ternary leadership theory as a theoretical framework to examine the present-day water control practice of the Grand Canal of China.

Top-Level Design of the Present-Day Water Control Practice of the Grand Canal of China

Authoritarian Leadership

With the continuous evolution of authoritarian leadership, especially under the normative framework of modern society ruled by law, authoritarian leadership is no longer just based on personal strength and respect formed in organizational inheritance, but more based on the management system of modern rule of law (Wang, 2019). Modern governance system is a huge complex system project, which “must rely on top-level design, continuous improvement and large-scale human coordination” (Lan & Wei, 2014, p. 9). The three major strategies of the “Belt and Road” initiative, the “Coordinated Development of Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei”, and the “Yangtze River Economic Belt” as well as the regional development strategy of “Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei Urban Agglomeration” are all successful cases of the top-level design of China’s national development strategy.

On May 26, 2017, President Xi Jinping wrote in the report *Creating a Golden Card to Display the Chinese Civilization—Some Thoughts on Building the Grand Canal Cultural Belt*: “The Grand Canal of China is a precious heritage left to us by our ancestors and a flowing culture, which should be well protected, inherited and utilized” (Wang, 2019, para. 6). The 2,500-year old Grand Canal of China, including the Sui-Tang Grand Canal, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, and the East Zhejiang Canal, has a total length of 3,200 kilometers. It starts from Luoyang, the starting point of the land Silk Road in the west, and ends at Sanjiangkou, Zhejiang Province, the starting point of the maritime Silk Road in the East, thus connecting the land and sea Silk Roads. In addition, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, which still plays the roles of navigation and new navigation, that is, the South-to-North Water Transfer, connects 35 cities in eight provinces and five major domestic water systems, basically including all node regions and important cities involved in the above national strategy. President Xi Jinping warned that “the danger of rivers and water sources is the danger of life and environment and the survival of the nation” (Zhao, 2017, para. 8). At the same time, he puts forward the concept that human beings and nature are a community of life. Representing the central government of the country, the president advocates that human beings must respect, conform to and protect nature; otherwise, human damage to nature will eventually hurt human beings themselves.

In addition to the scientific development of Chinese traditional culture and Marxist view of nature, from the strategic height of enhancing cultural self-confidence, strengthening regional coordinated development, and protecting the ecological environment, President Xi Jinping puts forward the scientific water control notions of “giving priority to water saving, spatial balance, systematic governance and making efforts with both hands herein.” He changes the traditional water control method that emphasized changing and conquering nature into a scientific water control concept that advocates adjusting human behavior, strengthening demand management, and adhering to the water demand, acting according to one’s ability and adjusting measures to local conditions. In order to realize this water control concept, he proposes to reform the natural resources and ecological environment management system, improve the ecological environment management system, and speed up the ecological civilization of water control, so as to establish the overall structure of the national water control system (Shi, Wu, & Hu, 2019). So far, a comprehensive cultural functional area integrating heritage and ecological protection, economic and social development, culture and leisure has been completed, “with the Grand Canal culture as the core, protection, inheritance and utilization as the main line, banded geographical space as the carrier, regional transportation as the basis and towns along the line as the development theme” (Xiong, 2017, pp. 41-42). The construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt has also become an organic part of the top-level design of the national development strategy.

As a positive response to the national top-level design blueprint of the Grand Canal, Chinese governments and relevant personnel at all levels have actively improved and successively issued plans, specifications, and regulations related to the Grand Canal on the basis of the regulations of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on World Heritage canals. The general offices of the Central Committee and the State Council of China issued a plan for the protection, inheritance, and utilization of the Grand Canal culture in February 2019, which promoted the construction of the Grand Canal cultural belt as a national strategy. The plan carries out the top-level design in terms of its direction, objectives, and tasks in the construction of the Grand Canal cultural belt and the functional positioning of the Grand Canal in culture, ecology, and tourism from six aspects: cultural heritage protection and inheritance, river system governance and management, ecological environment protection and restoration, integrated development of culture and tourism, overall planning and

coordination of urban and rural areas, and innovation of protection, inheritance and utilization mechanism (General Offices of the Central Committee and the State Council of China, 2019). Then, the ninth meeting of the Central Committee for comprehensively deepening reform reviewed and approved a plan on the construction of national cultural parks for the Great Wall, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal and the Long March on July 24, 2019. The construction plan of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal national cultural park is a major cultural project which is rigorously promoted by the central government of China during the 14th five-year plan period. It is also the latest top-level design of the Grand Canal so as to promote the protection, inheritance, and utilization of the Grand Canal, enhance the social understanding and recognition of Chinese culture, promote the coordinated development of culture, ecology, and urban and rural construction, integrate the canal culture into people's daily life, and let the people participate in and share the canal culture (Chai, Sun, Fu, & Chun, 2017). The introduction of the above two documents has made all relevant departments and personnel throughout the country excited and motivated because the top-level design blueprint for the construction of the Grand Canal cultural belt has made crystal clear the main content, innovation path, and implementation direction of the blueprint.

At the practical level, eight provinces and cities along the Grand Canal have set up special working groups for the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt, formulated their own implementation plans for the Grand Canal Cultural Park, and comprehensively consolidated the relevant implementation schemes and action plans for the protection, inheritance, and utilization of the world heritage canal. Taking Beijing and Yangzhou as examples, Yangzhou formulated the measures for the protection of the world cultural heritage in the Yangzhou section of the Grand Canal in 2017. In 2018, Beijing reviewed and approved the plan for the protection and construction of the Beijing Grand Canal Cultural Belt and the five-year action plan for the protection and construction of Beijing Grand Canal Cultural Belt (2018-2022). At the “Two Conferences” (i.e. the National People's Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference) held in 2021, Beijing submitted a proposal to focus on the construction of the Xishan Yongding River Cultural Belt, the Great Wall Cultural Belt, and the Grand Canal Cultural Belt, aiming to promote the overall rejuvenation of the region by selecting key points, focusing on nodes, and building cultural characteristic sections of the Grand Canal.

Likewise, Yangzhou plans to vigorously promote the key construction projects of the Grand Canal National Cultural Park from three aspects: (1) taking the opening of the Yangzhou National Grand Canal Museum as an opportunity to complete the construction of the Three-Bay exhibition park of the Grand Canal National Cultural Park with high standards, focusing on building a world canal cultural tourism destination; (2) taking the opening of Yangzhou World Horticultural Expo in 2021 as another opportunity to comprehensively improve the specification and quality of Zaolinwan tourist resort and build it into a tourist destination in East China; (3) making culture an important connotation and source of vitality of “good place” while giving play to the platform role of the World Historic and Cultural Canal Cities Cooperation Organization (WCCO), and telling the world the story of the Grand Canal and the story of China. Obviously, the above two cities have taken measures of laws, regulations, and administrative plans to ensure the authenticity, integrity and systematic protection, inheritance and utilization of their respective Grand Canal Heritage sites, and ensure the smooth implementation of the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt and the Grand Canal National Cultural Park (Research Group of the Culture, History and Study Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference, 2019).

To sum up, the top-level design of the Grand Canal reflects the authoritarian leadership of the Chinese government with President Xi Jinping as the core. Under the high-level leadership and based on grass-roots

suggestions and professional demonstration, the central government of China makes strategic, systematic, and practical overall arrangements and deployment on the target mode, system and mechanism and key areas of the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt. Through the flexible top-down and bottom-up interaction mechanism, the Chinese governments at various levels are capable of making scientific management and shouldering clear responsibilities to realize the development concept of “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets” (Yang, 2021, para. 2) and promote the top-level design of ecological civilization of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt.

Benevolent Leadership

Benevolent leadership shows that leaders provide individual, comprehensive, and long-term care for the personal well-being and face of their subordinates, and provide emergency assistance in all aspects. At the level of governing the country, benevolent leadership often highlights the people-oriented leading thought, which is reflected in the top-level design of major strategic projects. Since ancient times, “reassuring the people and consolidating the country” has been the ideal goal of governing the country in Chinese history and the main embodiment of the kind leadership of far-sighted politicians and thinkers. According to the *Book of History*: “the virtue of the ruler lies in promoting good governance and improving people’s livelihood” (Mu, 2009, para. 7). The concept of “making the people prosperous and the country strong” has a long history in China, which has been continuously deepened in thousands of years of social development and further innovated and developed in today’s Chinese society.

The Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China clearly pointed out that social governance is an important aspect of national governance. We must strengthen and innovate the social governance system and build a social governance community in which everyone has a responsibility, and everyone performs their duties for the benefits of all. Whether it is the “social governance system” or the “social governance community”, the top-level design of the central government of China fully embodies the benevolent leadership characteristics of “people’s nature”. This means that the governments at various levels ought to always live up to the needs and expectations of the people, and adhere to building a peaceful world and a well-off society with social stability and order, where people live and work in peace and contentment. President calls on the Party and the leaders to adhere to the essence of the people by materializing the fundamental interests and needs of the overwhelming majority of the people as the starting point and foothold. President Xi holds that “the effectiveness of a country’s governance can be tested by whether the people have really benefited, whether their lives have been truly improved, and whether their rights and interests have been truly protected” (Ai & Han, 2017, para. 9).

For the governance of the Grand Canal, benevolent leadership at the national top-level is clearly visible. On a global scale, the central government’s appeal to mobilize the Chinese people of the whole country to concentrate on major events is unparalleled in the world. The overall layout of the “South-to-North Water Diversion” project covers the “four horizontals” (the Yangtze River, the Huaihe River, the Yellow River, and the Haihe River) and the “three verticals” (the east line, the middle line, and the west line). The east line project around the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal is the most solid and stretched one. As early as 1957, Jiangsu Province took the lead in launching the South-to-North Water Diversion Project in the province, which laid a solid foundation for the top-level design and implementation of the National South-to-North Water Diversion Project. In 2002, when the State Council approved the official start of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, the implementation of the grand project and the improvement of the ecological environment were coordinated and deployed. The eastern

route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project utilizes the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal and its parallel rivers to transport water, sending water from the Yangtze River north to Tianjin and east to the Shandong Peninsula. In December 2013, the eastern route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project was the first to be completed with water supply. The main water transmission line is 1,156 kilometers long, and the annual water transfer scale is about 9 billion cubic meters, which has brought significant social, economic, and ecological benefits. Over the years, the southern provinces have continuously completed the glorious task of sending water to the north, which has greatly alleviated the water shortage crisis in the northern regions. In fact, the normalized, large flow, and sustainable South-to-North Water Transfer, on the one hand, “ensures the water level along the canal, enhances the self purification capacity of the river and creates a good trend of regional climate and ecology”, and, on the other hand, through the formation of the clear water corridor of the grand canal, the construction of beautiful river landscape and the launch of tourism hotspots along the canal, “gradually build a thriving ecological civilization scene of the Grand Canal, which also greatly enriches the connotation of the material and intangible culture of the Grand Canal” (Zhang, 2020, para. 8).

At the same time, on behalf of the central government of China, President Xi Jinping provides care to the hearts of hundreds of millions of people on offline and online network platforms through practice, field investigation, and cordial conversations with local people. On February 24, 2017, during his investigation in Tongzhou District, Beijing, President Xi remarked that:

it is the common responsibility of all regions along the Grand Canal to make the past serve the present, deeply tap the historical and cultural resources with the Grand Canal as the core while protecting the Grand Canal at the same time. (Research Group of the Culture, History and Study Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference, 2019)

In this context, on April 25, 2017, Wang Jiarui, vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese people’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), led relevant CPPCC members to conduct a field visit to collect first-hand information and provide supporting arguments for the key proposal of raising the construction of the Grand Canal Economic Belt to a national strategy. In September 2018, the central committee entrusted the Culture, History and Study Committee of the CPPCC National Committee to set up an investigation team to conduct on-the-spot investigations in Beijing, Tianjin, and Hebei, and provide suggestions for promoting the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt. On November 13, 2020, during his inspection in Yangzhou, President Xi stressed: “Yangzhou is a good place. It is an important historical and cultural city in China, built by water, getting prosperous by water, and becoming beautiful because of water” (Wang, 2020, para. 1). In order to implement the spirit of President Xi’s inspection speech, Yangzhou began to practice the new development concept, focus on the construction of “one city with three capitals” (the World Canal Capital, the World Food Capital, and the East Asian Cultural Capital), and bravely shoulder the multiple burdens of the “original city” of the Grand Canal, the “leading city for World Heritage Application”, and the “source city” of the east line of the South-to-North Water Diversion. Yangzhou Municipal People’s government has decided to take “shared development” as the fundamental pursuit of people’s well-being, and plans to win “six tough battles” in five years, such as black and smelly water treatment, rainwater and sewage diversion, scientific garbage classification, old community transformation, and improvement of urban appearance and environment to realize the “rebirth of the ancient canal”, and the “revitalization of the canal culture” (J. N. Wang, Sun, & J. Y. Wang, 2018, pp. 17-18).

It can be seen that the central government of China today and state leaders nowadays uphold the people-oriented concept, adhere to benevolent leadership, and try in every way to give long-term and comprehensive care for the well-being of the people. Of course, relevant government departments at all levels, social forces, and the broad masses of the people also actively respond to the call of the central leadership, especially those from the eight provinces and cities along the Grand Canal, namely Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Henan, and Anhui. Through the construction of urban sub centers, the integration of Grand Canal culture, ecological and tourism belt, and the exploitation of Grand Canal cultural resources, the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt, mobilization of social forces, China has been expanding its relevant cultural industries as people from the 35 cities in the relevant eight provinces are implementing comprehensively and systematically the central government’s strategic plan for the top-level design of the Grand Canal of China.

Moral Leadership

The moral leadership in this paper means that leaders cultivate good quality and moral behavior and set an example to win the admiration and imitation of their subordinates through the five aspects of “moral courage, open mind, meticulous honesty, sincerity and responsibility, integrity and fairness”. At the same time, moral leadership should also take into account not only the three aspects of emotion, reason, and law, but also the importance of the three through the flexible application of explicit and tacit knowledge, so as to form a mutually beneficial and efficient mechanism in leadership practice. Based on the basic characteristics of the Chinese social and cultural context, the traditional rulers of ancient China mostly proceeded from ethics, and strived to form the leadership norms of “ruling the country with virtue, filial piety and rites”. Confucian ethics has overcome the dualism of rationality and emotion in the West, which is either one or the other. Through considering others from the inside to the outside, it cultivates the internal moral quality on the one hand, and highlights the leadership effectiveness in practice on the other hand, so as to realize the ideal leadership realm of “inner sage and outer king”. To be an inner sage is to possess the talent and virtue of saints, and to be an outer king is to implement plans in a kingly way.

President Xi Jinping integrates moral leadership and virtue leadership, and carries them forward. Influenced by other great figures in the Chinese history, Xi imperceptibly inherited the noble character, spiritual outlook, and outstanding personality of the well-known historical figures and revolutionary leaders, including his own father, Xi Zhongxun. Once, Xi Zhongxun said to his son, “Jin Ping, no matter how high-ranking an official you are, don’t forget to serve the people diligently, really think of the people, contact the masses and be approachable...” (He, 2016, para. 17). It can be seen that his father’s example and earnest teaching have become valuable spiritual wealth for Xi Jinping’s political career. The noble character of many officials in ancient China who cared about the common people has also become a model for himself in politics. Xi believes that “to worry before the common people worries and to enjoy only after the people can enjoy” as stated by Fan Zhongyan, a renowned ancient Chinese scholar, vividly reflects the image of a good official who cares about the suffering of the people and wholeheartedly works for the welfare of the people. To him, the statement also fully explains the profound truth that no official can survive without the people, which is line with the Marxist concept of power: “A leaders’ power is given by the people and should be used for the people” (Xi, 2010, p. 78).

Throughout the ages, those who are good at governing the country must first control water, and those who are good at rejuvenating the country must first revitalize water. President Xi Jinping is well aware that the way to control water resembles the way to govern a country. National unity is conducive to water control, which in

turn is also conducive to national unity. Since the Grand Canal was listed on the World Cultural Heritage List on June 22, 2014, the central government of China under the leadership of President Xi has formulated the general principle for the protection and management of historical and cultural relics, which is “protecting primarily, rescuing first, utilizing rationally, and enhancing management” so as to promote the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt from the perspective of national development strategy. In other words, by formulating the above general principle, the Chinese government aims to

build a comprehensive cultural functional area integrating heritage and ecological protection, economic and social development, culture and leisure with the Grand Canal culture as the core, protection, inheritance and utilization as the main line, banded geographical space as the carrier, regional transportation as the basis and towns along the line as the main body of development. (Xiong, 2017, pp. 41-42)

Thus, the central government has, in a sense, shown the direction and path for building the Grand Canal of China into the “bright cultural belt, green ecological belt and colorful tourism belt” as planned.

In November 2020, when inspecting the Three-Bay Ecological and Cultural Park of Yangzhou, President Xi Jinping pointed out that the protection of cultural heritage of the Grand Canal should be jointly managed with the improvement of ecological environment protection, the protection and restoration of famous cities and towns along the Grand Canal, the integrated development of cultural tourism, and the transformation and improvement of canal navigation. By so doing, we can create favorable conditions for regional economic and social development, people’s well-being and healthy growth of teenagers and young people along the Grand Canal. During his visit to the Jiangdu Water Control Project in Yangzhou City, he instructed that China’s implementation of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project is to scientifically adjust water resources, promote the balanced and sustainable development of Southern and Northern China, coordinate the implementation of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project with water conservation in the north, adhere to both water transfer and water conservation. In this way, we can improve the ability to transfer water to the north; nevertheless, people in the northern region should proceed from reality by save watering instead of expanding their water consumption at will. Representing the central government of China, President Xi stressed that based on the great achievements of the East Route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, it is still necessary to play the roles of the large water conservancy project and Jiangdu Water Conservancy Project Exhibition Hall to

actively carry out the national water situation education, guide leaders and ordinary people, especially teenagers and young people, to enhance their awareness of saving water resources and protecting water ecology, and accelerate the green transformation of production and life style. (Ding, 2020, para. 9)

These far-sighted strategic measures have quickly won the warm support of the people all over the country, and have maximized the consensus and cohesion of the people of all ethnic groups in the process of their implementation. Relevant provinces and cities along the Grand Canal have made greater efforts promoting the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt. Yangzhou City in Jiangsu Province is the origin city of the earliest ancient canal in China and the intersection city of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the Grand Canal Cultural Belt. In recent years, according to the water control notions and policy of the national top-level design, Yangzhou has made great efforts building the “Three Belts and One Corridor” of the Yangzhou Ancient Canal Cultural Tourism Belt, Beijing Hangzhou Canal Green Navigation Demonstration Belt, the Source Ecological Belt of the East Route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, and the Jianghuai Ecological Corridor (Wang, 2020, para. 21). The “Three Belts and One Corridor” plan is the concrete implementation of the top-level design

blueprint of “Grand Canal bright cultural belt, green ecological belt and colorful tourism belt” drawn by the above central government. The plan is just one of the practical cases of moral leadership in the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt. In fact, other provinces and cities along the Grand Canal also have comparable themed projects.

In short, moral leadership emphasizes that leaders should be scrupulous in separating public from private interests, and honest and responsible so as to win the recognition and respect of subordinates. Such leadership emphasizes the leader’s personal morality, words, and deeds and their positive impact on subordinates. At the national level, moral leadership is mainly reflected by “ruling the country by virtue”. In the specific practice of ruling the country by virtue, President Xi creatively combined the excellent quality of being an official in the traditional Chinese culture with the Marxist concept of power, organically combined moral leadership with virtue leadership, so as to give consideration to emotion, reason, and law, and to form a mutually beneficial and efficient high-quality leadership mechanism. The top-level design blueprint of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt is deeply rooted in the hearts of the people and reflects the characteristics of engineering, linearity, liveliness, and integration to the greatest extent, so it is beneficial to the country and the people. Such top-level design has been widely supported and thoroughly implemented in the overall management of the country, especially in the development planning and implementation plans of the provinces and cities along the Grand Canal (Research Group of the Culture, History and Study Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese Political Consultative Conference, 2019).

Conclusion

Based on the macro guidance of the indigenous ternary leadership theory from the perspective of social psychology, this paper investigates the modern water control measure of the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt from the three dimensions of authoritarian leadership, benevolent leadership, and moral leadership. As a precious heritage left by the Chinese ancestors, the Grand Canal of China carries profound cultural value and spiritual connotation, and it represents the collective memory of the development of China’s profound history. The study found that in the dimension of authoritarian leadership, President Xi Jinping, representing the central government of the country, has carried out the top-level design of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt from the national strategic level based on the scientific concept and mode of water control. He is well aware of the importance of water control to the country and has made great efforts improving the people’s awareness of water crisis. Based on the traditional Chinese culture and Marxist view of nature, he has established the overall framework of the Grand Canal governance system from the perspective of the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity. A series of legal provisions have been formulated and promulgated to ensure the implementation of his ideas and principles of governing the country and managing water.

In the dimension of benevolent leadership, national leaders and the central government uphold the people-oriented concept and give long-term and comprehensive care to the well-being of the people. Since February 2017, President Xi has continuously made important instructions on the protection, inheritance, and utilization of the Grand Canal. The CPPCC National Committee has organized delegations to conduct on-the-spot visits for many times to make suggestions for promoting the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt. The overall strategic documents such as the “Plan for the Protection, Inheritance and Utilization of the Grand Canal Culture” and the “Plan on the Construction of National Cultural Parks for the Great Wall, the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal and the Long March” designed by the central government have provided important institutional guarantee

for the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt. The call and care of the central government have also won the positive response and practical actions of relevant government departments at all levels and the broad masses of the people.

In the dimension of moral leadership, the central government with President Xi at the core, in line with the principles of protecting heritage and ecology, developing economy and society, and inheriting history and culture, has promoted the construction of the Grand Canal Cultural Belt from the height of national development strategy. It is thus a top-level design blueprint that pays attention to economic tourism development and natural ecological protection. Therefore, the top-designed construction has benefited the country and the people, which was embodying great wisdom and morality. Specifically, the top-level design blueprint has been drawn into the development schemes and implementation plans of the eight provinces and 35 cities along the Grand Canal, which have been quickly and effectively implemented by local governments at all levels.

Based on the above research, we believe that the main reasons for the existence of the “Matteo Ricci’s puzzle” are as follows. First, the Western reports of the “other” including China are biased conclusions filtered through the “Orientalism” described by Said in most cases. Second, China experts including Matteo Ricci, have paid more attention to the similarities and differences between China and the West in terms of form and name, but have failed to deeply understand the root of China’s governance through different regimes. Since ancient times, the successful national governance experience in China is to safeguard the fundamental interests of the country and the people with public power. National governance is not limited to a certain form. It tends to combine leniency with severity and has a degree of openness. As long as leaders do put the overall and long-term interests of the country first and the interests and well-being of the people first, they can win the support of the people and the long-term stability of the country.

The limitations of the present study lie in that, on the one hand, in the discussion about the management of the Grand Canal of China, the present study focuses on the top-design of the Chinese Central Government while somewhat downplaying the roles of the governments at various other levels. On the other hand, since the Grand Canal of China is 2500-year old man-made construction project mainly from an agricultural civilization, the roles and contributions of the ordinary people should have been emphasized much more. For future research these areas ought to be strengthened.

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