

Common Justice

Interpolitical Thought in Western, Indian, and Chinese Traditions

An innovative study reveals striking similarities in the ways three disparate cultural traditions conceived of what we owe those from across our borders.

Theorists of justice set out to solve a difficult puzzle: What ideas, if any, could guide us to live together in harmony? While some enumerate universal values, critics argue that these very principles are ineluctably contingent and culturally specific—that human societies affirm vastly different tenets across intellectual traditions. In this bold, ambitious book, Hansong Li offers an alternative approach to world justice. He argues that while different cultures do conceive of justice in different ways, many also share important relational norms—ideas about how they might relate to and reason with other polities. To demonstrate as much, Li identifies parallel patterns of interpolitical arguments in ancient Greek, Indian, and classical Chinese traditions. Eschewing claims to universalism, he argues that the comparative study of these intellectual heritages can help transfigure us-versus-them logics. Thinkers in these traditions saw communities as guests and hosts, committed to love and justice, in pursuit of ethics and expediency. Then too, these thinkers all were concerned with stability and subversion, constraint and consonance, beauty and violence. Most significantly, Li traces among the three traditions an aspiration to define justice in the broadest possible terms: not as something worked out merely in courts but as a value of global and cosmic consequence. A work of rigorous philological scholarship and dazzling philosophical range, *Common Justice* points toward a new avenue for global political thought and comparative political theory. More than tracing how justice has been elaborated in different contexts, it demonstrates how—while using culturally and linguistically distinct concepts—diverse peoples have long been thinking in startlingly compatible ways, enabling the possibility of global justice.

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33,50 €

33,50 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

vorbestellbar, Erscheinungstermin ca. Dezember 2026

Artikelnummer: 9780674301795

Medium: Buch

ISBN: 978-0-674-30179-5

Verlag: Harvard University Press

Erscheinungstermin: 15.12.2026

Sprache(n): Englisch

Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2026

Produktform: Gebunden

Seiten: 368

Format (B x H): 156 x 235 mm

