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Understandings of freedom in China and the West

If one travels Chinese academia, one encounters a lot of interest in Western liberal thought. This is understandable, since the economic liberalization of the last decades in the People's Republic of China has brought with it different patterns of consumption and living that presuppose a more individualistic conception of citizen's relation to society. At the same time, we do not see a similar liberalization of political and cultural aspects of citizens' relation to society. In his lecture, prof. Van den Brink reflects on the differences between the two takes on the limits of liberal rights and the understandings of individual and collective freedom that come with it. Central to his argument will be a rejection of paradigms that build up China and the West as irreconcilable cultural 'blocks' and value systems, while acknowledging great differences between political, cultural, and ethical outlooks.

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The aesthetic element of ritual propriety in Confucian ethics

The connection between aesthetics and ethics is a close one, because they are both forms of value. The concept of *καλοκαγαθία* - from the expression *καλὸς κάγαθός* (the beautiful and the good) - makes sense in the context of ancient Greek thought, which stressed the importance of harmony and balance in every human expression. Confucius also associates the good and the beautiful. *Li* (translated as "ritual propriety") plays a central role in Confucianism, but its complexity is usually misunderstood. Some scholars interpret ritual behaviors as attempts to defend conservative practices from the idealized Chinese past. However, by a closer examination of the nature and function of ritual propriety, as described in Confucius' *Analects*, it becomes apparent that it is a broader concept. The rites of *li* are not rites in the Western conception of religious custom. Rather, *li* embodies the entire spectrum of interaction with humans, nature, and even material objects. Confucius includes in his discussions of ritual propriety such diverse topics as learning, mourning, and governance. I intend to argue that ritual propriety actually adds aesthetic elements to Confucian ethics and politics.