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No government has a right to suppress its people

From Mr James A. Dorn.

Sir, Ronnie Chan (“[The west is in danger of frittering away its freedom](#)”, November 15) thinks that “the west is now ... too free”, in the sense that political freedom – by which he means that the right to vote, or democracy, has impeded economic growth. There is no doubt that expanding the size and scope of government beyond a certain tipping point slows economic growth, but more important it impairs individual freedom. The framers of the US constitution did not elevate democracy over liberty; they sought to limit government powers and to protect persons and property. No government has an inalienable right to suppress its people.

Mr Chan argues that there is no single standard of liberty and that “China prefers societal harmony, and political and economic efficiency”. He could have said that China prefers state power over individual rights to life, liberty and property; and top-down order, not spontaneous order generated by voluntary exchanges under a rule of law. The principle underlying the Chinese Communist party is coercion, not consent. If liberty is the freedom to pursue one’s happiness provided the equal rights of others are protected under the law of the constitution, and that law is just in the sense of preventing the violation of one’s property rights, then law, liberty and justice are inseparable.

Thus, to argue that the US and China “must recognise that to call one standard of liberty the universal value is hubris; and to impose it on others is to rob them of freedom” is rather absurd. Just ask Liu Xiaobo or the millions of Chinese who have suffered under China’s preference for “societal harmony” and “political efficiency”.

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