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Virtue Language in the Time of the Coronavirus: A Cross-Cultural Triangulation Study Based on Speeches From Three National Leaders

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ABSTRACT

Work on this article was motivated by a speech given by the British Queen on April 5th, 2020, *A Rare Public Address Concerning the Ongoing Pandemic*. The speech was infused with virtue terms. Using investigator and data-source triangulation, the authors juxtapose Queen Elizabeth II's speech with two similarly motivated speeches by Chinese President Xi and Chilean President Piñera. As these three heads of state represent different socio-political cultures, it is academically interesting to explore (i) to what extent their speeches reflect universal versus local values/virtues and (ii) how their selection of virtues fits into current taxonomies of positive character traits. This article aims to make a contribution to the proverbial universalism versus relativism debate about morality and human values, as well as to the discourse on neo-Aristotelian character education and the psychological discourse on recovering an apt virtue terminology as a task that each of us needs to pursue in our endeavour to understand everyday virtue talk.

Keywords: Cross-cultural values, head-of-states' speeches, triangulation, virtue language, virtue literacy

INTRODUCTION

The socio-moral, psycho-moral, and economic reverberations of the 2020–2022 COVID-19 pandemic have led to a proliferation of debates in public media that closely connect to standard debates about human values and virtues. As scholars interested in the role of virtues and character strengths in the good life in general, and character education in schools in particular

(Huo et al., 2021), we have followed with some concern and frustration the efforts by many academic colleagues—in various blogs, newspaper columns, and on social media—to encourage 'virtuous' reactions to the ongoing crisis by promoting what nowadays tend to be called 'performance virtues' (Jubilee Centre, 2022). Those 'virtues,' such as resilience and grit (as explained, e.g., by Duckworth, 2016), are amoral performative competencies that help us, inter alia, to 'hang in there' in times of crisis and bounce back from negative experiences. The founder of Western virtue ethics, Aristotle, refused to call them 'virtues' because of their amoral and instrumentalist nature and only referred to them as technical skills: *techné* (Aristotle, 1985). We worry about the over-emphasis on those 'virtues' (or quasi-virtues) in public discourse because educational research has shown that schools which articulate and foreground *performance* virtues elicit progress in those virtues only among students, not in *moral* or *civic* virtues, let alone *intellectual* ones; there is, unfortunately, little pedagogical or developmental spill-over effect between the virtue groups (Seider, 2012).

If the elision of moral and civic virtues in the discourse among academics about reactions to the coronavirus crisis reflects fear of sounding moralistic and of invoking inherently relativistic values—when science is meant to be value-free (Weber, 1949)—this fear is not replicated among the general public. Polls of ordinary people in countries such as the United Kingdom have found that they have valued the moral virtues of care and compassion most of all during the crisis (with resilience and grit hardly mentioned), and a majority also agreed that the health of today's older generations is more important than long-term economic prosperity of future generations (Arthur, 2020).

The spur to the writing of this article was a speech given by the British Queen Elizabeth II (who sadly passed away in 2022) on April 5th, 2020: a rare public address concerning the pandemic (Queen Elizabeth II, 2020). The address was watched live by an estimated 24 million viewers in the United Kingdom alone. The speech was permeated with virtue terms[1], and her choice of terms coincided much more with the public focus on the moral and civic than the academic obsession with the performative by Kristjánsson (YTL Foundation, 2020). We began to wonder whether heads of state perhaps have a keener sense of the public mood and how a societal crisis could be ameliorated than academics. To test this hypothesis, the first author, Chinese, decided to subject a similar speech given by Chinese President Xi to scrutiny and made a comparison with British Queen Elizabeth II's speech (Huo & Guo, 2022). Finally, a Chilean author joined in and did the same for a speech by Chilean President Piñera. All of the speeches were given at a critical time when the countries were facing the challenge and uncertainty of COVID-19. Those speeches were meant to be uplifting and encourage their citizens' spirit in a difficult time.

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[1]　There were eight virtues identified by Kristjánsson (YTL Foundation, 2020), who gave a keynote speech entitled "Character education in the time of the coronavirus."

Juxtaposing these three speeches does have some curiosity value; however, we aim for more explicit academic benefits. These three heads of state represent three very different socio-political cultures, and it is academically interesting to explore (1) to what extent their speeches reflect universal versus local values/virtues and (2) how their selection of virtues fits into current academic taxonomies of positive character traits. We hope, therefore, that this article can make a contribution to the proverbial moral universalism versus relativism debate, as well as to the discourse on neo-Aristotelian character education and the psychological discourse on recovering an apt virtue terminology as a task that each of us needs to pursue in our endeavour to understand lay virtue talk (Kristjánsson, 2015).

Virtue Language and Virtue Literacy

Virtue language, that is, the use of the vocabulary of the virtues, is closely connected to the context of moral education (Vasalou, 2012). Gadamer (1983) said that "language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding occurs in interpreting language" (p. 389). Language is permeated with values and ethical terms (Mingers, 2003), and there is little hope of any neat separation of facts and values to satisfy the early 20th-century call (harking back all the way to Hume) for a strict fact–value dichotomy. According to virtue ethics, which has been enjoying a resurgence as a powerful ethical paradigm in the last 50 years, the first step to cultivating virtue is to acquire virtue literacy: an understanding and command of relevant virtue terms.

Virtue ethics, harking back to Aristotle and Confucius, has since the 1960s become the third alternative, alongside Kantian deontology and consequentialist theories, as an ethical theory of choice both for moral philosophers and applied professional ethicists. According to virtue ethics, an action is right not because it is required as one's duty in accordance with a formalistic principle (as in Kantianism) or because it has desirable overall consequences (as in consequentialism) but because it exhibits good character. In contrast to other moral theories, the concept of good character is thus what is foundational in virtue ethics, rather than the concepts of duties or consequences; and what defines acting well is derivative or a matter of what is consistent with good character (Annas, 2011). Thus, although virtue language or the application of virtue language does not necessarily lead to acting well, it is invaluable to recover some perennial ways of speaking (as virtue-infused; Arthur et al., 2014)

Character in Aristotelian theory, upon which most contemporary virtue ethics in the West draws (rather than Confucius), refers to one's make-up of virtues and vices (and other intermediate states of being and doing in the ethical sphere). Aristotle's (1985) understanding tallies with the modern conception of character as the reason-responsive, morally evaluable and educable subset of personality—although Aristotle did not have a discrete concept of non-moral personality at his disposal. Good

character, in an Aristotelian view, involves the cultivation and execution of *virtues* as specific human excellences. What sort of capacities are the virtues? Unfortunately, most general terms that can describe them carry unfortunate connotations in modernity. The closest answer is perhaps 'traits,' but in psychology, the term 'trait' typically refers to attributes that are (at least partly) inherited. The virtues, however—or so the Aristotelian story goes—are acquired, first through upbringing (esp. habituation and role modelling), and later through one's own repeated choices, coalescing into stable patterns.

In all events, let us say here that the virtues constitute stable dispositional clusters concerned with praiseworthy functioning in a number of significant and distinctive spheres of human life (Annas, 2011; Kristjánsson, 2015). Each virtue is typically seen to comprise a unique set of *components*: perception/recognition, language, emotion, desire, motivation, behaviour and comportment or style, applicable in the relevant sphere, where none of the components (not even 'correct' behaviour) can be evaluated in isolation from the others. The person possessing the virtue of compassion, for example, notices easily and attends to situations in which the situation of others has been undeservedly compromised, is in command of a language to express those perceptions, feels for the needs of those who have suffered this undeserved misfortune, desires that their misfortune be reversed, acts (if humanly possible) for the relevant (ethical)

reasons in ways conducive to that goal, and exudes an outward aura of empathy and care. The virtues Aristotle talks about are ethical, political and intellectual. It corresponds reasonably well to the typical modern philosophical taxonomy of virtues mentioned above, as moral, civic and intellectual (Jubilee Centre, 2022), although the fourth category extolled in modernity, that of performative virtues, would have been designated by Aristotle not as a set of virtues but of useful skills (*techné*). The scientific (psychological) taxonomies of virtues will be discussed later.

Returning to the issue of virtue language, according to virtue ethics, the virtue inherent in language and the virtue inherent in behaviour does not allow for any unproblematic separation; they are essentially intermingled (Huo & Guo, 2022; Jubilee Centre, 2022; Vasalou, 2012). It is why there is reason to worry that the use of some common virtue terms has declined substantially in ordinary language in the West in the last 100 years (Kesebir & Kesebir, 2012). The decay of moral language is, analogously, tied to the decline of morality. In our view, some current tensions on how to distribute the COVID-19 vaccine fairly (e.g., between the UK and the EU) have not so much reflected conflicts between cultures and borders as more pervasive tensions and deficiencies in the application of moral-language terms, such as 'equality' and 'justice' (Arthur et al., 2021). A more refined language of virtue may not be a vaccine for COVID-19 but may be understood as a vaccine for moral decay.

Moral language is embedded within forms of life. 20th-century social science was obsessed with cultural variance among the different forms of human life and hence with moral relativity, culminating in postmodern moral cynicism. However, dissenting voices kept reminding us of ways to build bridges between different moral languages and various moral dialects across time and space (Sichel, 1991). With the 21st-century decline of postmodernism, moral relativism is on the wane—also coinciding with the increased focus on universal problems facing humankind, such as global warming. The current authors have engaged in significant cross-cultural work in the past (Huo & Kristjánsson, 2021, on comparisons between an Aristotelian and Confucian lens on ethical consumption; and Huo et al., 2021, on comparisons between Western and Chinese approaches to character education). The current article builds on some of those previous insights and takes them further.

Taxonomies of Virtue

We briefly mentioned a standard philosophical taxonomy of virtues as moral, civic, intellectual, and performative. However, various other, more nuanced, virtue-and-value taxonomies are on offer.

For example, the core socialist values in China are summarised into 24 terms (in Chinese) and 12 key virtues: prosperity, democracy, civilisation, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, dedication, honesty and kindness—issued by the General Office of the CPC Central Committee in 2013 and representing central and guiding core values in China. Those virtues are considered to form a three-level structure: prosperity, democracy, civilisation, and harmony at the *national* level; freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law at the *social* level; and patriotism, dedication, honesty, and kindness at the *individual* level (General Office of Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2013; Table 1).

Table 1

Three-level structure of virtues representing the core socialist values in China (General Office of Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2013)

Value goals	Socialist core values/virtues
National level	Prosperity, Democracy, Civilisation, Harmony
Social level	Freedom, Equality, **Justice**, Rule of Law
Individual level	Patriotism, Dedication, **Honesty** and **Kindness**

Note. Virtues in bold are shared with character strengths in VIA; see later.

Not surprisingly—at least for those inclined towards moral universalism—some Chinese core virtues can be observed to have direct similarities with the most widely-used Western social scientific virtue-and-character framework: Values in Action (VIA). This framework categorises positive personal characteristics in terms of

24-character strengths reflecting six more general cross-culturally endorsed virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Table 2). Those 24 strengths are regarded as 'general principles of socially or morally desirable functioning as demonstrated by

their common mention in works of moral philosophy and religion' and are shown empirically cross-culturally applicable (McGrath, 2015). This assumption of 'empirically cross-culturally applicable' is crucial in the present study, making cross-cultural comparisons possible and meaningful.

Table 2
Six-factor structure of the VIA classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

Character-strength classifications	Virtues
Creativity, Curiosity, Judgment, Love of Learning, Perspective	Wisdom
Bravery, Perseverance, **Honesty***, Zest	Courage
Love, **Kindness**, Social Intelligence	Humanity
Teamwork, Fairness, Leadership	**Justice**
Forgiveness, Humility, Prudence, Self-regulation	Temperance
Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humour, Spirituality	Transcendence

Note. *Character and virtues in bold are shared with the core socialist values in China

While we are aware of the fact that the two frameworks of values and virtues were derived differently in terms of context and purpose, shared virtues can be directly identified, such as that justice, honesty and kindness (bold in Tables 1 & 2) are included in both the Chinese socialist core values and the VIA classifications (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Interestingly, justice is grouped under social-level virtue in China whilst classified as a virtue of individuals in VIA. It may raise concerns that using the same term does not always indicate a shared conceptual understanding: an issue that we return to briefly in the discussion. However, developmental theories of justice show its meaning to be constrained by common childhood experiences of

perceived deservingness or lack thereof within families (Damon, 1981); and as those familial experiences are essentially universal, they limit the scope for cultural variance.

Despite the original theoretical six-factor structure of the VIA, subsequent factor analysis of data has revealed a variance of empirically adequate structures, ranging from a five-factor to a one-factor structure (Macdonald et al., 2008; McGrath, 2015). We rely here on a three-factor model that is both conceptually and empirically defensible (McGrath, 2015). We support this assumption for the following reasons: a three-factor model comprising caring, inquisitiveness, and self-Control was identified by McGrath (2015); in addition,

a highly similar three-virtue model was also identified by Duan et al. (2012) in a Chinese context where the factors were referred to as interpersonal, vitality, and cautiousness. Having said this, it does not imply that our study solely counts on McGrath (2015), as we mentioned above; rather, it is informed by a variety of taxonomies of virtues (General Office of Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2013, Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Motivation

The study's background has elucidated some of the issues that motivated us to conduct this cross-cultural study of virtue language in the speeches of the three heads of state: namely, their relevance to ongoing academic debates about the nature of moral language, and virtue literacy, taxonomies (national and international) of virtue; and debates about virtues as local or universal (Webber, 2021).

We originally considered analysing only Queen Elizabeth II's speech and comparing/ contrasting it with the academic discourse on pandemic-relevant virtues. However, for reasons already clear in the study's background, we decided that a universal lens on virtues would be more instructive, hence adding the speeches by Chinese President Xi and Chilean President Piñera to the mix. It will arguably contribute to a fuller analysis for several reasons. First, in terms of location, the three countries are located on three continents: Europe, Asia, and South America. Second, regarding socio-political and ideological contexts, President Xi represents a country practising communist

social values. It is well-known that the late British Queen practised Christian values as well as representing a typical Western liberal society, and Piñera is a confessed Roman Catholic, as well as representing a developing country. This diverse cultural and ideological provenance will enrich the analysis and enable fruitful discourse comparisons. Third, with respect to time, Piñera's speech was delivered before Chile hit its peak of contagion. It contrasts countries where the pandemic was already peaking or on the rise.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current study utilises the power of triangulation as a research method (Carter et al., 2014) via two dimensions: investigator triangulation and data sources triangulation. 'Triangulation refers to using multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena' (Patton, 1999). It is viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity by converging information from different sources (Carter et al., 2014). According to Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999), there are four types of triangulations: (1) method, (2) investigator, (3) theory, and (4) data source. In our research case, we utilise two types of triangulations: investigator and data source. Our investigators are from China, Chile, and the UK (Table 3). It can be argued that the sample of the authors represents haphazard convenience sampling.

However, there was considerable thought given to the third author's discussion.

For example, we did consider colleagues from Germany and Japan, but none of them would bring an interesting mix from the third continent as the colleague from Chile does. Therefore, instead of considering it as a simple convenience sampling, it was more of a selective and thoughtful sampling method. However, we are aware that due to the limitations of the personal academic network, the first author could not invite a third colleague from another country (e.g., Brazil, Argentina). Whilst our methodology contains certain limits and biases regarding the authors' sampling, it does not cancel out the confirmations of findings from three different perspectives that add breadth to the phenomenon of interest (Denzin, 1978).

Table 3

Basic information about the three investigators' triangulation

Items	Investigator 1	Investigator 2	Investigator 3
Nationality	Chinese	Chilean	Icelandic
Residence	China	Chile	UK
Gender	Female	Male	Male
First language	Chinese	Chilean	Icelandic
Second language	English	English	English
Cross-cultural life experiences	Nearly 10 years	6 years	Over 20 years
Years of working experience in Character Education	Nearly 5 years	4 years	Over 15 years

Based on the strengths of three cross-cultural investigators, the three data sources were also selected from three languages (Table 4). This study initially utilised a comparative research approach. To establish valid comparisons, the speeches needed to share the same purpose: to outline strategies to meet the challenges imposed by COVID-19. Also, a specific time frame (three weeks) was imposed so the three leaders shared the same information about the spread of the virus worldwide. The three speeches were given in official contexts and produced to appeal to wide audiences.[2] Finally, despite not being identical, the speeches were similar in that all were short (Table 4).

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2   For example, if Queen Elizabeth's speech had over 404,000 views based on a single YouTube platform, it would have been watched by more people considering other alternative channels and the live broadcast. For Chinese President Xi's speech, there is a lack of statistics coverage; it is safe to say that it has had more views simply because the Chinese population is much larger, and a critical speech like this would have been widely promoted in workplaces, communities and public media. Regarding President Pinera's speech, it was broadcast on all Chilean channels and watched live by 43.3% of the total number of homes with a television (Prieto, 2021); then, it was uploaded to other platforms.

Table 4
Three data sources were used for the triangulation

Speaker	Time	Location	Length	Source
Chinese President Xi	On March 31, 2020	Wuhan, China	About 5600 words (in Chinese)	Xinhua news
Queen Elizabeth II	On April 5, 2020	London, UK	About 500 words (in English)	Royal.uk web
Chilean President Piñera	On April 19, 2020	Santiago, Chile	About 2600 words (in Spanish)	Presidency press department

Reflecting on our study method, we concede the study was not as sophisticated as one might ideally have aspired to; after all, it was based only on three leaders' speeches. However, as simple as it is (and similar to that of other researchers such as Brown & Levinson, 1987), we believe this study adds value to the existing literature by promoting the notion of virtue language or the use of certain virtue terms/vocabularies, which itself has important value in it.

Data Analysis

Once familiarised with the speeches, two members of the team conducted a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to extract words and phrases that conveyed a sense of 'virtue' (such as broadly understood in the VIA classification above). The virtues mentioned by the leaders were listed individually regardless of the number of appearances during the speech to structure the analysis. Given the focus of the analysis, it was decided on the presence/absence of these words, not their quantity or magnitude. There were also virtues embedded in the speeches but not explicitly mentioned; these were included if they referred indirectly to some of the virtues included in the VIA. For example, the virtue of heroic spirit was extracted as President Xi (2020) claimed,

> Wuhan is worthy of being a heroic city. The people of Wuhan are worthy of being heroes. The whole Party,[3] the whole nation and the people of all ethnic groups in China are moved in praise for you! (p. 1)

The comparative task would ideally have required a deep bilingual comprehension of virtue terms in three languages. In default of that competence, the authors had extensive experience in international discourses on virtue and character education and were reasonably well equipped for this task. The researchers involved in the codification of the speeches were native speakers of Chinese and Spanish correspondingly and had a good command of English as their second language. Once the codification process was over, the virtue terms were translated into English to facilitate cross-comparisons.

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3   Referring to the Communist Party of the People's Republic of China

RESULTS

After President Xi's and Piñera's speeches were analysed separately, the virtues selected were translated into English and listed in conjunction with those previously identified in the Queen's speech. The virtue list can be seen in Table 5. Virtues in bold are shared between President Xi's and the Queen's speeches; underlined virtues are shared between President Xi's and President Piñera's speeches; and virtues in italics are shared between the Queen's and President Piñera's speeches. It can be easily observed that there are more commonalities between President Xi's and Piñera's speeches, where there are 10 shared virtues (perspective, perseverance, teamwork, compassion, leadership, prudence, self-regulation, awareness, duty/responsibly, hope). There are five shared virtues between President Xi's and the Queen's speeches (appreciation, duty, resolution, help, compassion), and there are only three shared virtues between the Queen's and President Piñera's speeches (compassion, pride, and duty). All in all, the virtues shared in all three speeches are compassion and duty, which notably are both moral virtues, not performative ones.

Table 5
Virtues identified through the triangulation study

Speaker	Queen Elizabeth II's speech	President Xi's speech	President Piñera´s speech
Time	On April 5th, 2020	On March 31st, 2020	On April 19th, 2020
Virtues identified	Selflessness, **Appreciation**, *Duty*, **Resolution,** *Pride*, Humour, **Helping others**, and *Compassion*	Perspective, Bravery, Persistence/perseverance, Striving spirit, Sacrifice, Dedication, Teamwork, National spirit, Heroic spirit, Respect, **Appreciation**, **Compassion**, Leadership, Confidence, Scientific spirit, Accuracy, Effectiveness, Alertness, Prudence, Care, Love, Protection, Self-regulation, High-spiritedness, Being civilised, Environmental awareness, Service, Awareness, **Resolution, Duty/ Responsibility**, Humanness, Wisdom, **Help**, Tolerance, Law-abidingness, Hope, Purpose	Teamwork, Prudence, Responsibility and Duty, Perseverance, Leadership, Solidarity, Gratitude, Optimism, Hope, Compassion (empathy), *Pride*, Self-regulation and Judgement, Awareness, Perspective, Resilience, Appreciation

We next arranged the virtue terms from the three speeches into the three-factor model of virtue (McGrath, 2015), as we already justified in the study's background. It can be seen that some of the virtue terms from the three speeches fit into the model quite well, apart from one column, self-control, which is absent from the Queen's speech and relates to her omission, mentioned in the introduction, of performance virtues and her focus on the moral/civic. Some virtues simply do not fit into the three-factor model. We decided to leave those of consideration for the moment, pending further discussion.

Recap of the Queen's Speech and Chinese President Xi's speech

During her speech, the Queen focused on the virtues needed to take us through the pandemic, revealing that her ultra-short speech included no less than eight virtue terms. Interestingly, six of the eight terms referred to the realm of the moral/civic rather than the psychological/performative, for example, selflessness, helping others, and compassion. Although her choice of words differs slightly from those categorised by McGrath (2015), 'compassion' would, for example, fit snugly into the Caring (moral) as the approximate equivalent of 'kindness.'

Recap of Chinese President Xi's speech from President Xi's speech, 37 virtues were extracted (Table 5) during this process. We also identified three strong sub-themes: 'people-centred,' 'party-centred,' and 'nation-centred.' These three sub-themes were closely bonded together as a coherent big theme that the destiny of the people, the nation, and the party are closely related rather than be seen as separated.

'Heart' (心 in Chinese) seems to be the keyword that links the virtues together. During the speech, 'heart' was mentioned several times, such as "warm people's hearts and gather people's hearts" (Xi, 2020, p. 6); and "we should strengthen our sense of victory in heart, responsibility in heart, humanness spirit in heart, prudence in heart" (p. 7). In addition, with 'remain true to our original heart,' this original reference was repeated towards the end of the speech, conveying a strong sense of mission and purpose.

Recap of President Piñera's Speech

Overall, 18 virtues were extracted from President Piñera's speech (Table 5). Despite not having a large number of virtue terms, the speech was structured in such a manner that each one seemed to fulfil a purpose. The introduction begins with a call to be strong and unite as a country, to believe in the action of the political institutions, the scientific community and the authorities in charge. After the introduction, the speech describes the number of policies implemented to face the catastrophic effect of the pandemic. Prudence and responsibility are portrayed as the main strengths needed to overcome the difficulties arising. Then, President Piñera points out how the pandemic will impact everyone's lives and how it is a personal duty to care for the ones in danger. To counter terrible times, Piñera argues that there are no easy solutions but large

responsibilities and that time will judge our decisions. He pledges to understand the distress experienced by Chilean society and thinks that he will persevere even if this means taking unpopular decisions.

Near the end of the speech, President Piñera shows his gratitude to the people working in health services and encourages all to follow their example and love their country and their fellow citizens. He finally stresses that Chileans will overcome these tragic times with faith and optimism.

DISCUSSION

Huo and Guo (2022) offered a comparison of President Xi's and Queen Elizabeth II's speeches, in which they highlighted the shared virtues: a sense of duty or

responsibility when facing the ongoing challenge, a sense of compassion towards others, a willingness to offer help to others, a sense of appreciation and the resolution of the challenge and winning the battle. The addition of President Piñera's speech added further insights.

It is noticeable how a juxtaposition of President Piñera's speech with President Xi's speech relates to the virtues listed and how these virtues fall into McGrath's (2015) three-factor classification. As can be seen in Table 6, most of the virtues in these two speeches fell into the Caring and Self-control categories. This fact might be associated with a common perspective on how both leaders believe citizens should act under these circumstances. This commonality

Table 6
Fitting the identified virtues into McGrath's three-factor model (2015)

Three virtue type	Caring	Inquisitiveness	Self-Control
Virtues Character	Fairness Forgiveness & Mercy Gratitude Kindness Leadership Capacity to Love and be Loved Teamwork	Bravery Creativity Curiosity Love of Learning Perspective Social Intelligence	Honesty Judgement Perseverance Prudence Self-Regulation
President Xi's virtue terms	Teamwork, Love, Appreciation/gratitude, Leadership	Perspective, Bravery	Persistence/ perseverance, Self-regulation, Prudence,
President Piñera´s virtue terms	Teamwork, Leadership, Gratitude, Appreciation	Perspective	Prudence, Perseverance, Self-regulation and Judgement,
Queen's virtue terms	Appreciation	Humour*	n/a

Note. Humour was not included in McGrath (2015) but in Duan et al. (2012)

could respond to the status of both leaders in their respective countries. Chile is a highly centralised and 'presidential' country where citizens are expected to obey and follow the chain of command descending from the top, whilst President Xi is the leader of the Communist Party in China: with another highly hierarchical political structure. It could be why in both cases, the pledge made by the leaders is to care for others but understand that the best way of practising this is through self-control and obedience. In this regard, their use of virtue language could be described as instrumentalist, allowing the leaders to maintain control of the situation. It can be understood to reflect the political function of virtue language.

'Selflessness' was mentioned in the Queen's speech directly; it signals a shift from self-centred to others-centred concerns. It shows some similarities with President Xi's 'people-centred' speech, including virtues such as service, sacrifice, and dedication to describe a clear sense of selflessness. Meanwhile, two virtues in the Queen's speech did not appear in President Xi's speech: pride and humour. Interestingly, pride was included in President Piñera's speech but not humour. It may call for some cultural and historical explanations. For example, Chinese traditional culture encourages virtue such as modesty rather than pride, and humour is not a traditional Confucian virtue, although it is an Aristotelian virtue called 'wit' (Aristotle, 1985). Notably, in the Queen's speech, performative virtues (or what McGrath calls Self-control ones) are notable by

their absence, indicating a society where interpersonal virtues take precedence over intrapersonal ones, at least in times of crisis.

Obviously, deeper moral and philosophical issues are at stake here than those relating directly to a comparative analysis of three speeches from different cultures. In simple terms, the very fact that there is considerable overlap between the virtues foregrounded by leaders of three culturally and geographically distinct countries does not allow us to infer that virtues are fundamentally universal rather than local. In other words, we have by no means dealt a death blow to the spectre of moral relativism.

Webber (2021) provides a helpful conceptualisation that explains the difficulties with cross-cultural comparisons of this kind. After explaining how each virtue's motivational structure consists of a cluster of related evaluative attitudes, Webber employs the metaphor of high and low resolutions. Our ordinary virtue talk specifies complex motivational states in fairly low resolution allowing for a universalist interpretation. However, suppose we zoom in for a higher-resolution image that presents the relevant set of attitudes or even further for an even higher-resolution image that presents the evaluative attitudes' clusters of associated desires and beliefs. We have much more localised (culture-specific or even situation-specific) variance in that case. For example, even if Chinese, Chilean and British speakers would agree that gratitude is a virtue, the word used to convey the virtue of gratitude in the three

languages might have local connotations that only reveal themselves if we study the virtue term in 'higher resolution.' Webber allows for the possibility that this zooming exercise may yield different results in the case of different virtues: namely, that some virtues are universal down while others lose their universalist resolution fairly quickly as we zoom in on the specifics.

Webber offers suggestions that potentially change the constitution of the universal-versus local debate on moral values and virtues from the universality or locality of virtue to the universality or locality of particular virtues. For some virtues, such as honesty, likely, universality remains even in Webber's 'high-resolution' mode simply because being faithful to the truth does not allow for as much cultural variance as, for instance, judging when one should be grateful for a particular favour.

Despite this caveat, we believe that the only way to study the issue of moral relativity versus universality is to engage in repeated exercises as we have conducted in our study. Just as a tree is known by its fruit, virtues are known by how people apply and speak about them. Nevertheless, while it can be argued that the study of three short speeches from the three head-of-states offers some enlightenment regarding the research objective, to what extent do the three leaders' speeches reflect universal versus local values? There are two ways to answer this question: first, if the study solely focuses on the 'three leaders' one-time speech,' the answer then is properly not to a great extent. Second, if the study change perspective

slightly, the three short speeches do not seem to tell the whole story of virtues; the timing of the speeches was critical and worthy of noting. They were not every 'now and then' speeches; they were perhaps some of the most special and distinctive ones over the past decade; hopefully, speeches like such will not be called for again in the many years to come. So, considering the specialness of the speeches under unusual circumstances (the crisis and challenge of COVID-19), the three seemingly short speeches carry much meaning regarding the content of each speech itself and its effects on the people it was speaking to. Therefore, we consider the analysis of the three speeches to reflect universal and local values, as can be judged from the shared and differentiated virtue language employed in these speeches.

CONCLUSION

Virtue language, throughout history, has had a significant cultural, psychological, and socio-political role to play (Creyghton et al., 2016). It remains relevant in contemporary societies, especially under the pandemic challenge that the world has been facing.

Implications of Study

Our study findings suggest that virtue language is vibrant and powerful in the speeches given by the three primary leaders from three countries, Britain, China and Chile, which we have analysed in this article. There are shared virtues across languages and cultures, such as duty and compassion, in evidence. Take the virtue of duty as an example; which country would

not wish citizens to have a sense of duty to contribute to society and the public good? Moreover, which parents/teachers would not wish their children/students to be equipped with a sense of duty or responsibility? It is worth noting that compassion is also the most valued in a recent quantitative study in the UK context (Arthur, 2020). Similarly, compassion is regarded as the top virtue among the four virtues/hearts in the Chinese classic *Mencius* (Mencius, 2018). Likewise, in the Chilean context, compassion is incorporated as a core virtue by Pope Francisco's agency, which is followed by more than half of the population and is regarded as one of the key virtues to practise and develop (Serrano, 2017). Thus, such virtues should be given universal attention and cultivated systematically among global citizens.

Limitations and Recommendations

We concede that our findings are limited by the small sample of speeches (namely, three) selected for the present study. It is telling that we only found two shared virtue terms. These two virtue terms should be highly valued, however, as they are not only cherished by one country/culture but shared in three countries and surely many other countries and cultures. Thus, our study is not intended to offer a holistic virtue list; that should be saved for another day. Rather, our study examines these three short speeches by key leaders at critical junctures, which can remind us of the often-forgotten value of virtue terms (such as duty and compassion), which are essentially universal.

Having couched most of our findings in the language of 'virtue terms' and 'virtue literacy,' our findings of a shared language regarding virtues such as duty and compassion are not limited to the mere use of words; we hope that an enhanced universal focus on the terms can direct more interest to their shared meanings also and eventually turn mere virtue literacy into true virtue practice. We encourage (i) further research investigating virtue vocabularies and terms from other languages and cultural traditions—that will contribute to a more comprehensive list of universal virtues, (ii) further explorations of their perceived meanings and relevance in the situated cultures and contexts, to add richness to the existing findings.

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