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Warring States and Harmonized Nations

Tianxia Theory as a World Political Argument

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine Chinese foreign policy by analyzing Chinese visions and arguments on the nature of world politics. The study focuses on Chinese academic discussions, which attempt to develop a 'Chinese theory of international politics', and especially on the so called 'tianxia theory' (天下论, *tianxia lun*), which is one of the most influential initiatives within these discussions. Tianxia theorists study imperial China's traditional system of foreign relations and claim that the current international order, which is based on competing nation states, should be replaced with some kind of world government that would oversee the good of the whole planet.

The dissertation relies on the constructivist framework proposed by Alexander Wendt, in which the essence of world politics is not determined by material factors or unchanging national interests, but instead, is to a large degree socially constructed by the main actors of the order. *Ideas* – riding on the wings of material power – are the central force, which transforms international orders. Against this framework the dissertation understands theories of world politics as such transforming ideas as they influence and limit the way we understand political reality. Following Kari Palonen's understanding of politics, the study approaches tianxia theory as an argument in the ongoing debates, which deal with the nature of world politics; as a rhetorical device, which is criticizing and delegitimizing the existing 'liberal international order' and its 'Western values'.

In the wider context, tianxia theory is approached in the dissertation as a part of China's overall rhetorical offensive for developing Chinese soft power and for reinterpreting the grand narrative of world politics according to, allegedly, Chinese concepts. Besides academic discussions the study examines how ideas from the tianxia theory find their place in the official Chinese foreign policy argumentation in the public speeches of President Xi Jinping.

In its form, the study is a mixture between a traditional monograph and an article based dissertation. During the research process, various independent research articles were written and published, or presented as conference papers. These papers have been reworked and transformed into a monograph form, which has three analytical chapters. The chapters approach the topic from different angles, and which apply slightly different methodological tools, but are unified in their interest in tianxia theory and the concept of tianxia.

Keywords: China, Chinese foreign policy, world politics, theory of international relations, tianxia theory, Community of shared future for mankind

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Tämä maailmanpolitiikan väitöskirja tutkii Kiinan ulkopolitiikkaa keskittymällä kiinalaisiin näkemyksiin maailmanpolitiikan perusolemuksesta ja sen kehittämisestä. Kiinassa on 2000-luvulla pyritty rakentamaan kiinalaista maailmanpolitiikan teoriaa, joka ammentaisi lännen sijaan Kiinan omasta historiasta ja kiinalaisesta älyllisestä traditiosta. Tutkimus syventyy tianxia-teoriaan (天下论, *tianxia lun*), joka on yksi eniten huomiota herättäneistä teoreettisista aloitteista tällä saralla. Tianxia-teorian mukaan nykyinen suvereeneihin kansallisvaltioihin perustuva kansainvälinen järjestelmä tulisi korvata Kiinan historiasta löytyvän tianxia-mallin mukaisella keskusjohdetulla maailmanvaltiolla

Tutkimus nojautuu Alexander Wendtin konstruktivistiseen viitekehykseen, jonka mukaan maailmanpolitiikan luonne ei pohjaudu pelkästään materiaalisiin tekijöihin tai muuttumattomiin kansallisiin intresseihin, vaan konstruoituu sosiaalisesti valtioiden ja muiden toimijodien välisessä kanssakäymisessä. *Ideat*, ei niinkään puhdas materiaalinen voima, muovaavat kansainvälisiä järjestelmiä.

Tutkimus tarkastelee maailmanpolitiikan teorioita paloslaiseen politiikkakäsitykseen nojautuen argumentteina, jotka vaikuttavat maailmanpolitiikasta tehtyihin tulkintoihin. Tianxia-teoriaa analysoidaan argumenttina keskusteluissa maailmanpolitiikan perimmäisestä olemuksesta ja sen tekemisen mahdollisuuksista – retorisena välineenä, joka pyrkii kritisoimaan ja delegitimoimaan liberaalia kansainvälistä järjestelmää ja sen 'läntisiä arvoja'.

Laajemmassa kontekstissa tutkimus tarkastelee tianxia-teoriaa osana Kiinan kokonaisvaltaista retorista offensiivia, jolla Kiina pyrkii kehittämään pehmeää valtaansa, sekä vahvistamaan omaa tulkintaansa maailmanpolitiikan perusolemuksesta. Akateemisten keskustelujen lisäksi tutkimus analysoi miten tianxia-teorian käsitteitä käytetään Kiinan virallisessa ulkopoliittisessa argumentaatiossa. Vertailukohtana tarkastellaan presidentti Xi Jinpingin ulkopoliittista pääkäsitettä 'ihmiskunnan kohtalonyhteisö' (人类命运共同体, *renlei mingyun gongtongti*)

Väitöskirja on muodoltaan monografian ja artikkeliväitöskirjan välimaastossa. Väitöstutkimuksen aikana kirjoitettiin useita artikkeleita ja seminaariesitelmiä, jotka on jälkeen päin muovattu monografian luvuiksi. Luvut ovat lähestymistavoiltaan, näkökulmiltaan ja metodologioiltaan erilaisia, mutta ne kaikki tarkastelevat tianxia-teoriaa ja tianxian käsitteen määrittelyjä.

Asiasanat: maailmanpolitiikka, Kiina, Kiinan ulkopolitiikka, tianxia-teoria, tianxia, maailmanpolitiikan teoria

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine change in world politics by analyzing Chinese visions and arguments on the nature of world politics, and on how the problematic aspects of the current international system should be corrected. The study focuses on discussions within the Chinese academia, which attempt to develop a 'Chinese theory of international politics', and especially on the so called 'tianxia theory' (天下论, *tianxia lun*), which is one of the most influential initiatives within these discussions. Tianxia theory is approached in the dissertation in a wider context, as a part of China's overall rhetorical offensive to delegitimize the current international order and to reinterpret the grand narrative of world politics according to, allegedly, Chinese concepts. The study also examines how ideas from the tianxia theory find their place in the official Chinese foreign policy argumentation in the public speeches of President Xi Jinping.

During the last decade, the 'liberal international order' and its central ideas, such as democracy, human rights and belief in free trade have faced serious challenges. Within the order's core in Europe and in the United States, populist parties and movements are challenging the liberal and 'globalist' values of the order. Outside the Western core areas, meanwhile, a concert of new visions for the future international order has emerged. Some present nostalgic schemes on returning to certain foundational principles of the order, with sovereign nation states and strict national borders as its essence. Others, such as the rising great powers like China, India and Russia are introducing bold visions of the order thoroughly reformed and democratized.

Among the contending visionaries for a new world order, China is arguably the most important due to its sheer, material size. Since it initiated its reforms during the late 1970's, China has identified and also rhetorically described itself as a modest developing country, which would follow a 'low profile strategy' and which would shy away from international commitments too burdensome for it to carry. But as China's economic development has continued at a fast pace, Chinese leaders have become more confident about

their role in international politics[1], and have increased their criticism on the dominance of the West – both economical as well as ideological – within the international order. During the reign of President Xi Jinping (2012–) the visions have become even more magnanimous with such claims that China, after its 'rejuvenation' would "enter the center of the world stage" (走近世界舞台中央, *zoujin shijie wutai zhongyang*) and bring great contributions for the human kind.[2]

At the level of official proclamations the Chinese leadership has been offering its own ideological concepts and ideas, most notably its grand vision of the international order reformed into a cosmopolitan 'Community of shared future for mankind' (人类命运共同体, *renlei mingyun gongtongti*), in which 'zero-sum power politics' would become a thing of the past, and in which the role of the developing world would be greatly improved. Meanwhile in the academia, Chinese scholars are criticizing the whole established academic intellectual tradition and discipline of international politics, claiming that it only represents a particular European setting, and that its analytical frameworks are not universally applicable everywhere. With their arguments, the scholars are taking part in an overall discursive offensive, in which China attempts to undermine the dominance of the Western great powers within the international order as well as the universality of 'Western ideas' on world politics as a whole.[3] Tianxia theory and the rhetorical application of the ancient Chinese concept of tianxia, are among the most influential rhetorical devices in these re-interpretations of world politics.

The dissertation hopes to contribute in the ongoing studies on China's emergence as an increasingly important actor in world politics. The study attempts to combine and bring together the author's interest in three different fields of study: first, world politics and the theory of world politics, second, Chinese studies in general, and third, world history. The study is balancing between these three interests and approaches its subject through three, largely overlapping perspectives.

At the largest level, the dissertation is a study of **world politics**, examining change in international systems and international orders. It contributes in this undertaking by analyzing the relationships between international orders and the international thought systems that have emerged to support them. In this, the study also delves into the relationship of language and power politics and approaches tianxia theory and other Chinese arguments as a parts of global debates on the essence of world politics.

Through the perspective of **China studies**, the dissertation contributes to studies of China as an actor in international politics. As 'China's rise' has been

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[1]   Lorem Ipsum The terms 'international politics', 'world politics' and 'international relations' are used within the dissertation more or less synonymously. When pointing to the discipline or the study of this phenomenon, terms such as 'study of world politics' or 'field of international politics' are used instead of 'International Relations' with capital letters as is sometimes used particularly in the anglophone world.

[2]   Xi 2017c.

[3]   See for example Yan 2018.

continuing through the era of reform (1978–), a large number of scholars of international politics have been pondering on its ramifications for the Western led international system. Typical estimates have ranged from 'realist' assumptions that China's rise will cause a hegemonic war with the established hegemon, the United States, to the theorists of the liberal spectrum, who argue that China will be incorporated into the international order and its institutions peacefully.[4] A third group of scholars, labeled 'new Orientalists' by William Callahan, proposes that China is too different from the West to be explained by Western theoretical models at all, and that its rise will be followed by something completely different.[5] This dissertation is motivated by the same questions, but approaches them from a different angle: the study aims to 'get inside' Chinese views by examining Chinese scholarly debates on the same issues, since they are being heatedly discussed in China too. Tianxia theory is an important and influential argument among these debates.

The third perspective of the dissertation, **history**, is more like a thread that goes through the whole study, uniting the elements into a shared framework. First the study is interested in the historical developments of international orders, and the object of the study, tianxia theory itself, draws inspiration from historical sources. Second, and more importantly, the study approaches current events in international politics through the 'gaze of the historian', as unique events in a historical context – except that the context is *now* and keeps evolving in real time. This approach is seen in the methodological orientation of the study, which is inspired by historians of ideology, especially Michael Freeden and Quentin Skinner. Sensitivity to historical context is also present on the notion of political *contingency* that is central to the study, i.e. on the notion that international politics is not determined to follow any predetermined paths or iron laws of rationalism, but that the nature of international politics and the nature of international orders evolve ideationally through social construction.

Tianxia theory brings these three perspectives together. It is a Chinese theoretical initiative, designed to delegitimize the existing international order, thus taking part in world political debates at a global scale. The theory is based on an ancient Chinese concept of tianxia, 'all under Heaven', and it uses as its raw material, history, both Chinese and international. Tianxia theory, in short, is all about *world* politics, is very *Chinese* and is a deeply *historical* construct. These three perspectives in the dissertation are tied together through the following research questions:

First, how is the tianxia theory constructed and what are its central arguments? How does tianxia theory define the current state of world politics and its major challenges? These questions are mostly the focus of third chapter. **Second**, how is tianxia theory aiming to rectify world politics and how much innovative potential does it hold for doing so compared to similar, already established theories of world politics and global governance? These questions

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[4]   For realists, see Mearsheimer 2010. Allison 2017. For liberal views see for example Ikenberry 2008.
[5]   Callahan 2012.

are the focus of the fourth chapter. **Third**, how does the tianxia theory and its ideas influence the thinking or at least the rhetoric of China's foreign policy leadership? These questions form the focus of the fifth chapter.

In its form, the study is a mixture between a traditional monograph and an article based dissertation. During the research process, various independent research articles were written and published, or presented as conference papers. These papers have been reworked and transformed into a monograph form, which has three analytical chapters, which each approach the topic from different angles, and which apply slightly different methodological tools. However, all the three chapters are unified by their focus on language and rhetorics, especially on political concepts and their definitions. Concepts are, by their very nature, indeterminant, ambiguously defined and always under contestation by political ideologists. This study is interested in how Chinese actors, both Chinese scholars and the Chinese foreign policy leadership use and define concepts for their political purposes, and by so doing, attempt to reframe international politics to their benefit.

Before moving into the actual analytical chapters, chapter one explains the context, theoretical presumptions and methodology of the study, and chapter two offers a short historiography of the concept of tianxia and introduces the tianxia theory and its place among other similar studies of the 'Chinese world order'. Chapter three studies the political cosmology of the tianxia theory. Chapter four compares tianxia theory to a chosen set of established theories of international politics. Chapter five compares tianxia theory to the official foreign policy vision of the Xi Jinping administration, symbolized by the slogan of the Community of shared future for mankind.

1.1   International order and international thought

All through written history, societies have attempted to comprehend the political reality around them, making theoretical assumptions as well as normative guidelines for political action. Geographical surroundings and sociopolitical contexts have played key roles in these accounts: in different historical eras and in different regions of the world, students and practitioners of world politics have arrived at completely different interpretations and institutional solutions.

Although it is easy to view the liberal international order based on nation states and market economies as natural, universally valid, and perhaps even the best possible framework for organizing international politics, the order and the thought system around it are outcomes of long, complex and contingent historical processes, in which ideas have emerged and developed in their historical contexts, always collaborating with actual day to day politics. This relationship has been articulated by Quentin Skinner so that "the political life itself sets the main problems for the political theorists, causing a certain range of issues to appear problematic and a corresponding range of questions to

become the leading subjects of debate."[6] Bertrand Russell explains the evolution of human thought in general in a similar manner: "There is here a reciprocal causation: the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy, but, conversely, their philosophy does much to determine their circumstances."[7]

The liberal international order and its fundamental institutions and values are based on particular European practices (sovereign nation states and their interactions according to certain diplomatic customs and understandings of international law), which expanded to become global during a historical process that has taken centuries. Similarly the currently dominating theoretical and normative visions of international politics, international thought, developed around European debates and contexts. It is still holding a globally 'hegemonic' position on how international politics is being interpreted. This is especially true when it comes to 'scientific' study of international politics: within the discipline different areas of the world might have differing theoretical models, but the only theories and concepts that have become truly global and that are studied and internalized by (almost) everyone in the field of international politics, are the Western theories.[8]

International thought holds an important connection with the order it is attempting to analyze and explain: it constructs and supports the order by explicating which principles and ideals should organize the world and what kind of foreign policies should be followed. It tends to support certain kinds of thinking and to marginalize and delegitimize the alternatives.[9] Robert Cox has stated in an overused, but still valid cliché that international "theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose. Perspectives derive from a position in time and space, specially social and political time and space. [...] There is, accordingly, no such thing as theory in itself, divorced from standpoint in time and space."[10]

During the early modern era, before the globalization of the European international order, Europe was merely a peripheral corner in a polycentric world system, in which various different international orders coexisted and interacted with each other in many ways.[11] The 'Westphalian' international order of nation states taking shape in Europe during the early modern era, in the words of Henry Kissinger, was simply one order among others, all of which defined themselves as "the legitimate organizations of all humanity, imagining that in governing what lay before them, they were ordering the world".[12]

Within the polycentric world system, Western power and the reach of Western ideas and institutions was restricted already in the Middle Eastern region by the international order built around the Ottoman empire. They were

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[6]   Quoted in Tully 1988, 10–11.
[7]   Russell 1947, 11.
[8]   Wæver 1999.
[9]   Asworth 2014.
[10] Cox 1986, 207.
[11] Pomeranz 2000. Little 2014, 159–180.
[12] Kissinger 2014, 4.

even less influential within the Mughal empire in India or within the Chinese tributary system in East-Asia, which were both barely even conscious of such an order and its principles.[13] Such separate world systems and their inhabitants held their own unique political cosmologies and "socially 'imagined' and theorised their existence".[14]

It is only following the revolutionary developments in economy, technology and science during the 19th century that the European international order was able to expand and become the planet wide world order of today. As it expanded, it was also able to supplant all the alternative forms of political organization such as traditional empires, tribal confederations and city states.[15] The completion of the Western order also extinguished local interpretations and cosmologies for framing and understanding international politics and the nature of the world itself.

With the spread of the Western order, the concept of international law and its standards were developed to define, which political entity (or race) would be worthy of entering the order as its equal member.[16] The West saw itself as the bearer of the standard of civilization, and the international thinkers of this era – even at the liberal end of the spectrum, such as John Stuart Mill or the vehemently anti-imperialist John A. Hobson – legitimized its mission to spread its influence, and to bring the backward peoples and races into modernity more or less benignly.[17]

Dealing with the catastrophic developments between the years 1914 and 1945 marked the birth of the 'liberal international order'. Its first version was established after the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, but the order was later updated to better reflect the dynamics of great power politics after World War II, and was in many senses designed to serve the foreign policy interests of the United States.[18] The same era also saw the establishment of international relations as a specific field of study. Like the order, the theory of international relations, particularly after World War II, became almost identical with studying the foreign policy of the United States.[19] By defining the 'science' of international politics, the Western academic community could "determine what can be said, how it can be said and whether or not what is said constitutes a pertinent or important contribution to knowledge".[20]

During the Cold War, the liberal international order existed mainly within the United States and Western Europe as most other parts of the world (the socialist bloc, India, and most of the third world) remained effectively outside of its reach. The order was challenged, in both theory and in practice, by communism in its many different variations, which all held a vision of a world

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[13]   Little 2014.
[14]   Andornino 2006, 4.
[15]   See Buzan and Lawson 2012.
[16]   Little 2014, 170–171.
[17]   Hobson 2012, 33–58.
[18]   See for example Mäkinen 2018.
[19]   Wæver 1999.
[20]   Wæver 1999.

communist order, in which the states themselves would eventually wither away, and in which wars and great power politics would become a thing of the past.

After the collapse of the communist world in the late 1980's it seemed that the liberal order with its definition and master narrative of international politics had defeated its last ideological and institutional challengers. The order could now spread uninhibited almost everywhere, and the liberal intellectual Francis Fukuyama declared in his well known *End of History* argument that the development of political ideologies had now reached its Hegelian zenith.[21] Meanwhile, liberal theorists of international relations, such as John Ikenberry even proposed that the United States might have finally found the correct recipe for a universally valid, sustainable and stable international order.[22]

During the peak of their powers, the Western great powers could create and mold the international order according to their will, but importantly, they were also able to define the dominating interpretation of the world politics – write its master narrative along with its goals and correct practices. The West wrote itself at the center of the world, both spatially and temporarily, as the world history itself was defined as a steady progress towards the modernity the West had itself defined.[23]

1.1.1 After the end of history

After the short 'unipolar moment' of the 1990's the liberal international order has been encountering increasing challenges and its legitimacy has been questioned both from within it as well as from outside of it. Within the core of the order, in Western Europe and in the United States, new and powerful populist movements are calling for a reversion of globalization, and outside the core areas of the order, emerging great powers such as Russia, India and China are openly challenging the international order, its institutions, values and foundational ideas. They are offering new international institutions such as the BRICS (a coalition of emerging economies that includes Brazil, Russia, India China and South-Africa) and the Chinese supplement for the major old multinational development banks: the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), to complement the original institutions of the order. These emerging powers are also launching new narratives, concepts and keywords – such as the Chinese 'Community of shared future for mankind' or the Russian vision of a 'Greater Eurasian partnership' – in which world politics is envisioned a new.[24] According to Amitav Acharya, a global 'idea shift' is happening along the material 'power shift', in which the world outside the West is catching up.[25]

[21]   Fukuyama 1992.
[22]   See Ikenberry 2001. See also chapter 4.3.2.
[23]   Goody 2006.
[24]   Zhao S. 2018. On the greater Eurasian partnership, see Köstem 2019. On the Community of shared future for mankind, see Chapter 5.
[25]   Acharya 2016.

All in all, the shared master narrative of world politics, if there ever existed such a thing, is now transforming, in the words of Randall Schweller, into

> an increasingly fragmented and disjointed story. Like a postmodern novel, the plot features a menagerie of wildly incongruent themes and unlikely protagonists, as if divinely plucked from different historical ages and placed in a time machine set for the third millennium.[26]

This narrative has also been under attack by postmodern critics also within the discipline of international politics. Ralph Pettman, for instance, has defined the narrative as well as the theories of international politics formed around it as relying overtly on the Enlightenment ideas on 'modernity' and 'rationality', while both concepts remain ambiguously and fuzzily defined on a closer examination. [27] Within post-colonial criticisms, the Western tradition of international politics is seen as a mere imperial mechanism, which supports the hegemonic position of the Western great powers. International relations for the post-colonial thinkers, "as a body of knowledge and [...] as a social practice or set of social relations remain colonial, colonized, or imperial in character."[28]

Amitav Acharya has described the emerging world order, in which the power configurations of the past – both material and ideational – are changing a 'multiplex world'. The multiplex world is not dominated by any single hegemonic power or a hegemonic thought system, but consists of various competing centers of power. The multiplex does not mean a return to a classical 'multipolar' order with a delicate balance between a group of powerful great powers, since although the great powers will remain influential in the future, many new powerful actors, such as multinational corporations and non-governmental organizations are emerging alongside them, limiting their power.[29]

The liberal international order, according to Acharya, will remain one order within the multiplex world, which like a multiplex cinema, does not have any dominating centers, but offers a multitude of different views and regional arrangements – a broad variety from which to choose.[30] The old fashioned movie theater, with only one projector showing the liberal Western vision, is being remodeled into a multiplex theater, in which one can find different screenwriters, directors and actors according to ones political tastes. According to Acharya this development is not necessarily a negative one, rather it complicates things.

In many ways it seems that the world is returning to a state not unlike the polycentric world system of the early modern era, when various international

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[26]   Schweller 2014, 9.
[27]   Pettman 2004.
[28]   Saurin 2006, 26. See also Halperin 2006. Hobson 2012. For criticism of Western geopolitical tradition, see Agnew 1998.
[29]   Acharya 2017.
[30]   Ibid.

orders coexisted and interacted, yet, at the same time, upheld their particular (yet universal) visions and institutional frameworks.

1.2   Theoretical framework of the study

How to explain the evolution of world politics: the rise of the Western international order from its humble West-European origins into an order of global proportions? And how to approach, from a theoretical perspective, the possible decline and disintegration of the order, which might be followed by a return to a polycentric world system with various co-existing international arrangements?

World politics is traditionally understood as a domain of brutal material competition, in which morality or civilized discussion find little space. Whereas such discussions might be important within domestic politics of the states, within the scene of the international politics it is raw, material *power*, which counts. According to this traditional, realist view, world politics develops deterministically through great power competitions, obeying what could be almost described as natural laws of politics. Although some superficial changes can be seen at the outer appearances – institutions, values and such – the anarchic essence of world politics has and will remain static.

This dissertation, to the contrary, is founded on the notion on political *contingency*. Contingency, in the words of John Lewis Gaddis,

> the concept of sensitive dependence on initial conditions, as it has emerged from the sciences of chaos and complexity, demonstrates that immeasurable perturbations at the beginning of a process can produce immense results at its end.[31]

Since world politics is essentially contingent activity, it evolves through infinite and endless mutations, and the trajectory of world political history is never set to follow any preset path. It can develop into various different outcomes and consequently, also the different ways we think, assess and discuss world politics are building on the history of these contingent developments. Had the "chaos and complexity" of world politics taken a different turn at some point, had, for example, the Chinese or the Indian international order and political cosmology become dominant, we would think and conceptualize the phenomenon of world politics in quite different terms.

For approaching the contingent nature of international politics, this dissertation agrees with the epistemological, ontological, and, to a certain degree, theoretical presumptions of constructivism as expressed by Alexander Wendt in his modern classic, *The Social Theory of International Politics*. Constructivism as a field of study in world politics, is rather new, which began emerging slowly since the 1980's. Its early proponents, such as Nicholas Onuf, John Ruggie, Friedrich Kratochwil and R.B.J. Walker did not establish a

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[31]   Gaddis 1996, 43.

complete theoretical tradition or a commonly shared research program, but focused on offering critical remarks on the rationalist-positivist theories, which dominated the study of world politics at the time. Though their orientations were different, the early constructivists were all unified in their belief that the essence of the international politics is socially constructed by the actors within it, and that material variables, such as geography, military power or natural resources are only relevant through the meanings that are given to them by these actors.[32]

Constructivist theory found its most systematic expression in Wendt's *Social Theory,* which was published in 1999.[33] In his rendition of constructivism, Wendt attempted to create a scientifically valid grand theory, which could offer a 'middle ground' between the seemingly irreconcilable positivist and postmodernist (radical constructivist) approaches. The publication of *Social Theory* brought constructivist approach into the mainstream, causing it to be widely recognized as the third theoretical family alongside the established, realist and liberal theoretical traditions of world politics.[34]

Wendtian constructivism, and also this dissertation, build on the ontological and epistemological precepts of scientific realism. Against more radical constructivist or post-modern scholars, who assert that speculation on the shape or even the very existence of the material 'world out there' is meaningless, since we can only gain knowledge of it through conceptions and perceptions of our minds, scientific realism holds that there exists a world that is independent of our minds and that it is possible to gain reliable and objective knowledge of that world. According to Ilkka Niiniluoto, who represents 'critical scientific realism', although final and absolute truths of the 'world out there' can perhaps never be reached, the practical success of scientific theories makes it reasonable to assume that the theories can be said to be at least 'approximately true' or 'sufficiently close to truth'. Thus for scientific realists, approximating truth – something that radical constructivists would reject altogether – remains the essential aim of science. And by following the self-correcting methods of science, as well as by respecting the fallibilist principle, according to which all theories can always be wrong, objective progress can be made on this regard.[35]

Wendt expands the ontological and epistemological premises of scientific realism into the study of world politics, which, for him can – just as the natural sciences – create cumulative knowledge on its object of observation. For social

[32]   On the constructivist theoretical family and its historical development, see for example Peltonen 2017 and Reus-Smit 2009. On

[33]   For a shorter and earlier version of Wendt's main arguments, see Wendt 1992.

[34]   According to some scholars who label themselves as 'third generation constructivists', scientificization and mainstreamization of contstructivism by Wendt has diminished the critical potential of the early constructivists. Wendt also has distanced himself from his original theory. See Peltonen 2017.

[35]   Wendt 1999, 47–64. On scientific realism, see Niiniluoto 1999. Niiniluoto further places scientific realists into naive-, skeptical- and critical realists. A naive realist would claim that truth about the world is easily accessed while a skeptical realist argues that we can never be sure. A critical realist comes middle way by proposing that 'truthfulness' is a more useful concept than the 'truth'.

sciences, the objects of observation are the 'social kinds', which in the field of world politics would include such objects as states and international systems. Social kinds, although practically unobservable, are for Wendt real, "materially grounded, self-organizing phenomena with intrinsic powers and dispositions that exist independent of the minds and/or discourse of those who would know them".[36]

Wendtian constructivism shares the basic assumption of structurally oriented theories of world politics in believing that the *structure* of the international system defines the nature of international politics. The agents within the structures – states – are conditioned by the structure to act and behave in certain ways. In the ultimate rendition of the structuralist theory, Waltzian neorealism, the unique features of the states (i.e. their domestic political systems or cultural traditions) are irrelevant, since the anarchic structure of world politics will, through socialization and competition, transform the states to become "functionally like units".[37] For both (neo)realist or neoliberal theoretical families, this essential structure emerges from material conditions and on the enduring, unchanging national interests arising from them. Under these conditions, the rationalists claim, it is rational for the states' survival to maximize their interest at the expense of other states.[38]

Constructivist theory also accepts the concept of rationality at the 'thin' level. According to 'thin' conception of rationality, actors – either individuals or states in the stage of world politics – are self-interested, efficiency-oriented goal seekers, which attempt to maximize their interests while minimizing their costs. But exactly what are the interest they seek, is another question entirely and modifying this 'variable' changes the whole outlook of what is seen as rational conduct.[39] According to Waltzian neorealism, the interest is defined as security, which is gained by minimizing changes in relative power with rivals. Pursuing of this interest compels the states to strengthen their military capabilities and build balancing alliances. Under some conditions this is objectively the case, but it does not explain why Canada is not balancing against the United States or why Sweden is not exactly worried of its relative weakness compared to Finnish military power. For constructivists, the central assumption is that the interests are not tied to the material conditions, but socially constructed. Thus, although states in constructivist theory can seen as acting rationally, what is seen as rational conduct can differ considerably, because the desires, interests and even the identities of the states can and do change. As Wendt puts it: "effects of anarchy and material structure depend on what states want" and therefore, ultimately "anarchy is what states make out of it".[40]

Putting emphasis on ideas and social construction does not mean that material conditions are unimportant. Wendt presents many material factors,

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[36]   On discussion on 'social kinds' and scientific realism see Wendt 1999, 64–77.
[37]   See Waltz 1979, 79–101.
[38]   Wendt 1999, 92–138.
[39]   On the concept of rationality in world politics, see Freyberg-Inan 2016.
[40]   Wendt 1999, 106; Wendt 1992. For Wendt, the main actors, at least in the current context of international politics, are the states, but this could change in the future.

which cannot be ignored: natural resources lie within certain geographical regions, some states possess more powerful and technologically advanced military forces than others, and human beings themselves have certain undeniable biological features, which simply are not mere social construction.[41] These, for Wendt are 'brute material factors', which exist independently of the meanings that are given to them – no matter how radical form constructivism takes. But they do not themselves determine the interests of the states and doom us to act out an endless tragedy of great power politics. As Wendt puts it, it is "the things that we want material forces *for* – that drive social evolution, not material forces as such".[42]

According to Wendt, states construct mutually shared structures of collective knowledge (on shared expectations), which are called international cultures. What is usually described as the structure of international politics, for Wendt, is more precisely the culture of international politics, and in the end it is the culture tahat constitutes the interests and identities of the states. The culture is of course, to a degree, connected to the 'brute material factors' underlying it, but since it is not determined by them – but by the structures collective knowledge shared by the actors – it can take various different forms.[43] Wendt proposes that international cultures can in fact, take a virtually unlimited range of forms, but he defines three different types of international cultures most relevant to the analysis of our contemporary world political situation: Hobbesian, Lockean and Kantian cultures.[44]

The dissertation does not adopt Wendt's social theory of international politics in it entirety, but mainly binds the more narrow focus of the dissertation – the study of world political debates – into its metatheoretical framework. Wendt's theoretical presumptions, in short, establish a solid foundation for a study of the role of ideas in international politics, as well as for the study of change in international orders more generally. In addition to the concept of Wendtian culture the dissertation also draws inspiration from the concept of 'international society', which has been developed by the theorists of 'English school' of international politics. The concept is a close relative to the concepts of international culture and 'international order', but whereas a Wendtian culture can exist without a society – and this has probably been the case for most parts of the history of world politics –, actors within an international society behave according to certain established institutions, norms and values. Hedley Bull was among the first scholars to propose the idea of an international society with *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World*

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41   Wendt 1999, 110–138. Ralph Pettman has proposed that theories of international relations often make far-reaching conclusions on world politics based on 'metaphysical' assumptions on the essence of human nature. Realist theories see the human nature as being essentially evil, while liberalism and cosmopolitanism frame it in a much more positive light. See Pettman 2004, 15–33.

42   Wendt 1999, 113. Italics in original.

43   Wendt 1999, 150–178.

44   For a detailed description of the three cultures, see Wendt 1999, 246–312.

Politics. Bull differentiated international society from the concept of the international system in that within an international society, political units are

> conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions.[45]

An international society is therefore also part of an international system, but an international system can exist without a society among the states. As an example Bull mentions Ancient Greece and the Persian empire, which existed within the same international system (that is, they had systemic effects on each other) but Persia was not a member of the Greek international society, nor did Persia share the Ancient Greek institutions i.e. consultations with the Delphic oracle or the pan-Hellenic games.[46]

According to Adam Watson, international societies generally exist between the two extreme poles of hierarchic 'suzerain empires' with a strong hegemonic center and anarchic 'states systems' with sovereign states.[47] Barry Buzan and Richard Little have outlined a history of different international societies covering over 50,000 years of human activity. Basing on their wide ranging historical survey, Buzan and Little claim that an 'anarchic', Westphalian states-system is actually rather rare, and the history of world politics is more a history of various suzerain systems of diverse nature.[48]

Basically this dissertation leaves open as to what the international societies can be or become, but builds on the notion that the international society, its norms, values and institutions and its political cosmology are not determined by material conditions but constructed socially. Nor do the dominant units within the societies have to be limited to states. Buzan and Little argue in their historical examination that the dominant units of international systems in general are bound to change due to historical and political contexts, and can range from tribes, and chiefdoms to empires, states and multinational corporations. This dissertation more or less agrees with the description of Buzan and Little who define the units of international systems as:

> entities composed of various sub-groups, organizations, communities and many individuals, sufficiently cohesive to have actor quality. […] Using this understanding, the Roman Catholic Church, NATO, and Hizbollah can be seen as units, but Christian, Western or Islamic civilizations cannot.[49]

The nature and essence of the international order, according to constructivist ideas applied here, is always open for change and always forming a ground for

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[45]   Bull 1977, 13.
[46]   Bull 1977, 8–19. From the point of view of a Wendtian concept of culture, both the Persian empire and Greece could be also seen as existing within a shared international culture, which points out the differences between international systems, cultures and societies.
[47]   Watson 1992, 14–18.
[48]   Buzan & Little 2000.
[49]   Buzan & Little 2000, 101.

(world) political contestations. The essence of world politics is thus in the words of Peter Katzenstein, contrary to deterministic conceptions

> defined by persistent heterogeneity and diversity rather than homogeneity and convergence on American, European, or Western institutions, traditions, and theories.[50]

How then is the construction, delegimitization and reconstruction of the international society done and where are the political contestations happening? On this issue, the dissertation agrees and draws inspiration from the main precepts of the 'Cambridge school' scholars of intellectual history – unfortunately rarely brought to the realm of international politics – that political ideas are not fixed, ahistorical entities, but represent the political debates of their own eras and contexts. Transformations in power relations – whether in domestic or international politics – are in a deep and interdependent relationship with the ideological and philosophical debates of their era. Quentin Skinner, for example, has explained the political developments of the early modern Europe as an interaction between ideas and material power, basically the pen *and* the sword:

> The shifting power relations (in early modern society) explain, in general terms, ideological persistence and change. […] The alterations in ideological conventions in response to, and in legitimation of, these shifts explain in detail the character the configurations of power relations take on. […] Effectual changes in (European) political thought and action in this period are the consequences of wars and practical struggles and, secondarily, the outcome of the ideological response to the legitimation crises engendered by the shifting power relations that give way to battle.[51]

The Skinnerian conception of political change is well in concord with Wendt's interplay of 'brute material facts' and 'interest constituting ideas'. It does not need to be limited to the context of early modern Europe, but when expanded into the realm of world politics and its historical development, it explains the rise of the liberal international order and the spread of the Western political cosmology with its associated ideas. The Skinnerian notion also helps to contextualize the ongoing changes, in which the liberal consensus seems to be unraveling and challenging visions are appearing, riding on the material power of the emerging powers. Following the wording of Skinner, we are currently witnessing a legitimacy crisis of the liberal order and its proportions are global.

Historians and especially intellectual historians of the sort of the Cambridge school, are always wary of perennial ideas or scientific models of social conduct, in the case of this dissertation, theories of international politics. All international thought, including academic theories and models of international politics, are seen in this study as *arguments on the nature of world politics*. In addition to their analytical functions, the theories also attempt to define and frame world politics, and their interpretations also guide foreign policy of the political decision makers. In short, the dissertation asserts that international orders are constructed, sustained, delegitimized and reconstructed

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[50]   Katzenstein 2018, 379.
[51]   Tully 1988, 23–24.

through world political debates, in deep interplay with shifting power relations and their material factors, and the arguments in such debates – here, theories of world politics – are at the focus of this study.

To summarize, Wendtian constructivism and its epistemological and ontological standpoints together with ideas of the Cambridge school on the nature of political concepts and political change are applied as a meta-theoretical base for the dissertation. They form a framework, which helps to explain how international orders come in place, and how they transform and change. The framework also helps to understand what is the place of ideas and concepts in these transformations, and how they should be approached as arguments in the ongoing debates. In light of this framework, the Western international society carrying with itself a Western conception of world politics was able to reach a global scale because of the economic and military-technological power backing its expansion – the brute material factors. Material power thus affects who gets to speak and to take part in constructing the order but it does not determine the nature of the order; this happens in the realm of ideas.

For studying world political change the dissertation then applies the gaze and the toolkit of the historian, that is, sensitivity to context and process, but for contemporary events instead of those of the past. This toolkit will be examined in more detail in the section 1.5. but first, it is necessary to introduce the context and the argument that is being studied. As mentioned above, it seems that the basis for Western hegemony in world politics – both material and ideological – is wavering, and the history of political ideologies is continuing after a short interlude of the post-Cold War era. Within the newly emerging polycentric world system, various different actors are increasingly attempting to challenge the ideational foundations of the international order. And among these the most important is China.

1.3   China's challenge

China is an important and interesting case since it was the center of one of the international orders co-existing during the polycentric era of world politics. Before the 19th century and before the spread of the European international order into its domain, China considered itself as the center of the world, 'all under Heaven' (天下, *tianxia*). It saw itself as representing *the* civilization, and its emperor was acting as a stabilizing force between the godlike Heaven and the mortal humans beneath it. All other states or political entities around the Middle Kingdom (中国, *Zhongguo*) were considered to be the emperor's tributaries or mere barbarians, which would eventually be brought into civility according to Chinese principles. Just like the Western civilization had its own 'standard of civilization', Chinese all under Heaven also possessed its own

civilizing mission and its conception of 'modernity', based on the culture and customs of the elites living in the Chinese heartlands.

Following the intrusion of the Western great powers into China after the first Opium War (1839–1842), China was slowly forced to realize that its cosmology of being the center of 'all under Heaven' had been but a complete illusion. The country had to go through a long and painful experience, during which it repositioned itself into the world; it reduced itself from representing 'all under Heaven' into being a mere state among others, existing within the Westphalian society of states. (See subsection 2.1.3.) Following the collapse of the Qing, a full modernization and westernization ensued. Liberal minded cultural and intellectual movements such as the New Culture and the May Fourth movement aimed to transform China completely into a normal yet powerful state. The first President of the Republic of China, Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), proclaimed that:

> with the establishment of the Provisional government we will try our best to carry out the duties of a civilized nation so as to obtain the rights of a civilized nation.[52]

By joining into and integrating with the Western international order of states, China would thus obtain a legitimate and rightful position within the world and during these transforming years, China gradually accepted the Western vision and the Western 'master narrative' of international politics.[53] Instead of a harmonious family of peoples, balanced by the Son of Heaven, world politics was now conceived as intense, even brutal competition between great powers, yet within a certain framework of international laws and institutions.[54]

The Republic of China soon succumbed to a bloody civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists. The civil war ended in 1949 in the victory of the Communists and the People's Republic of China was created. Under the guidance of Mao Zedong, China took yet another massive ideological and cosmological turn by fully embracing Marxism as its guiding thought system. Large pictures of "a German jew" were now marched in the Tiananmen Square – a symbolical location, which only few decades previously was thought to represent the center of all under Heaven.[55] For a while, and perhaps the first time since the collapse of the all under Heaven, Chinese leaders seemed to know what China was and where it was heading, but the fervently Maoist foreign policy also led the country into isolation from the international order.

A new u-turn was taken soon after the death of Mao in 1976, as the moderately oriented Deng Xiaoping rose in power. Deng initiated the period of 'reform and opening up' (改革开放, *gaige kaifang*), during which China's main energies were channeled towards economic development and modernization.[56] In its foreign relations China decided to follow a 'low profile' strategy, which

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[52] Quoted in Gong 1984, 181.
[53] Agnew 2010.
[54] See Haapanen 2013.
[55] Horner 2009, 4.
[56] 不管黑猫白猫，捉到老鼠就是好猫. On this process of reform and opening up, see a detailed description in chapters 4, 5 and 6 in MacFarquhar 2012.

meant that it abandoned the Maoist global class struggle and halted its support for communist revolutionaries and insurgencies in the third world (see section 5.1). Following this strategy, China began to develop diplomatic relations with all interested parties and swiftly stepped down from the position of the leader of a world communist movement. It reshaped itself into a normal state among others and slowly began to accept and engage the post-war international order and its institutions and agreements.[57]

1.3.1 What kind of a great power?

It could be said that the speed of China's development was too fast, however. According to some scholars "China's mind has not been able to keep up with the pace of China's body"[58]. The body was indeed rushing forward as China's military was becoming one of the mightiest on the face of the earth and as China's space probes were visiting the Moon. In 2010 the Chinese economy surpassed the Japanese economy in size, becoming the second largest economy in the world, and according to most forecasts it will overtake the United States soon.

The perennial questions, which were left without satisfying answers throughout the fast paced rise have become more acute: what is China and what is its identity if it is no more socialist, yet it does not want to become a Westernized liberal state either? And how will China relate with the world and the international order around it as its position will keep growing more and more powerful? Will China want to turn over the current liberal international order and if so, what kind of world order is it visioning as a replacement?

During the early decades of the People's Republic (1949–1978), the Chinese interpretation of Marxism (Maoism) offered a consistent and comprehensive theory for China's development as well as a worldview for the society as a whole. It was able to answer the aforementioned questions on identity, since according to Maoist cosmology the Chinese were vanguards of the world proletarian revolution, set against capitalists, imperialists and other class enemies. Maoism also offered the ultimate destination shimmering at the end of their labors: the blissful world communist utopia.[59]

After the reforms of Deng, the Maoist orthodoxy was dismantled, and an ideational vacuum emerged at all levels of the society. At the lowest levels of the society, religions and spiritual movements (such as Falun Gong) gained ground. At the highest level of the state, the Communist party leadership has been puzzled in its attempts to reform its own ideology and its own grand narrative on what China is, where it is heading and what is it position in the world.[60]

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[57]   Zhao S. 2018.
[58]   ″中国的大脑远远落后于他的身体″, Qiu 2015.
[59]   Rofel 2017. For an introduction to Maoism and its historical development see the essays in Cheek 2010. Also see Kauppinen 2006.
[60]   Kallio 2016. On religions after Maoism see Johnson 2017. The People's Republic of China is an authoritarian 'party-state', which is ruled alne by the Communist Party

Instead of defining and constructing China's new identity on a top-down manner as during the Maoist era, the party in the reform era has allowed the intellectual and cultural circles of the country to take part in the project. Soon after the reforms commenced, cultural policy was seriously loosened and the 1980's were a lively and relatively liberal period for the Chinese intellectuals. Various, formerly banned topics and fields of study, from the essence of socialist theory to capitalist economics and traditional Chinese philosophies were opened up for study, discussion and debate again.[61] During these years of change, the traditional *establishment intellectuals*, who throughout the era of Maoist orthodoxy explained and interpreted the world from the official perspective and through official channels, began to transform into *public intellectuals*. The latter had fewer links to the administration, if at all, and applied all the new mediums and discussion forums, which were being introduced due to the loosening of the ideological policies, including later on, the internet.[62]

The crackdown on the democratic protests at the Tiananmen Square in 1989 temporarily froze the intellectual atmosphere. After the dust had settled, the limits of intellectual debate were severely demarcated and open dissidence basically vanished from the country, but a return to ideological orthodoxy similar to the era of Mao was not established. The Communist ideology was already being dissolved and the party leadership was not able to offer a full replacement in its place, since it was itself divided on the future direction of China. Since 1989, the intellectual and cultural fields have enjoyed certain freedoms in discussing their topics as long as they do not criticize the Communist party or question its legitimacy to rule.[63]

The intellectual scene, emerging from the Tiananmen crackdown, has evolved around three main traditions: the liberals, the new left and the traditionalists, which are all attempting to fill the ideological vacuum with their ideas and seek answers for the perennial questions on what China is, what it should be and how should it relate itself with the international order.[64] The liberals, although subtly, call for full democratization and marketization of the economy while the new left criticizes the 'neoliberal policies' initiated during the reform era and, at their extreme end, call for the return of the Maoist socialist system.[65] Within the traditionalist scene, neither the rightist or the leftist ideas of the West are fully endorsed, but instead, Confucianism and the traditional political structure based on it, is seen as a genuinely Chinese model to be emulated. Since the 1990's and especially during the 2000's, an all

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of China (CCP). The terms 'party' and 'party leadership' thus within the dissertation always refers to the CCP.
[61]   See Cheek 2015, 215–258.
[62]   See Cheek 2015, 260–314.
[63]   Cheek 2015, 260–314. Wang 2003.
[64]   Cheek & Ownby & Fogel 2018.
[65]   On liberalism, see Tang & McConaghy 2018. On new left, see Shi & Lachapelle & Galway 2018.

out 'national learning fever' (国学热, *guoxue re*) has emerged in the country, in which the traditional ideas and philosophies have been rehabilitated.[66]

For the party leadership, this vibrant and colorful discussion and development of ideas within the Chinese academic circles is serving as an important raw matter as the party is searching for its identity and for developing a grand narrative on its place in the world at large. Timothy Cheek, David Ownby and Joshua Fogel have even argued that the "academic public intellectuals are the key voices in this struggle to define and tell China's story."[67]

The party leadership is guiding and controlling the broad direction of the academia, yet it allows the grass-root academic level also to hold an innovative initiative. The control of the academia is done more explicitly through, for example, leading research institutes, such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which is supervised by the Propaganda Department of the Communist Party. All funding of the related research is also channeled through the National Planning Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences (also overseen by the Propaganda Department), which offers another important mechanism for guiding research.[68] The party also controls the academic discussion more implicitly through its declarations on what is seen as important or appropriate. Such interventions also can be very direct, as for example the speech of President Xi Jinping at a conference on philosophy of social sciences, organized in 2016, which emphasized the role of social sciences for the cause of socialism:

> 坚持和发展中国特色社会主义，哲学社会科学具有不可替代的重要地位，哲学社会科学工作者具有不可替代的重要作用。坚持和发展中国特色社会主义，必须高度重视哲学社会科学，结合中国特色社会主义伟大实践，加快构建中国特色哲学社会科学. [...]

> 构建中国特色哲学社会科学，一是要体现继承性、民族性。 要善于融通马克思主义的资源、中华优秀传统文化的资源、国外哲学社会科学的资源， 坚持不忘本来、吸收外来、面向未来族性.

> For upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics, philosophy of social sciences and the workers of philosophy of social sciences have an irreplaceable position and importance. The upholding and development of socialism with Chinese characteristics must hold high the philosophy of social sciences, combine socialism with Chinese characteristics with its own admirable practice, and accelerate the construction of *philosophical social sciences with Chinese characteristics.*

> When constructing the science of socialism with Chinese characteristics, tradition and nationalism need to be embodied. The construction needs to combine sources of Marxism with the sources of the Chinese traditional culture and with sources from foreign social sciences and philosophies, not forgetting ones roots while absorbing foreign influences, facing the future.[69]

Such interventions by the government offer important cues for the intellectual community on what is seen as desirable by the government, and on what

[66] Kallio 2016. Makeham 2011.
[67] Cheek & Ownby & Fogel 2018.
[68] Holbig 2014.
[69] Renmin Ribao 18.5.2016. Italics by the author.

direction the research should (or should not) take. A Chinese public intellectual must remain sensitive and wary of such discrete signals emanating from the party leadership. Besides such cues, the leaders are also offering initially empty concepts such as the 'Chinese dream' (中国梦, *Zhongguo meng*) or the 'harmonious world' (和谐世界, *hexie shijie*) and allow the academic communities to discuss and fill in the details. A launch of a new official policy concept is always followed by a storm of academic analyses on the concept and on its alleged connotations.

In this way, the party can include elements and ideas from these discussions into its own grand narrative of China, and the party and the intellectual field are embedded in a two-way, reciprocal relationship. Zhang Feng has proposed that the Chinese public intellectuals in modern China could be even "more influential than their counterparts in many Western countries paradoxically because China's repressive political system makes intellectual debates a surrogate form of politics."[70] Intellectual discussion in China, because of its limitations, can be indeed seen as a continuation of official politics and should be also studied as such by the scholars of Chinese politics.

Throughout the reform process, the new 'China story' on China's identity has been taking shape. Its central elements are taken from Deng Xiaoping's 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' (中国特色社会主义, *Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi*), which have been combined with ideas from Chinese tradition. Traditional, especially Confucian ideas were added to supplement the socialist lexicon during the era of Hu Jintao when, for example, the concept of 'harmony' (和谐, *hexie*) was introduced. In Hu's administration, for example, set the ideal of the Chinese society to transform itself into a 'harmonious society' (和谐社会, *hexie shehui*), and on the international stage, China was building a 'harmonious world'. Valerie Niquet has described the rhetorical style of the administration as 'Confu-talk'.[71]

During the era of Xi Jinping, this process has continued while the story has been evolving around the concepts of 'rejuvenation' (复兴, *fuxing*) and the 'Chinese dream'. Within this narrative, China's rapid development is seen as a renaissance of sorts; not as a rise from nothing, since for most of its history, China has been one of the most important great powers. It is only during the 'hundred years of national humiliation' (百年国耻, *bainian guochi*) that China temporarily fell from its central position because of the foreign invaders. But now under the leadership of the Communist Party, it is dreaming of its rise to the former glory. Compared to the early years of the strictly Maoist China, during which the whole imperial past was seen as feudalistic and backward, the rejuvenation narrative therefore closely links current socialist China with its imperial predecessors.[72]

The emerging 'China story' holds an important international element, since the narrative is not at all only designed for domestic consumption. As

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70   Zhang 2013, 46.
71   Callahan 2015. Niquet 2012.
72   Horner 2009.

China's power grows and as China emerges as an ever important actor in the international stage, it has to have an intriguing story also for the international community – in the words of Xi Jinping himself, China needs to "tell China's story well" to the world. With the story China has to be able to describe what kind of actor China is on the stage of world politics, and how will it wield its power for reforming the international order for the better. Developing the 'China story' is closely connected to the discussions on 'discourse power' (话语权, *huayu quan*) within the Chinese academic and policy circles.[73] Zhang Weiwei, a professor of international relations at the Fudan university, has been one of the most vocal scholars urging China to greatly reinforce its 'discourse power' for being able to define the dominating values, ideals, and master narratives of the world. Zhang claims that an essential element of the West's power consists of maintaining a 'discursive hegemony' (话语霸权, *huayu baquan*) on how world politics is being understood and what are its guiding values.[74] Another scholar, Zeng Xianghong has claimed similarly that besides its military and economic hegemony, the West has also projected a 'hegemonic worldview' (霸权世界观, *baquan shijieguan*) over the world, that is, a hegemonic interpretation on world politics and its goals.[75] For the Chinese story to prosper, these Western ideological hegemonies needs to be abolished by developing China's own discourse power.

With the China story and the officially sanctioned concepts used for communicating it, China wants to project an identity of itself as a peaceful and harmonious great power, which's rise is not threatening to anyone, and which instead offers numerous opportunities for cooperation.[76] Besides constructing and communicating the harmonious identity, the project also attempts to reframe the way international politics and its central values and objectives are understood. Jyrki Kallio has defined this international undertaking as China's 'strategic narrative' of world politics.[77] This is an overall project for gaining 'discourse power' and 'soft power' in the international arena and for disseminating Chinese concepts and ideas for global audiences. Disseminating of the strategic narrative is going on at various different levels:

First the narrative is spread through official statements and speeches delivered by top-level officials, which are disseminated also through news medias. *Second*, the strategic narrative is conveyed through diplomacy, as China is increasingly trying to get its foreign policy concepts (such as the 'Community of shared future for mankind' and the 'Belt and Road Initiative') to be added into the vocabularies of international organizations and international agreements.[78] *Third*, the project is going on within the Chinese academia, in which intellectuals are mobilized for developing rhetorical tools for the narrative, but also for spreading the concepts and ideas within international

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[73] On the development of the concept of 'discourse power' in China, see Rolland 2020.
[74] Zhang 2012, 125–129.
[75] Zeng 2015, 1–15.
[76] See Aukia 2019.
[77] Kallio 2016.
[78] Zhang 2018.

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academic discussions. The development of 'Chinese theories of international relations' is among the most important elements of this project.

Tianxia theory is part of this latter endeavor. Discussions around the concept of tianxia, and subsequently the tianxia theory emerging from them can be seen as arguments within the larger strategic narrative, constructed for the purpose of delegitimizing and challenging the liberal international order, as well as for offering alternative visions. It is a perfect vehicle for this task, since it is genuinely an old Chinese policy concept, and its image of China as a peaceful and harmonious great power fits the larger strategic narrative of official China very well. (see chapter 5).

1.3.2   Chinese theory of international politics

Within Chinese academic circles of international politics a large project for developing a 'Chinese theory of international relations' or a 'Chinese school' has been in progress since the early 2000's.[79] Chinese scholars working on such a theory claim that the dominating interpretations and theoretical frameworks of international politics originate from the West and form a part of West's hegemonic worldview.[80] The problem is not solely discussed in China but has been also noted by international scholars such as Barry Buzan and Amitav Acharya among others. For Buzan and Acharya the established theories of international relations are 'West-centric', in the sense that they mainly use elements of European or Western history and Western political thought as their raw material, and attempt to explain the rest of the world through this perspective.[81]

Western theories are dominating also within China, even though Chinese history and political thought differs considerably from those of the West and could, accoring to the proponents of the Chinese school, serve as a source for new interpretations on world politics. Ye Zicheng, for example, has argued that Chinese works of history and political thought, such as the massive historical commentary, *Zuozhuan*, should be seen as important sources of political history and thought, similar with the *Peloponnesonean War* by Thucydides.[82] Zhao Tingyang, one of the most notable developers of the tianxia theory, has even called for a complete 're-thinking of China' (重思中国, *chongsi Zhongguo*), which means the recreation of a completely Chinese philosophical system that would use Chinese concepts and ideas instead of 'Western' ones for describing and analyzing world politics.[83]

The dominance of Western theories of international relations in China was established during the early years of the reform era. The study of international politics in China before the reforms was limited to a few institutions, mainly

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[79]   A lot has been written on the topic. See for example Nielsen & Kristensen 2014. Kim 2016. Noesselt 2015. Schneider 2014. Kallio 2015.
[80]   Zeng 2015, 1–15.
[81]   Acharya & Buzan 2010. Buzan & Little 2000, 18–22. See also Hui 2012.
[82]   Ye 2013.
[83]   Zhao 2011, 1–7.

focused on educating party cadres and diplomats. In 1964, three institutions for the study of international relations were established in Peking University and Renmin University in Beijing, and Fudan University in Shanghai. Peking and Renmin focused on socialist theory and revolutionary movements within the third world countries, and only Fudan was studying developments in international studies outside China, especially in the West.[84] Theoretical innovations of international politics during the Maoist era were limited to a few policy concepts developed mainly by Mao Zedong, such as the 'three worlds theory' (三个世界的理论, *San ge shijie de lilun*).

As the reforms commenced in the early 1980's and as China's diplomatic networks began to spread out to the world, China soon faced a rapidly growing demand for knowledge and expertise on foreign relations and international politics in general. The Maoist framework was dismantled but a new discipline of international relations could not be established from scratch.[85] As the Chinese universities reopened their doors after being closed during the Cultural revolution, Chinese scholars became able to visit abroad and study there. First generations of Chinese scholars of political studies and international relations, including Wang Jisi and Yan Xuetong, studied mainly in the United States.[86] American foundations, such as the Ford, Rockefeller and Fulbright foundations among others, were keen to support these contacts financially, and as a cumulative result, China basically adopted the American discipline of International Relations, with its theoretical mainstreams (realism, liberalism and constructivism) and even its name (国际关系, *guoji guanxi*).[87]

According to Qin Yaqing, the 1990's was a period of learning and translation, during which most classics of Western international relations – such as the works of Hans Morgenthau and Kenneth Waltz – were translated into Chinese. It is only during the early 2000's that the Chinese scholars began to show interest in developing a genuine 'Chinese theory of international relations'.[88] According to Qin, a proponent of the 'Chinese school', China should not rely on American or European traditions of international politics, as their core problems arise from different geographical, historical and social backgrounds. The American discipline was motivated by its support of the American hegemonic position within the international order. The core problem of the European theories on the other hand, focused on the unification of Europe and consequently developed an emphasis on the concept of international society. The core problem for the Chinese school of international relations, at the current historical context according to Qin, is how to integrate a giant state like China into the international society peacefully.[89]

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[84] Qin 2010. On the discipline of international politics in China before the revolution of 1949, see Lu 2014.
[85] Zhang, F. 2014.
[86] White 2013.
[87] Nielsen & Kristensen 2014, 97–118.
[88] Qin 2010.
[89] Qin 2012.

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This theorization has focused around three schools of thought: first, Yan Xuetong's 'Qinghua school' of international relations and its doctrine of 'moral realism', second, Qin Yaqing and his 'relational theory of international politics', and third, tianxia theory. All the three streams apply traditional Chinese concepts as their raw material for theory construction and there are many overlapping and shared ideas between them. For example, all the schools generally emphasize morality and 'humane leadership' as central principles in international politics and they are all are interested in relational statuses of political units within larger systems.

Yan Xuetongs 'moral realism' builds on the precepts of classical realist thinkers, such as Hans Morgenthau, who argue that world politics has always been and will remain an anarchic competition between states. According to Yan, however, stability and order can be brought into this anarchy by following moral cultivation. Based on his interpretation of certain pre-Qin dynasty political philosophers (such as Mengzi and Xunzi), Yan claims that international orders are usually established hierarchically around dominating great powers, but the moral essence of the leading power highly impacts the stability of the system. A hegemonic power (霸权, *baquan*) might rule the order – temporarily – through its material power, but only a morally superior 'humane authority' (王权, *wangquan*) is able to establish authority. Though Yan does not propose a tianxia-style unified world, his ideal order is similarly structured hierarchically around a morally superior, humane great power. Yan also actively advocates that China abandon its traditional 'low profile' foreign policy and develop itself into a 'humane authority' by building networks of alliances and by growing its moral standing through soft power.[90]

Qin Yaqing's relational theory, meanwhile, builds on the premise that international theories are always heavily influenced by the background knowledge emanating from the cultural surroundings, in which they they came into existence. Building a civilizational dualism based on the civilizations of the West and China, Qin claims that the core component of the Western international theory is rationality, while the Chinese culture has always emphasized relationality instead. The relational theory, which gains inspiration from Chinese philosophical classics, such as the *Zhongyong*, understands the world as not composed "of self-subsistent and pre-constituted actors, but of interwoven and dynamic relations". Qin proposes the concept of 'relational power' to complement already established conceptions of power (such as hard and soft power) and the concept of 'relational governance' to complement the 'Western' conception of rule-based governance.91

To summarize, moral realism, relational theory and tianxia theory have multiple similarities and overlapping elements, and instead of being contradictory, can be seen as complementing each other. All the three schools also attempt to offer some normative guidelines on how to stabilize the

[90]   Yan 2009; Yan 2014; See also a collection of translated essays by Yan and his disciples in Yan 2011.
[91]   Qin 2016, 10; Qin 2018.

international order, and on how to incorporate China peacefully within it. Most also envision an international order with a hierarchic structure, and possibly, China in its center. For some scholars, especially Yan Xuetong, the main motivation seems indeed to be to offer guidance for lifting China into a leading position within the order. This dual-function bears the legacy of Marxist thought, where theory (理论, *lilun*) was seen principally as a means for 'guiding political action', instead of simply as a tool for analyzing or explaining events. Chinese theory of international politics should thus, similarly, also serve as a guide for Chinese foreign policy.[92]

1.4 Tianxiaism: Theory, political philosophy or ideology?

This dissertation focuses on the third stream of thought within the evolving Chinese theories of international politics: 'tianxia theory' (天下论, *tianxia lun*) also called 'tianxiaism' (天下主义, *tianxia zhuyi*). Tianxia theory is one of the most prominent and noted initiatives of recent Chinese international thought. Its central idea of a unique Chinese tianxia worldview has been effectively set on the agenda within China and the majority of Chinese scholarship is explaining and analyzing Chinese foreign policy thinking by applying, or at least referring to its concepts.[93]

The main argument of tianxiaism is that the current international order as well as the hegemonic interpretations of international politics supporting it (i.e. Western theory of international politics) are not to be taken as universal. They are only products of particular historical developments within the Western civilization, in which the equal and sovereign states and their interactions became the central institutions of international politics. The West, because of its military supremacy, has forced this model upon the rest of the world, but the model is getting increasingly ineffective in answering to the challenges posed by globalization.

According to tianxiaism, Chinese civilization evolved in remarkably different conditions. From the very beginning of history, China developed a conception of politics that was based on the whole world – all under Heaven – unified under a benevolent central institution. This was materialized in the institutional structure of the tributary system, in which the Chinese emperor served as a leading core and the smaller political units were its vassals or tributaries. Within this system, the tianxiaists claim, sovereignty and equality of the political units was limited, but the system as a whole was much more peaceful and tolerant.

The tianxia system – according to the theorists – collapsed under the pressure of Western great powers during the 19th century, but it should now be resurrected as it is better suited for the era of deepening globalization. The

92   Noessellt 2015.
93   See Schneider, 2014.

theorists attempt to develop a modern variant of the ancient tianxia order; in modern (Western) terms, some kind of a hierarchic yet cosmopolitan world community, in which the sovereignty of individual states would be limited.

Although the concept often used is *tianxia theory*, on closer inspection most discussions on the concept of tianxia do not resemble a scientific theory as usually understood, or even a theory as loosely understood within the discipline of international politics. The discussions consist mostly of harsh criticism of the current international order with historically oriented arguments, and there exits only a thin and vague normative layer proposing actual practical solutions. According to Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, tianxia theory could perhaps be considered to be in a state of 'pre-theory', which is currently too underdeveloped for fulfilling the requirements of a 'real' theory. Yet it holds the potential for becoming one later.[94]

Instead of a 'theory' strictly understood, tianxiaism is better understood as a creative mixture of political philosophy and ideology. It contains elements for explaining and criticizing the political status quo of the world – its own worldview – but it also offers some normative guidelines towards the establishment of this utopia. At the level of language, tianxiaist discussion is often descriptive, highly abstract and at times even poetic, ample with colorful metaphors and provocative figures of speech. Very often the tianxiaist texts resemble ideological pamphlets more than any form of rigorous analysis. Furthermore, for Robert Cox, *all* theories, which claim universal truths about the essence of international politics should always be "examined as ideologies [with] concealed perspectives" and the same is of course true of almost all theories of international politics.[95] Within the thesis from now on, the word *tianxiaism* will be used instead of tianxia theory, as it better expresses its nature.

How then should we proceed to examine tianxiaist thought and to search for its "concealed perspectives"? Marko Kauppinen, building on Franz Schurmann's ideas, argues that all ideologies (and political philosophies) have both 'pure' and 'practical' components built within them. By 'pure ideology' Kauppinen means a set of ideas, which together form a unified worldview (*Weltanschauung*) of the ideology. The component of pure ideology explains the current (usually unfortunate) state of affairs and projects an utopian vision, which the ideology is attempting to reach, and by projecting this vision, creates the need and basis for political action. In the case of Maoism, pure ideology defined the world as being in the state of perennial war between the classes and projected the blissful future state of communism as the ultimate end of the labors of the communists.[96]

Practical ideology, on the other hand, establishes the guidelines for reaching this 'perfect final state of mankind'. It offers the conceptual stepping stones, which lead political action and prevents deviating from the correct path. The two aspects according to Kauppinen, balance each other:

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[94]   Acharya & Buzan 2010.
[95]   Cox 1986, 207.
[96]   Kauppinen 2006, 20–27.

> Without pure ideology the ideas of practical ideology have no legitimation, and without practical ideology an organization cannot transform its [worldview] into consistent action.[97]

Although tianxiaism hovers between ideology and political thought/theory, Kauppinen's framework fits it quite well. Following this definition, tianxiaism can be seen as having a rather strong pure ideological structure yet a very thin layer of practical ideology. In other words, tianxiaist thinkers share a consistent and well developed view on the nature of world politics (what is wrong in the world and why) but they differ heavily on what the new tianxia order should look like or even on the question whether it should be established at all.

The pure ideology of tianxiaism, its *Weltanschauung*, is built around a grand narrative of different civilizations, the West and China. It is through this historical narrative that the theorists are criticizing the current international order *and* offering ideas for constructing a brand new, utopian all under Heaven system. A simultaneous and significant aspect is the historical narrative is helping to (re)construct a new great power identity for China, in which China is seen as an essentially peaceful and harmonious great power. The practical ideology, on the other hand, remains at a level of high abstraction with few concrete suggestions on how to transform the worldview into political action, that is, to establish an actual new tianxia.

1.5 Methodology and structure

Theories of world politics and political philosophies in general are approached in this dissertation as arguments in ongoing debates, which deal with the nature of world politics. They are important as they influence and limit the way we understand political reality, and though being dressed up as objective and neutral explanations, their inbuilt normative assumptions, or as Cox puts it "concealed perspectives", also guide political action of the actual decisionmakers.[98] In short, theories of world politics attempt to hide the contingency of politics and restrict the possibilities in a similar manner as theories of economics are argued to be doing for economic policies.

Scholarly work and academic arguments are not typically seen as a forms of politics. Dominant theories of international politics, especially in the United States emphasise their objective and even scientific nature in a manner that historian John Lewis Gaddis has described as 'physics envy'.[99] 'Science' and 'scientificity' according to Patrick Jackson, have served as important rhetorical commonplaces within discussions of international theory, though their descriptions have often remained ambiguous and vague, and though the

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[97]   Ibid.
[98]   Cox 1986, 207.
[99]   Gaddis 1996.

theorists mostly do not enter into arguments on philosophy of science on what actually constitutes 'science'.[100]

This dissertation begins with the notion that almost every human activity possesses a political nature, although it might be initially difficult to notice. Claudia Wiesner, Taru Haapala and Kari Palonen, argue that

> We have to learn to read and interpret the political aspects of actions both when the agents deny that they are acting politically as well as when they do not even realise they are doing so, though their action is clearly politically significant.[101]

Academic discussion can also be seen as a political activity with a rhetorical purpose, though its political nature is not always realized and often denied. For Gaddis, this applies to all science, including hard natural science. Science in general has a rhetorical purpose

> in that it seeks to persuade its 'consumers' that its conclusions are valid. That is how one achieves the consensus that makes the scientific method work. The same is certainly true in the social sciences and in history; indeed, a scientific, social-scientific, or historical account that is totally free from rhetoric of one kind or another is probably as unattainable as a purely 'objective' historical study would be.[102]

For Kari Palonen, political theory itself should not be seen as being any different:

> Those who write about political theory are *theory-politicians*, and their action is politics in relation to the questions, contexts and the point. This is the case also when the theory in question is not normative or policy-oriented, but a theory on the possibilities, preconditions and forms of political action.[103]

Palonen thus suggests that political theorists should be seen as *theory-politicians*, whose theoretical initiatives – in this case theories of international politics – are their own interpretations on the possibilities of political action. They can be seen as *meta-arguments* or to be more precise, as *frames*, which attempt to uphold or establish new interpretations on the prevailing conditions.[104] A neorealist theory of international relations frames world politics rather bleakly as an endless 'tragedy of great power politics', in which cycles of hegemonic wars are inevitable.[105] Liberal institutionalism, on the other hand, sees cooperation and institutionalization of the relations between the states as transforming world politics towards a peaceful, Kantian future. Both neorealism and liberal institutionalism would, beginning from their own frames and their limitations, suggest quite different policies: a neorealist framing suggests building raw

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[100]   See Jackson 2011, 1–23.
[101]   Wiesner & Haapala & Palonen 2017, 4.
[102]   Gaddis 1996, 44.
[103]   "Ne, jotka kirjoittavat poliittisesta teoriasta, ovat eräänlaisia *teoriapoliitikkoja*, ja heidän toimintansa politiikkaa kysymysten, kontekstin ja pointin suhteen. Näin on silloinkin, kun kohteena ei ole normatiivinen tai policy-orientoitunut teoria, vaan yleisemmin poliittisesti toimimisen mahdollisuuksia, edellytyksiä, muotoja, tyylejä tms. koskeva teoriatyyppi." Palonen 1997, 130. Italics by the author.
[104]   Crawford 2002, 123–123. Also see subsection 3.4.1.
[105]   Mearsheimer 2001.

military power while a liberal frame advises on developing multilateral institutions and free trade. Interpretations of the world, also 'scientific' ones, have a huge significance and are always deeply political in nature.

However a short clarification is required before developing this notion further. Even though theories of world politics possess political aspects and a rhetorical purpose, this dissertation does not take the radical constructivist stance according to which all theories should be seen as equally (in)valid in explaining the developments and processes of world politics. Since the dissertation leans on the philosophical premises of scientific realism, it takes the attitude that the 'truth' is out there and it can be approached. Theories of world politics differ on their analytical capabilities and some theories can therefore produce more 'truthlike' evaluations than others. That the theories have *also* political and rhetorical aspects does not rule out their ability to provide scientific knowledge on world politics. They do, but the focus of the dissertation is on the political and framing aspects of the theories.

This being clarified it is claimed that tianxiaism is an attempt to establish a frame of international politics, in which the Western style of world politics is defined as obsolete and even dangerous. Tianxiaism also challenges the validity of the established (Western) theories of world politics, and projects the tianxia model of politics and its 'worldly' analytical framework as more suitable alternatives. Whether its arguments are believable is not, for the interests this dissertation, as important as is its rhetorical value and the fact that it is able to set its frame on the agenda of global discussions. William Callahan has explicated the point in relation to the 'clash of civilizations' theory, which was introduced by Samuel Huntington in the early 1990's, and which evoked discussions on the nature of civilizations in world politics:

> The point is not whether Huntington's articles are intellectually sophisticated, or whether US policy is dictated or influenced by them. Rather the texts are powerful as polemics that define problems in specific ways that actually serve to limit the range of possible solutions. In this way, Huntington set the terms of the debate about post-Cold War international politics that in turn generated a certain range of responses. Even when these responses are critical of the clash of civilizations argument, they add to its influence by recirculating the idea that "civilization" is the key topic of debate for international politics.[106]

For tianxiaism, the topic attempting to be set in the agenda is the current 'warring states' condition of world politics and its replacement by a new tianxia order, which would hopefully be led by China, although this last element is normally only implicated, not explicated. The "intellectual sophistication" or the validity of its arguments can be challenged, and it is an open question how much Chinese foreign policy is influenced by them, but tianxiaism – similar to Huntington with civilizations – has already been successful in adding the concept of tianxia into the agenda of world political discussions.

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[106]   Callahan 2008, 759.

1.5.1 Conceptual approach

Ideological constructs such as tianxiaism are approached through texts, and various, linguistically oriented methodologies are available for such a purpose. One could, for instance, delineate and analyze the discourses used by the tianxiaist thinkers (*discourse analysis*) or structures of the narratives, which are being constructed (*narratology*). This dissertation, however, focuses on the definitions of concepts, and is therefore inspired by the central ideas of conceptual historians, which include the thinkers of Cambridge school of intellectual history (such as Quentin Skinner and John Pocock) but also other scholars representing more independent lines of research, such as Reinhart Koselleck, Kari Palonen, Felix Berenskoetter and Michael Freeden. Although the exact approaches of these thinkers have differing emphases, their ideas are not contradictory, but more supportive of each other.

Political theories and ideologies can be said to consist of concepts, but what are concepts exactly? According to Berenskoetter, concepts are images in our minds, which help us to organize, name and give meaning to different features of the world. They should not be understood as accurate representations of the world, but as "abstract heuristic devices", which meaningfully organize and – to a degree – simplify reality. Concepts make it possible to communicate about the world and its features. Concepts are not equal to words, because whereas a word typically points to a one particular thing, a concept is always a combination of multiple elements and aspects in relation to each other. Concepts, in the words of Berenskoetter, however, always tend to be "attached to a word, although – and this is important not necessarily always to the same word." A concept is therefore always "more than a word."[107]

Reinhart Koselleck has described the relation between a word and a concept in the following way:

> a concept is connected to a word, but is at the same time more than a word: a word becomes a concept only when the entirety of meaning and experience within a socio-political context within which and for which a word is used can be condensed into one word.[108]

For Koselleck, a word is a mere shell or a container for the meanings and objects of the concept. Concept is a "concentrate of several substantial meanings", and therefore concept, (the signification of a word) "can be thought separately from that which is signified".[109] To put it in concrete terms, a state, for example, and its various substantial meanings (an entity with a geographical territory, governing structure and a national anthem) can be thought of and conceptualized without the need to apply the word which is used to signify it.

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[107]   Berenskoetter 2016b, 2.
[108]   Koselleck 2004, 85.
[109]   Ibid.

Because concepts consist of combinations of different meanings, they are always vague and indeterminant. In fact, most conceptual historians support the notion that concepts *cannot* be defined with any fixed meanings. However, although their definitions are constantly changing, all concepts must have "some sort of internal logic, structure, perhaps even properties, which form [their] core".[110] Michael Freeden has argued similarly that concepts must have certain 'ineliminable components', without which they would cease to exist.[111] In the case of the concept of the state then, a 'geographically delineated political entity' would make such an ineliminable component or core property without which the concept would not exist.

According to Freeden, ideologies and political philosophies are contesting against each other through language, and by defining language, they aim to influence in the direction of politics. Concepts are at the center of these contestations, and the ideologies are attempting to *decontest* their meanings. By decontesting Freeden means attempts to provide the dominating and unchallenged definitions for concepts and therefore to end the contestations around them. The concepts of *democracy* or *equality*, for example, have very different definitions within liberal and socialist ideologies, but both ideologies strive to get their own definition in a dominant position.[112]

Political concepts are the building blocks of ideologies and political philosophies. In ideologies the concepts are never isolated and independent units, but in a close relation to other concepts in which Berenskoetter calls 'conceptual webs'. The conceptual web of an ideology holds certain 'basic concepts', which keep its structure together, and which are tied to *supporting* and *cognate concepts*. The definitions of the basic concepts can also be clarified by applying *contrasting concepts*.[113]

Freeden describes the relationship between concepts an ideology in a similar manner through a linguistic metaphor of conceptual 'morphology'. Concepts are the *morphemes* of ideologies; the smallest meaningful units of information, which, when combined together, create the 'morphologcial' structure of the ideology.[114] According to Freeden, all ideologies need to have certain ineliminable *core concepts*, without which the ideology would cease to exists (i.e. liberty in liberalism or equality in socialism), as well as *adjacent* concepts, which are supporting the core concepts. Ideologies also have *peripheral* and *marginal* concepts, which do not serve any important function, but come up within the discussions every now and then. Concepts can move from periphery and margin into the core and vice versa, but how much such movement is allowed depends on the nature of the ideology. A highly dogmatic ideology will try to prevent any movement between these zones, while a more

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[110]   Berenskoetter 2016b, 4.
[111]   Freeden 1996, 60–75.
[112]   Freeden 2003, 50–66. Freeden 2008.
[113]   Berenskoetter 2016b, 1–20.
[114]   Freeden 1996, 75–91. In linguistics a morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit in a language. Morpheme is not equal to a word, because a word can include several morphemes.

open ended ideology allows concepts to travel and change almost uninhibited.[115]

Quentin Skinner proposes that for identifying and delineating ideologies "texts of a period are carefully dusted off and surveyed to identify the constitutive and regulative conventions of the reigning ideologies and their inter-relations".[116] For Freeden this means searching the core concepts, which are defined and used in a similar manner by a group of writers, and which then constitute the 'morpohology' of an ideology. For both Skinner and Freeden ideologies or political philosophies are rarely developed by single strong individuals, but come together through shared definitions of concepts done collectively by 'ideology-producing groups'. Freeden gives some credit to individual ideologues, however, as they can serve as 'channels' for more widely held beliefs:

> Ideology-producing groups will reflect the impact of articulate and representative individuals, who may be the effective channels that give expression to more widely held beliefs, as well as adding their own imprint on what they absorb and convey.[117]

The three semi-autonomous analytical chapters of this dissertation all deal with concepts and their definitions. Methodologically the dissertation does not adhere rigidly to any analytical framework, and the methodological approaches in all of the three chapters also differ from each other to a degree. However, all the chapters are inspired especially by the morphological approach proposed by Freeden, which has been useful for delineating, from the vast mass of texts, tianxiaism as an ideology (political philosophy) through searching for its core and adjacent concepts. In essence, a large amount of philosophical texts by Chinese scholars, united by their interest for and by their use of the concept of tianxia were read. Core and adjacent concepts, defined in a similar manner by the authors (though often by differing *wording*) were searched, and as a result, the collectively produced tianxiaist ideology (political philosophy) and its sot and hard variants was identified. At the center of this cosmology, as chapter three argues, are the two, ineliminable, civilizational core concepts, namely tianxia and the West (西方, *xifang*), which were defined by all the authors in a similar manner. Arrays of adjacent and peripheral concepts supporting the core concepts were also identified.

Ideologies and political philosophies do not only describe the world, but also attempt to change it. After the conceptual essence of tianxiaism was identified, chapter three analyzed the 'rhetorical purpose' of such a cosmology, i.e. what the ideology is *doing*. According to Cambridge school thinkers, such as Quentin Skinner, concepts should be treated "less as statements about the world than as tools and weapons of debate."[118] For Skinner, every definition of a political concept within the text under examination should be seen as a

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[115]   Freeden 1996, 75–91.
[116]   Tully 1988, 23.
[117]   Freeden 1996, 111.
[118]   Skinner 1999, 62.

'speech act'. Since political ideas and ideologies are to be seen as arguments within their contemporary debates, all the texts thus have a meaning (*locution*) but they are also attempting to do things (*illocution*), i.e. defending, attacking, delegitimizing or legitimizing a certain point of view.[119]

Tianxiaism defines international politics using its conceptual West-tianxia -dichotomy, but what then is tianxiaism attempting *to do* with it? Chapter three argues that tianxiaism is attempting to delegitimize the dominating intellectual tradition on international politics as well as the actual institutional arrangements themselves, that is, the liberal international order. Through its conceptual redefinitions, it tries to open new ways for thinking about international politics and to offer alternative, although very utopian and ambiguously described visions. Such visions, as the analysis in chapter four argues, are not as unique and practical as it is claimed, but they offer important rhetorical building blocks for the Chinese leadership as it is constructing a great power identity for China and as it is developing its own visions on the reform of the international order. Use of tianxiaist core concepts by the Chinese leadership is the focus of the fifth chapter.

1.5.2 On research material

As the dissertation focuses on academic discussions on the concept of tianxia, the bulk of the research material consists of academic monographs, articles, essays and shorter commentaries in various different journals. Most important include top ranked Chinese journals, such as *World Economics and Politics* (世界经济与政治, *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi*), which is a journal of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; *International politics research* (国际政治研究, *Guoji zhengzhi yanjiu*) of Peking University; and *Science of international politics* (国际政治科学, *Guoji Zhengzhi kexue*) of Qinghua University. Beyond these academic journals, various shorter essays and blog posts in internet journals and magazines, such as *Confucian net* (儒家网, *Rujia wang*) or *The Paper* (澎湃, *Pengpai*) have also been used. For the fifth chapter, which compares tianxiaism with official Chinese foreign policy concepts, speeches and articles by President Xi Jinping have been used.

Most of the research material is in Chinese language. Occasional articles and monographs have been published also in English, and for most of the speeches of President Xi Jinping there exists an official English translation. In such cases the official translation has always been used in quotations, but for any other sources and citations offered within the dissertation, the translations have been done by the author.

For obtaining the research material, the internet has been an irreplaceable resource. The use of the internet for academic purposes has advanced very rapidly in China, and a large part of articles published after the 1980's is already digitized and available in different databases and websites. Of the databases, the most important is the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI, 中

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[119]   Skinner 2002, 103–112.

国知网, *Zhongguo zhiwang*) database, which was launched in 1999 at Qinghua university, and which holds digital versions of almost all academic articles published in China after the 1980's.[120] The CNKI database can be searched by keywords and research topics and it can even be used for doing statistical research on the uses of certain keywords or concepts within Chinese discussions.

Another excellent resource for gathering research material for the project and for following Chinese intellectual discussions in general is a Chinese web site *Aisixiang* (爱思想, Engl. *Love philosophy*). The website re-publishes writings of Chinese intellectuals, including full academic journal articles, shorter essays and shorter blog posts and commentaries. The site also updates a database of Chinese thinkers and all the articles at the site are effectively organized according to categories and keywords, which makes searching for articles around certain topics (for example Chinese theories of international relations) very convenient.

Obtaining research material from Chinese internet sources includes its own technical problems, however. The internet in China is in constant change and movement, often because of technical issues: websites simply vanish all the time, and the researcher will rapidly become well acquainted with the '404 error message'. Such changes also often happens due to changes in the political winds. The internet is heavily censored in China and the rules and regulations on *what* to censor and *why* are in a constant flux. The general trend during the length of the whole dissertation project has been towards stricter forms of censorship. To mention a few notable cases that happened during the dissertation project, two outspoken journals, *Yanhuang Chunqiu* (炎黄春秋) and *Consensus Net* (共识网, *Gongshi wang*), which many saw as the last sites of independent debate in China, and in which debates on tianxiaism were also held, were shut down.[121]

Later in 2018, Sheng Hong, one of the major thinkers behind tianxiaism, became a *persona non grata* in China due to his liberal views. Sheng was the leading figure of an independent Chinese think tank, Unirule Institute (天泽经济研究所, *Tianze jingji yanjiusuo*), which supports free market economy and constitutional democracy. Due to his activities in the think tank, Sheng was barred from visiting a conference in the United States, and a little later the whole institute was ordered to be shut down.[122] Following the demise of the institute, Sheng's writings started to vanish from the internet, and for example his whole profile page at *Aisixiang* was deleted. As a remedy, internet archives, such as the *Wayback machine* were often needed in order to find certain articles

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[120]   On CNKI, see https://www.cnki.net/gycnki/gycnki.htm
[121]   See Davies 2016, 127–129.
[122]   See Scholars at Risk at https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/report/2018-08-26-unirule-institute-of-economics/

and for going back to articles, which had vanished during the research process.[123]

For chapter five, which focuses on official Chinese foreign policy concepts, the task of collecting the research material is somewhat easier. Most of the speeches and writings of Xi Jinping, analyzed within the chapter, can be found from a 2018 collection, published by the Central Party Press, *On Promoting the Building of A Community with A Shared Future for Mankind* (论坚持推动构建人类命运共同体, *Lun jianchi tuijian goujian renlei mingyun gongtongti).* Speeches not included in the collection can be found in official government websites and official English translations of the speeches also exist, for example, in the website of the United Nations as well as in Chinese news sites, such as Xinhua.

Finally, the dissertation project also included a research visit at the Renmin University in Beijing, China in September-October of 2016. During the visit, research material was obtained from libraries and bookstores, and discussions were held with various Chinese scholars of international politics. These discussions remained purely unofficial in nature, and none of them is directly cited within the dissertation, though insights acquired from them have been used in understanding the phenomenon.

1.5.3   On previous studies of tianxia theory

Tianxiaism has evoked a lot of interest after its introduction for international audiences by Zhao Tingyang in the early 2000's. It has established its place within the discourses outside of China, and almost all scholars interested in the possibility of a 'non-Western theory of international politics' note tianxiaism as a potential, challenging conceptualization of world politics.

To mention a few examples, William Callahan has been one of the most active scholars on the topic, and has criticized Zhao's ideas in many different articles and book chapters. June Dreyer has approached tianxia in a similar fashion with this dissertation, as a trope, a 'rhetorical device' for soft power projection. Bettina Hueckel has studied tianxia theory as a 'meta theory', shaping the ontological foundations of the debate on international politics.[124] Meanwhile, Salvatore Babones, in a rare application of tianxiaism into political analysis, has proposed in his 2017 book *American tianxia: Chinese money, American power, and the end of history* that the tianxia is actually already in place, since the current world order under the hegemonic leadership of the United States matches its framework quite well.[125]

Almost all research on tianxiaism has been rather short, and consists of journal-length articles or shorter comments. All previous studies also typically cite only the first book (2011) or the few English language articles by Zhao

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[123]   The *Wayback machine* uses the resources of the Internet Archive, which holds and archive of 330 billion websites beginning from the year 1996. See https://archive.org/about/

[124]   Callahan 2008, 2013. Dreyer 2015. Hueckel 2012. For other similar discussions, see for example Xu 2013. Godehart 2016. Barbantseva 2009.

[125]   Babones 2017. See also the reply of Zhao Tingyang to Babones in Zhao 2018.

Tingyang, and do not mention other scholars and the larger discussions around the idea. Tianxiaism, however, is a much larger phenomenon than Zhao Tingyang and his first book. Zhao himself has since published many articles and a whole new book (2016) on the subject. Broader discussions on the concept, not usually noticed by international scholars, have been evolving in the background and the concept and the ideology, as understood by Michael Freeden, has been collectively pushed forward. As Freeden proposed above: "articulate and representative individuals", in this case Zhao and Sheng Hong "may be the effective channels that give expression to more widely held beliefs". The dissertation argues that this might indeed the case, and the "more widely held beliefs" should be examined by going through large amounts of texts on the subject.

A larger study, examining in detail the whole range of discussions around tianxia has been missing, and this dissertation hopes to contribute in this regard. The dissertation also provides an initial comparison of the tianxiaist concepts with the concepts of China's foreign policy argumentation.

1.5.4   On the structure

Structurally this study is an amalgam between a monograph and an article based dissertation. Chapters three and five (or certain fragments of them) have been published during the dissertation project as independent articles and have been thoroughly reworked into chapters in the monograph. Chapter four is also originally based on an independent conference paper, which has not been published before. All the three analytical chapters are, to a degree, independent and have somewhat differing approaches and methodological orientations. Though different, the chapters are still unified in their interest in definitions of concepts and in the phenomenon of tianxiaism as a rhetorical device.

Before moving into the actual analysis, the second chapter "**Tianxia and the tributary system – studies of the Chinese world order**" first orientates the reader into the topic by offering a short history of the concept of tianxia and its cosmology in relation to the surrounding Chinese international order. The chapter is mostly based on historical research literature. After the historiography, the chapter discusses how this 'Chinese world order' has been studied within different scholarly disciplines (including international politics) and what is the position of tianxiaism among these studies.

The third chapter "**Historical roots of the international order: Western order and tianxia**" analyzes the *pure ideology* of tianxiaism, that is, the central worldview, which is universally shared by all of the tianxiaists. The chapter, by going through large amounts of texts, searches for 'freedenian' core concepts, defined and used similarly by all the writers. Following this method, the analysis in the chapter argues that the tianxiaist worldview consists of a civilizational grand narrative, in which the civilizations of China and the West are used as central components: the concept of the West is used for criticizing and delegitimizing the international order while the concept of China/tianxia is

used for providing alternative visions. Fragments of this chapter have been published previously in Puranen 2019 and Puranen 2019b.

The fourth chapter "**New tianxia or a liberal hegemony?**" focuses on the *practical ideology* of tianxiaism, that is, on the propositions that the tianxiaists suggests for reforming the international order The chapter begins by reconstructing the vague definitions of the tianxiaist writers (mainly Zhao Tingayang) to present how a new tianxist order might look institutionally, and then compares this model to three established theories of international politics: hegemonic stability theory, constitutional liberalism and cosmopolitanism. The chapter argues that although tianxiaism attempts to present itself as a unique theoretical construct, on a closer evaluation its core concepts hold many similarities with the concepts of the three traditions mentioned.

The fifth chapter "**Tianxiaism in Chinese foreign policy**" shifts the focus into China's official foreign policy and examines the central foreign policy concept of the Xi Jinping administration: the Community of shared future for mankind (人类命运共同体, *renlei mingyun gongtongti*). The chapter first shortly surveys Chinese relations with the international order and the importance of ideological concepts for Chinese foreign policy in general. The chapter then, by presenting portions of Xi Jinping's speeches, analyzes the main elements of the Community rhetoric and compares them with tianxiaist ideas. Fragments of this chapter have been published previously in Puranen 2019c. Finally, the sixth and the last chapter offers a short summary on the chapters and their themes.

2   TIANXIA AND THE TRIBUTARY SYSTEM – STUDIES OF THE CHINESE WORLD ORDER

This chapter first outlines a short historiography of the concept of tianxia in its surrounding historical contexts based on research literature. It examines the evolution of the 'Chinese world order' along with its tianxia cosmology from the earliest Chinese dynasties into the collapse of the imperial system during the 19th and 20th centuries. The historiography is offered, since it constitutes the background against which the modern tianxiaist discourse is developing. For example, many of the concepts, which are applied by modern tianxiaist thinkers are modified (or mutated) resurrections of certain traditional concepts.

Second, after presenting the historiography, the chapter briefly discusses how the concept of tianxia and the East-Asian international order around it has been studied in different disciplines, most importantly within the discipline of international politics, and by so doing, elucidate the place of tianxiaism among these studies.

2.1   Evolution of the tianxia system

Tianxia is an ancient Chinese concept corresponding roughly with 'the world'. The word is composed of two characters: 'heaven' (天, *tian*) and 'under' (下, *xia*), which together are conventionally translated as 'all under Heaven'. Dictionary translations for tianxia include such words as: the whole world, the whole of China and realm. [126] Such dictionary translations are inevitably crude simplifications since the concept of tianxia bears multiple meanings and connotations. Being one of the oldest Chinese political concepts, its meaning has evolved for over 3000 years. Throughout history, the concept has had an intimate relationship with the international order China has attempted to

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[126]   See for example *Handian* web dictionary entry
https://www.zdic.net/hans/%E5%A4%A9%E4%B8%8B, visited 11.5.2020.

construct around it, and therefore, the concept has taken various different meanings during different eras and dynasties.

The earliest use of the concept of tianxia can be identified in early Zhou dynasty (c. 1046–256 b.c.e.), but according to some scholars, many components important to the concept can perhaps be traced even further, back into the preceding Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1046 b.c.e.).[127] During the Shang, second of the Chinese dynasties according to traditional records, the Chinese state truly emerged with a centralized political system and importantly, the ideographical writing system, which survives to this day. According to Shang worldview, the Shang state was at the center of the world (中商, *zhonshang*) and the world around it was square in form, extending into four cardinal directions (四方, *sifang*).[128]

Shang religion was a complex mixture of ancestor worship combined with a large pantheon of gods and spirits, but the dynasty did worship a superior godlike figure called *Shangdi* (上帝), who was standing above all the other gods. Shangdi was responsible for major natural phenomena, such as floods and harvests, and had a strong influence on the success of hunting. Sometimes Shangdi could even influence political issues on earth, as he could, for example, order one of the neighboring tribes to attack the dynasty. The Shang king acted as a high priest or a shaman, leading the most important rituals and sacrifices, and arbitrating between Shangdi and the mortal population below.[129]

The concept of tianxia was not used during the Shang and begins to emerge during the rise of the Zhou dynasty, when the Chinese political system as well as its political cosmology went through several important changes. According to traditional records, Zhou dynasty replaced the Shang in 1046 b.c.e., as the Shang had become corrupt and tyrannical. After defeating Shang, the Zhou placed its capital in the Wei River valley in the west, strategically isolated from the Chinese hinterlands of the Central plain in the east. For controlling the hinterland, the Zhou established a political system called *fengjian* (封建), in which the Zhou kings ruled directly only a small kingdom of their own, but enfeoffed lands for the members of the royal clan, and also for certain meritorious characters outside the royal family. The Zhou kings allowed these 'vassal states' (诸侯, *zhuhou*) to have considerable autonomy in their domestic policies for practical reasons as it was hard to keep a tight rein over vast distances. However, unity of the realm was upheld, for example, by imperial envoys, who would travel around the states, gathering information and spreading the commands of the king.[130]

As can be seen from bronze findings and other archaeological artifacts remaining from the period, the Zhou elites throughout the realm did indeed share a common, surprisingly unified cultural consciousness.[131] This common

[127]   Pines 2012. Wang 2012. All the years and dates used in this chapter are heavily debated and controversial and should be used only as a reference.
[128]   Li 2013.
[129]   Shaughnessy 1999.
[130]   See Shaughnessy 1999. Li 2006. Khayutina 2010.
[131]   Li 2006.

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culture gave rise to the conception of the civilization (or *Huaxia,* 华夏): the idea that the members of the Zhou realm were the civilized ones in contrast to the 'four barbarians' (四夷, *si yi*), who lived mostly on the rimlands of the realm, and who were not integrated to Zhou customs and rituals, known collectively as *li* (礼). This common cultural sphere of *Huaxia* was the breeding ground from which the conception of 'all under Heaven' also arose.

The Zhou replaced Shangdi with their own god, Heaven (天， *tian*), which, however, preserved some properties of Shangdi. [132] Heaven was not a 'personalistic' or 'anthropomorphic' god, but rather a universal cosmic force, which observed and evaluated the actions of men but did not participate directly on terrestrial affairs. The invention of Heaven brought forth three political concepts, which were to become highly important for the political philosophy of imperial China: the 'Son of Heaven' (天子, *tianzi*), the 'mandate of Heaven' (天命, *tianming*) and 'all under Heaven' (天下, *tianxia*).[133]

In Zhou cosmology, the ruler, also known as king (王, *wang*) was thought to be the 'Son of Heaven'. He was the representative of Heaven on earth and he was given a 'mandate' to rule all earthly and humanly issues. The mandate of Heaven meant, however, that the Son of Heaven could only rule with the consent of Heaven and only as long as his conduct was in line with virtue (德, *de*). If the Heaven was not content with the king, it could replace him, and no king, nor a royal lineage was therefore safe from Heaven's judgment. Benjamin Schwartz has argued that the mandate of Heaven was an ingenious philosophical device for legitimizing political power, yet it was also a dangerous one. The Zhou dynasty had received the mandate by overthrowing the morally decadent Shang, but it could also rapidly lose it if it failed to uphold the well-being of the realm and its people.[134]

The concept of tianxia appears for the first time during these transformative years, but it was used during the early Zhou only occasionally, if at all. According to Yuri Pines, during early Zhou, tianxia likely served only as a shorthand for the longer phrase (天之下, *tianzhi xia*): "all the land under the rule of the Son of Heaven". Tianxia thus was not yet in use as a cosmological world concept, and the geographical concept, which was used at the time was still *sifang*, inherited from the Shang.[135]

2.1.1 Collapse of the Zhou central authority and the rise of tianxia

In 771 b.c.e., after over 200 years of rather stable and peaceful rule, the Zhou ruling house nearly collapsed under the pressure of western nomadic invaders.

[132] Schwartz 1985, 40–55. The original character for *tian* resembles a large man, sometimes spreading his hands. Perhaps the concept therefore, at least initially held certain anthropomorphic elements. (Zdian, https://www.zdic.net/zd/zx/jw/%E5%A4%A9)
[133] Shaughnessy 1999.
[134] See Schwartz 1985, 40–55. The Mandate of Heaven is reminiscent of the European concept of 'divine right of kings', with the caveat that the European monarchs could rule almost unconditionally without ever losing their divine right, whereas the mandate of Heaven was tightly connected to the moral conduct of the ruler.
[135] Pines 2002. Lewis & Hsieh 2018. Chang 2011.

It had to relocate to the east, and the period of Eastern Zhou (771–254 b.c.e.), perhaps better known as the 'Spring and Autumn period' (春秋, *chunqiu*) began. During the Spring and Autumn period the Zhou ruling house lost most of its political power and prestige in the eyes of the vassal states. The king still claimed to hold the mandate of Heaven for ruling the realm and the vassal states symbolically obeyed the traditional rituals in their relations to the Zhou court, but in reality, the vassal states began developing into independent political entities.[136]

As the competition between the states intensified, a temporary institution developed to partly replace the authority of the former kings: a hegemonic system, in which one of the states, in succession, emerged as a 'hegemon' (霸, *ba*). The hegemon was the mightiest state within the system, yet not able to or daring to proclaim itself as a Son of Heaven. The hegemon acted as a guardian of the realm against possible barbarian threats, but also as a balancing and stabilizing force within the system. According to Pines, the hegemon prompted obedience of certain important rites, ceremonies and rules of the earlier Zhou era, akin to a form of 'international law'.[137]

This historical period of Zhou degeneration from 771 b.c.e. on is one of the most important periods in Chinese history. It is at this time that the concept of tianxia begins to really enter the political vocabulary as the states, though evolving into culturally distinctive and politically independent units, and though increasingly waging merciless wars against each other, still regarded themselves as being part of the same world, and as existing under the same Heaven.

Under these circumstances the states developed a kind of 'proto-nationalist' identity. An important element of this identity and a cultural border of the tianxia was established with the concept of the 'Xia barbarian distinction' (夏夷之辨, *xia yi zhi bian*). The Xia – meaning here the same as the *Huaxia* mentioned above – consisted of 'middle countries' (中国, *Zhongguo*) or the 'vassal states' (诸夏, *zhuxia*), which were culturally distinct from the 'four barbarians'. Tianxia thus pointed to this cultural realm of the civilized peoples, which, although beginning to come apart politically, shared common norms, values and beliefs.[138] Pines compares the concept of tianxia during the Spring and Autumn era to the concept of 'oikumene' (οἰκουμἐνη) of the ancient Greek world, which similarly referred to the politically diverse yet culturally unified area of Greek culture.[139]

A central, yet controversial source on the history of the Spring and Autumn period is the Zuozhuan commentary, which chronicles and analyzes

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[136]   Pines 2002.
[137]   Pines 2012, 13–15. According to traditional records, the 'five hegemons' were the states of Qi, Song, Jin, Chu and Qin. The existence of the hegemon system has also been questioned in for example Zhao D. 2006, which claims that the historical records of the era are mostly based on the chronicles written in the state of Lu, thus over-emphasizing the perspective of a rather minor, eastern state.
[138]   Pines 2012, 32–33.
[139]   Pines 2002.

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the events of the era. In Zuozhuan, tianxia is mentioned 22 times, usually as a vague cultural zone or the realm of the vassal states. Sometimes the concept is also used in such contexts as 'the people of the realm' (天下之民, *tianxia zhi min*), which likely means an (assumed) shared opinion or consciousness of the elites of the vassal states.[140]

Though a cultural identity of belonging into the large family of civilized peoples under Heaven endured, the states themselves developed into *de facto* sovereign entities as their militarization and bureaucratization increased. As the bigger states kept swallowing the smaller ones, a period, which is known as the Warring States (c. 473–221 b.c.e. 战国, *zhanguo*) begun. During the Warring States era, the last remnants of the traditional feudalistic system and its rules collapsed into chaotic wars of massive scale, which caused millions of deaths and included slaughters of civilians and destruction of infrastructure. Nothing was left of the authority of the 'Son of Heaven' as most leaders of the states themselves started to use the title of king, previously reserved only for the rulers of Zhou. Importantly, the aforementioned ritualized, gentlemanly relations and the 'international law' of the era withered away, giving way to applications of brute force and cunning military strategies.[141]

During the Warring States era, the concept of tianxia started to include political connotations. Instead of a vague cultural community, tianxia began to be seen as a territorially limited political realm, which was currently in a state of division, but which needed to be unified again. This change can be quite prominently seen in the writings of the various new philosophical schools, which were emerging during the era.[142] Despite their differences, the schools were all mutually concerned of the intensifying political and social conflicts around them, and were motivated by the same foundational question: how to unify and pacify all under Heaven again. In the writings of these philosophers – including such works of philosophy as *Mozi* (墨子), *Xunzi* (荀子), *Mengzi* (孟子) and *Hanfeizi* (韩非子) – the concept of tianxia, especially as a political unit, became an often used commonplace. It was seen as a territorial political unit, which had its outer borders and which could, for example, be 'possessed' (有天下, *you tianxia*), or 'ruled' (治天下, *zhi tianxia*) or ruled in a wise and kingly manner (王天下, *wang tianxia*).[143]

As the concept of tianxia gained political connotations, the state (国, *guo*) came to be seen as a sub-unit of the tianxia. Tianxia, on the other hand, started to mean something like a large universal state, which should be established

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[140]   See Zuozhuan: Lord Wen 18th year.
[141]   Pines 2012, 13–15. On the evolution of strategic thinking, see Nojonen 2008 & Sawyer 2007. An anecdotal case is a legendary battle between the states of Song and Chu in 637 b.c.e., in which the Song obeyed gentlemanly traditions of warfare whereas the semi-barbarian Chu did not respect them at all. For example the Song commander, lord Xiang, allowed the Chu army to cross a river and reorganize its forces in peace, and after Chu was ready to attack, the army of Song was severely defeated. Sawyer 2007, 376–377.
[142]   The era is also known as an era of the 'hundred schools of thought' (诸子百家, *zhuzi baijia*)
[143]   Lewis & Hsieh 2017.

following the model provided by the most advanced bureaucratic states of the era. As the wars between the states continued, independent states were seen as a hindrance to universal tianxia. According to Pines, the idea of an independent state was often delegitimized in the philosophical discussions as it was seen as the main source of turmoil and bloodshed.[144] What was included into the tianxia could differ, however, and according to Pines, for example, some writers called for the unification of tianxia in order to defend against the menace of the state of Qin in the West.[145]

The political realm of tianxia was not the only meaning of the concept, however, as the Warring States era neared its end, tianxia also started to gain certain universalist connotations, which reached beyond its territorial political dimensions. Pines, Lewis and Hsieh claim that as the 'barbarian' peoples and states of the rimland (such as the southern Wu 吴 and Yue 越 states) were brought into deeper contact with the *Huaxia* culture, the concept of tianxia began to include the idea that all the peoples under Heaven, were or should be the subjects of the Son of Heaven, and that the tianxia was not limited to a certain territorial area. A universalist tianxia is most apparent in the pacifist work known as Mozi, which calls for 'universal love' (兼爱, *jianai*) towards all the peoples of the world.[146] The idea can also be found in an often quoted part of the *Gongyang zhuan* (公羊传), which, similar to Zuozhuan, although in a more propagational manner, chronicles and comments on events of the Eastern Zhou era:

> 《春秋》内其国而外诸夏，内诸夏而外夷狄。王者欲一乎天下，曷为以外内之辞言之？言自近者始也。

> the Spring and Autumn Annals considers its own state [Lu 鲁] as internal and all the Xia as external, considers all the Xia as internal and the Yi and Di [夷狄] as external. But the Son of Heaven wants to unite tianxia, so how can he speak of things in terms of internal and external? This simply means that he begins with what is close.[147]

In the Gongyang zhuan, tianxia is seen as embracing the world as a whole. It does not have any outer borders, and even if the distinction between the barbarians and the civilized center exists, the distinction is cultural, and the barbarians can be transformed to become members of the civilized center through moral cultivation.[148]

Meanwhile, other, perhaps more detailed geographical and cosmological concepts existed and developed alongside tianxia. One of the most important and often used concept was 'four seas' (四海, *sihai*) or 'within the four seas' (四海之内, *sihai zhi nei*) according to which the world was imagined to be a square

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[144] Pines 2012, 16–20.
[145] Pines 2002.
[146] Pines 2002. Lewis & Hsieh 2017.
[147] Chun qiu Gongyang zhuan, Lord Cheng year 15. ch. 18. 7b–8a.
https://ctext.org/gongyang-zhuan/cheng-gong-shi-wu-nian/zhs?searchu=%E5%86%85&searchmode=showall#result . Translation by Lewis & Hsieh 2017.
[148] Pines 2002.

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in form and surrounded by seas from all the four cardinal directions. The world within the four seas was also sometimes defined as 'nine regions' (九州, *jiuzhou*), which the legendary sage emperor Yu had designed. [149] In an ideal an institutional sense, the world was thought to consist of 'five services' (五服, *fuwu*), which defined the relations between the civilized peoples and the Son of Heaven in the center and the barbarians surrounding them. According to five services, the world was institutionally made up of five layers, in which the relations and the care of the Son of Heaven withered the further one went from the center of the domain.[150]

2.1.2 Imperial tianxia

Some scholars, such as Victoria Tin-Bor Hui, have noted that during the Warring States period the Chinese political order held many similarities with the early modern Europe order. Both were balance of power systems based on independent states. [151] An enduring states-system did not emerge in China, however, but instead the western state of Qin was able to unify all the states under its leadership. With the Qin unification, all under Heaven was unified also institutionally: during the short rule of the Qin dynasty (221–206 b.c.e), the former states were transformed into provinces of the empire, writing systems were unified and the ideological and philosophical diversity was extinguished with a legendary persecution known as the 'burning of books and burying of intellectuals' (焚书坑儒, *fenshu kengru*).[152] The ministers of Qin congratulated the king's achievements as an unprecedented event in the history of the civilization:

> 今陛下兴义兵，诛残贼，平定天下，海内为郡县，法令由一统，自上古以来未尝有，五帝所不及

> Now Your Majesty has raised an army of justice to punish tyrants, subjugating the whole empire so that all lands within the seas have become our provinces and counties and all the law-codes have been unified. This is something never before achieved, which not even the Five Emperors could match.[153]

Following these changes, the king of Qin designed a new title to distance himself from the former states-system: Qin Shihuangdi, first emperor of Qin. He also ceased to refer to his realm as the state of Qin, but declared exactly to ruling 'all under Heaven', with such bold claims that: "wherever human traces reach, there is none who did not declare himself [the Emperor's] subject."[154]

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[149] Cheng & Chen 2017. In a classic of political philosophy, *Huainanzi* (淮南子, ca. 139 b.c.e.) jiuzhou is described as a larger cosmos that consisted of nine island like continents. The Chinese continent was in the middle, but it was itself divided into nine provinces. See Hsing 1981.
[150] Li 2013, 35–36. Chun 2009, 23.
[151] Hui 2005.
[152] Pines 2012, 20–25. See also Lewis 2007.
[153] Sima Qian, Shiji, The First Emperor of Qin, chapter 14, p. 19. Translated by Yang Xiangyi and Gladys Yang. The translation uses the word 'empire' for the original Chinese term in the text, which is tianxia.
[154] Quoted in Pines 2012, 34.

The Qin dynasty lasted only two decades, but the idea of the empire as being the same thing as tianxia was inherited by the Han dynasty (206 b.c.e.–220). During the first decades of the Han, the universality of the emperor's claims of being the Son of Heaven were seriously challenged, first by the feudal kings enfeoffed by the emperor, but more importantly by the nomadic Xiongnu-empire in the north. Although the Han certainly regarded the Xiongnu as barbarians, the dynasty was unable to force them into submission and the relations between the two *de facto* empires were mutually defined as the relations between 'two masters' (两主, *liang zhu*). The 'two masters' arranged their relations on an more or less equal basis by exchanging gifts and brides, and a delicate balance of power existed between them.[155]

During the reign of the emperor Wu (157–87 b.c.e.), the Han initiated expansionist foreign policies and launched a full military invasion against the Xiongnu. But even after the menace of the Xiongnu was extinguished, the perennial problem of how to organize the relations between the 'civilized' stationary peoples of China proper, and the 'barbarians' of the steppe regions remained. As a solution, the tributary system was developed, in which the emperor granted titles, gave lavish gifts and offered a *de facto* autonomy to regional lords who in return demonstrated (at least symbolic) submission in front of the emperor. The system brought stability and political legitimacy for both parties, and from the point of view of the dynasty, it was more effective and cheaper than a military occupation.[156]

With the rise of the tributary system, clear borders of the empire, if they had ever existed in the first place, slowly vanished away. The Han empire expanded all the way to the modern-day Xinjiang in the west and to the Korean peninsula in the east, and various different cultures and ethnicities became its vassals or at least offered it tributary gifts. According to Lewis and Hsieh, the Han during its peak established the prototype of the multinational 'all under Heaven' system, which served as guiding framework for the future dynasties.[157]

The Han dynasty also saw the introduction of Confucianism into the official ideological mix of the empire. With Confucian ideas such as 'filial piety' (孝, *xiao*), the empire and the tianxia it represented were seen through a metaphor of the family, thus a new word 'family state' (国家, *guojia*) entered into the political lexicon. According to Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng the 'family state', like a large family, was to follow similar ethical principles as the individuals, and therefore, all the various tributaries and vassals around the imperial center were seen the children of the emperor, who was in his place, a father figure of the whole world. Both parties would need to adapt themselves into their roles and responsibilities within the Confucian hierarchy.[158]

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[155] Lewis & Hsieh 2017. On Xiongnu and other nomadic empires see Barfield 2009. Thomas Barfield calls these empires China's "shadow empires".
[156] Pines 2012, 32–37. Sverdrup-Thygeson 2012.
[157] Lewis & Hsieh 2017.
[158] Jin & Liu 2010, 229-230.

A similar idea was also expressed in a Han-era Confucian classic the *Great Learning* (大学, *Da xue*), which was later, during the Song dynasty (960–1279) canonized as one of the four classics of Confucianism. According to the Great Learning, all under Heaven would prosper only if moral cultivation was practiced at all levels of the world: by the individuals within the families, within the state and finally, at the level of the world. The ancient sage kings, according to an often quoted passage of the Great Learning, were able to pacify all under Heaven precisely through their moral cultivation:

心正而後身修，身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平。自天子以至於庶人，壹是皆以修身為本

Their hearts being rectified, their persons were cultivated. Their persons being cultivated, their families were regulated. Their families being regulated, their states were rightly governed. Their states being rightly governed, the whole kingdom was made tranquil and happy. From the Son of Heaven down to the mass of the people, all must consider the cultivation of the person the root of everything besides.[159]

This cosmology, supported by the institutional structure of the tributary system, became an inalienable element of the following dynasties after the collapse of Han in 220. It was upheld even during times of the empire's weakness and when its claims of universal kingdom found no factual basis.

The tianxia cosmology endured the years of division after the collapse of Han (sometimes called 'China's middle ages'). Its next major incarnation came into existence during the Tang dynasty (618–907), which is seen as one of imperial China's greatest dynasties, and also known for its open and cosmopolitan essence. This was perhaps due to the fact that the Tang ruling elites had, for centuries, developed intimate cultural relations with the non-Chinese populations of the Western regions. After the early Tang emperors expanded their power over the Turkic peoples of the west, the emperor was holding two titles, the Son of Heaven and the Heavenly Qaghan, and thus gained recognition as a universal king within both the Chinese and Turkic cultural spheres. During its largest extent, distant kingdoms in Korea and even in Japan sent their tributary missions to the Tang capital in Chang'an.[160]

According to Lewis, the open nature of the Tang dynasty was also prominent in its conception of the tianxia, which was seen as a more universal and open concept, instead of being biologically connected to the ruling house as during the previous dynasties. In other words, the Tang emperors gained their legitimacy to rule all under Heaven, not from belonging to a prestigious family, but directly from Heaven itself:

Tang imperial ritual shifted the emphasis from the notion that "all under Heaven is [the affair of] a family" to the idea that "all under Heaven is public." Instead of being

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[159]   Da xue, 2. https://ctext.org/liji/da-xue, translation by James Legge. The translation uses the word 'whole kingdom' for the original Chinese term in the text, which is tianxia.

[160]   For a general description of Tang dynasty foreign relations, see Lewis 2009, 145–178. Also Wang Z. 2013.

the realm of the ruling house, the empire was viewed as a public good that transcended and negated the parochialism of family ties.[161]

During the early Tang, the tianxia became broad and vast in a geographical sense, but according to Li Fang, the concept held both narrow and broad meanings at the same time. The broad tianxia meant the whole world known to Tang, including all the distant states that the court had even faint knowledge about. This included both the vassal states as well as the *de facto* independent states existing far away from the empire's heartlands. The narrow tianxia meant the region, which was *de facto* under the rule of the court, and both these conceptions were in use, somewhat haphazardly, at the same time.[162]

Such flexibility and ambiguity of the concept was an endemic feature during the imperial era.[163] The border between the *inner* (内, *nei*) and *outer* (外, *wai*), and the civilized and the barbarian remained fuzzy and in a constant state of flux. Often the *inner* simply reflected parts of the empire, which were governed by the imperial magistrates (narrow tianxia) and the *outer* pointed to vassals and tributaries (broad tianxia), but this pattern constantly evolved due to political circumstances.[164] Such ambiguity is well expressed in Chinese maps, which, as put by Richard Smith "tended to reflect idealized political hopes and not simply geographical or administrative 'reality'".[165]

After the fall of Tang in 907 China again collapsed into an era of disunion. The following Song dynasty (960–1279) was militarily weak and the international political order around it more resembled a 'Westphalian' system of sovereign states than a hierarchic tributary system circulating around the Middle Kingdom. The Song, for example, signed *de facto* equal treaties with its northern neighbor, the Liao dynasty, and even openly submitted as a vassal of the 'Jurchen Jin' dynasty, which had replaced the Liao in 1125. [166] This humiliating reality was not reflected in the official records of the dynasty, as the Confucian bureaucrats in their chronicles still described the world according to the tianxia cosmology, writing Song in the center of the world.[167] After the Song was wiped out by the Mongolian Yuan dynasty in 1271, the Mongolians rulers, besides embracing the traditional Confucian ideology and its bureaucratic system, also accepted the tianxia cosmology and, on their turn, claimed to represent the will of Heaven just as the previous emperors had done during their rule.

The mandate of Heaven was theoretically obtainable by any righteous ruler. This idea was famously expressed by Gu Yanwu (顾炎武, 1613–1682) a few hundred years later. Gu, writing during the troubled times of the declining

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161 Lewis 2009, 226.
162 Li 2007.
163 Wang G. 2013, 1–27.
164 Pines 2012, 35–36.
165 Smith 1996, 6.
166 Sverdrup-Thygeson 2012. Nicolas Tackett has proposed that under these 'Westphalian' conditions, Song dynasty was developing towards a proto-nationalist Chinese state, but the development was cut short as the Mongol Yuan dynasty extinguished the Song in 1271. See Tackett 2017.
167 See Wang 1983.

Ming dynasty (1368–1644), argued that if a 'state' perished, this was not catastrophical, since another state would come and replace it. By state, Gu was meaning the ruling dynasty or the imperial court, and these, as was well known, did change throughout the history. The collapse of tianxia however, for Gu, meant that the whole ethical order based on Confucian principles would come to an end, which would mean a complete chaos:

> 有亡国，有亡天下。亡国与亡天下奚辨？曰：易姓改号，谓之亡国；仁义充塞，而至于率兽食人。人将相食，谓之亡天下
>
> There is a difference between the subjugation of a state and that of tianxia. Then how to tell the difference? When a dynasty is replaced by another, it is a change of family name and we say it is the subjugation of a state; and when the benevolence and righteousness are overridden so much so that even animals are directed to eat people and that even human beings become cannibals, we call it the subjugation of tian-xia.[168]

The era of the Ming- and early Qing- (1644–1911) dynasties is often seen in the research literature as the golden era of the tributary system, during which the system reached its largest and most developed extent. The Ming and Qing dynasties served as central institutions, which supported the economic and political stability of the whole East-Asian order, and through which states and other actors were bound to interact. But the system was important for the dynasties also for ideological reasons, because, according to Andornino, "it enhanced the ideological legitimacy of the Emperor's rule over 'All Under Heaven'".[169]

During this heyday of the tributary order, the tianxia came in contact with the 'Westphalian order', which was taking shape in the Europe, as first European traders, missionaries and diplomats arrived in China during the 16th century. According to Zhang Yongjin, the first three hundred years of contacts between these two orders were quite peaceful because the Europeans, usually, accepted the Chinese rules of the game. When dealing with the dynasties, European diplomats paid tribute as expected and took part in other Confucian rituals; "like other non-Chinese participants in *Pax Sinica*, they accepted norms, rules and institutions of the Chinese world order." Moreover, the Europeans did not (yet) attempt to push their own 'Westphalian' conception of international politics on the Chinese and by that, Zhang argues, they actually reinforced the tianxia conception within the eyes of the Chinese: even the distant barbarians, traveling thousands of *li* beyond the seas seemed to recognize the Emperor as the true Son of Heaven.[170]

Contacts with the Europeans did, however, bring some novel insights for the empire. Matteo Ricci (1522–1610), one of the Jesuit missionaries, presented a 'world map of myriad countries' (坤舆万国全图, *kunyu wanguo quantu*) to the

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[168] Jin & Liu 2010, 230. Translation in Liu 2006, 345–345.
[169] Andornino 2006. The essays in Fairbank 1968 are also still relevant introduction into the tributary system.
[170] Zhang 2014, 73. On first contacts between Europeans and China, also see Wills 1984 and essays in Wills 2011.

Wanli emperor.[171] At this time the concept of 'ten thousand countries' (万国, *wanguo*) came into use to explain the new knowledge about distant countries and continents. The map was not fundamentally in contradiction with the official tianxia conception however, since it only explained geographical details of the world and China's central place within it. Ricci politely drew his map with the Ming in its center.[172]

2.1.3 From tianxia into the world

As the Western powers expanded throughout the world, the two international orders – Westphalian states-system and hierarchic tianxia – were drawn closer to each other. The era of three hundred years of peaceful interactions between the orders, described by Zhang, was coming to a close. The Western powers were tempted by the massive, latent possibilities of the closed Chinese market, and repeated attempts were made to diplomatically open it for trade. In 1793 the emperor Qianlong of Qing was still able to respond magnanimously in a letter to George III of England that:

> Our dynasty's majestic virtue has penetrated unto every country under Heaven, and Kings of all nations have offered their costly tribute by land and sea. As your Ambassador can see for himself, we possess all things. I set no value on objects strange or ingenious, and have no use for your country's manufactures.[173]

The world was nevertheless changing and the intrusion of the Western powers in China during the early 19th century launched the process in which the China-centered East Asian order was dismantled and the concept of tianxia was eventually replaced with the concepts of the 'world' (世界, *shijie*) and the 'nation state' (民族国家, *minzu guojia*). The process started with the Opium war of 1839–1842, in which the British empire humiliated the Qing dynasty and forced it to open some of its coastal cities to trade. Other great powers (France, the United States) followed the lead, and soon China ended up signing 'unequal treaties' with most Western great powers, and later even with its former tributary, Japan.[174]

While attempting to readjust itself to the new political reality and the enormous challenges imbued in it, the concept of 'ten thousand countries' re-emerged alongside the concept of tianxia. The concept was used to explain the new circumstances so that even though the world was much larger and more diverse than expected, and even though some of its actors were frighteningly

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[171]   See Korhonen 2002.
[172]   Jin & Liu 2010, 233-238. The concept of 'ten thousand countries' actually predates the Ming era and originates from the early Zhou dynasty, when it meant roughly all the states within the Son of Heaven's domain. After the Qin -unification, the concept almost disappeared, but it resurfaced ruing the Yuan dynasty and was in use especially during the Ming – when the Western missionaries arrived in China.
[173]   Qianlong Emperor's Letter to George III, 1793. Available at https://china.usc.edu/emperor-qianlong-letter-george-iii-1793. On Macarthur's visit in China, see Hevia 1995.
[174]   Spence 1999, 160–166.

powerful, China was still at its center. The world around China was thus still interpreted according to traditional tianxia conception, and for example, the first Chinese translation of the *Elements of International Law* still describes China as the leading virtuous country, and even claims that the 'international law' explained in the book, was in fact originally based on Confucian morals.[175]

The pressure from the foreign great powers was growing throughout the century and the tianxia conception was forced to be dismantled in small pieces. With the Treaty of Tianjin, signed after the end of the Second Opium War in 1858, Western powers were allowed to set up embassies in Beijing and China was forced to establish a ministry of foreign affairs (总理衙门, *Zongli yamen*) in place of its traditional tributary system office, 'the ministry of rites' (礼部, *libu*).[176] Furthermore in 1860, the Qing emperor Xianfeng was compelled to concede that England is an independent and sovereign state, which should have an equal status with China. It was the first time such an announcement was made officially and publicly.[177]

Ideational changes followed Western gunboats: Western political concepts invaded China with contemporary classics of world politics such as Karl von Martens' *Guide Diplomatique*, Johann Kaspar Bluntschli's *Völkerrecht*, Henry Fawcett's *Political Economy*, Alexander Fraser Tytler's *Universal History* being translated into Chinese. Such books offered a whole new master narrative on what world politics was all about, how it should be conducted and implicitly, what was China's place within the it.[178] Following these "greatest changes in 3000 years", as an influential Qing dynasty scholar-official Li Hongzhang put it, the intellectuals of the late 19th and the early 20th century were compelled to recontextualize the whole outlook of their country.[179] Some would advise a total reform of the dynasty or even the establishment of a nation state akin to the Western examples, since the power of the West was believed to lie within its highly developed institutions. Other, traditionally minded officials stubbornly opposed all such endeavors and wanted to make the tianxia cosmology fit into the new circumstances, as had been done many times before.

The tide could not be changed. China was facing massive challenges in transforming its traditional cosmology and its conceptual frameworks. First, to transform tianxia into a state, or in other words, the establishment of a Chinese state in place of the empire. Second, to transform the concept of tianxia into the world, in which China, as one of the most influential thinkers of the late Qing era Kang Youwei put it was: "but one corner of Asia and one-eightieth of the world."[180]

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[175]   Jin & Liu 2010, 233-238.
[176]   Zhao 2015. Spence 1999, 197–202.
[177]   The Qing court had *de facto* accepted equal relations and on mutual sovereignty with the Russian empire in the treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689, but the actual treaty document was not translated into Chinese. See Spence 1999, 66–69.
[178]   Ch'en 1979, 62.
[179]   Jin & Liu 2010, 233. "此三千于余年一大变局也"
[180]   Wang 2017, 93.

Liang Qichao (1873–1929) was one of the most important thinkers to influence and define this conceptual transition. According to Liang, the traditional Chinese empire had not been conscious of any other great cultures or powers, and therefore legitimately believed that it was equal to the whole world, tianxia. For the same reason, the empire did not have a name for itself since "a state is given a name in order to differentiate it from other states […] If there were only one state in the world, it would not have a state name."[181] The traditional Chinese, according to Liang, did not understand what a state is. On the local level, they had strong ties and loyalties, for example, towards their own clan, and on the larger level, they had "developed world thinking", but in the level between, they did not have loyalties towards a state, nor understood why such an institution was required in the first place.[182]

The power of the West, in the imagination of reform minded thinkers such as Liang, was based on their highly developed state. For being able to survive in the new hostile environment – especially after China was yet again humiliated by a former tributary, Japan, in the war of 1894–1895 – China had to develop a modernized state. In this project, a pattern of new concepts such as people (群 qun or 民 min) and nation (民族, minzu), which had had no place in the all-embracing tianxia cosmology, needed to be translated and applied into the Chinese condition.[183] 'Four seas' had to become 'world', and the barbarian had to become 'nation'. Even the word 'China' (中华, Zhonghua) had to be invented as well. Along these concepts, the concept of 'race' (族, zu) was also introduced and on its definition the Chinese intellectuals imported the conception of 'five major races' of which, the Chinese and the neighboring peoples, such as Manchus and Mongolians were all seen to represent the yellow race.[184]

The Chinese state, being formed, was to leave its delusion of a tianxia and join the world. The 'world' was initially seen as being something outside of China, almost like a foreign country, which was centered around the Western great powers. It was a place, which China had to enter and in which it had to find its own place.[185] Kang Youwei attempted to combine these two conceptions with his major work *The Book of Great Harmony* (大同书, Datong shu). Basing his interpretation on the so called new-text Confucianism, Kang argued that the world was slowly making progress towards the ultimate state of 'great harmony' (大同, datong). For now, the world remained in the state of 'small harmony' (小康, xiaokang), during which nationalism, races and competition between states would endure, but it was steadily evolving towards the global cosmopolitan utopia, and the Western great power, according to Kang, represented its most advanced forces. In his vision, the concept of tianxia

181 Quoted in Luo 2008, 94.
182 Luo 2008.
183 See Cheek 2015, 29–65.
184 Zarrow 2012, 150–160. Cheek 2015, 29–60. Although Western theories of racism were introduced into China during this period, racism and 'Han-chauvinism' was not a completely new phenomenon.
185 Luo 2008. Luo mentions, for example, how in one of the first Chinese atlases of the world *Atlas of the World* (海国图志, Hai guo tuzhi) by Wei Yuan, China was left outside.

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needed not to be totally abandoned, since it would be fully realized in the distant future.[186]

With the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 the Chinese nation building process was finally allowed to go on without the obstinate resistance of the Confucian officials. Discussion on what China was and what it should be in the future, ranged from the visions of the extreme liberal Westernizers and socialist Marxists-anarchists to conservative new-Confucians. Nationalism emerged as an important political and intellectual force especially after the May Fourth Movement of 1919, but nationalism was also seen at the same time in a negative light, as the major source of international troubles. The May Fourth thinkers, while hoping for a strong Chinese state and nation to rise, were also visioning a new, cosmopolitan style of world politics reminiscent of tianxia, in which the competition between states would evolve into deeper cooperation.[187]

In 1949, the newly established People's Republic of China became notoriously strong defender of its own sovereignty and in its foreign policy it also claimed to respect the sovereignty of other states. (See section 5.1.) On the surface, this would seem like a total abandonment of the tianxia conception, but at the same time, China was highly supporting the advancement of 'socialist internationalism'. According to Lisa Rofel, the aim of establishing a borderless communist world, which shared a single universal ideology – originally the orthodox Soviet communism and later Maoism – resonates very well with the worldview of tianxia.[188] Furthermore, Mao Zedong himself was impressed by the writings of Kang Youwei. Kang's visions of the world organized in a community 'great harmony' greatly influenced Mao's own political philosophy and the Book of Great Harmony was even briefly studied by the Communist party leadership alongside the classics of Marxism during the 1950's.[189]

Dreams of Maoist world communism were buried with Mao Zedong in 1976. After the policies of reform and opening initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, discussions for locating China's position, role and identity among the ten thousand countries were initiated once again. As a part of these discussions, the concept of tianxia was rediscovered during the 1990's, but not in a context of China's weakness – to the contrary, during its rapid emergence as a global great power. Discussions of the contemporary tianxiaists are continuing from where Liang Shuming, Kang Youwei and others left, but since the transformation of China into a state is now complete, the question set is the opposite: how to transform the system of states into a tianxia again and this time, once and for all.

[186]   Wang 2017.
[187]   See Haapanen 2013 & 2019.
[188]   See Rofel 2017.
[189]   See Callahan 2015, 994–995.

2.2   Studies of the Chinese world order

From the historiography above, it can be concluded that during the thousands of years of Chinese history, a rather coherent tianxia cosmology existed even though the institutional framework around it tended to be in a state of flux due to changes in regional power relations. Through falling and rising dynasties and even through periods of foreign domination, the tianxia conception endured. It was like an ideational glue, which brought continuity for the political order through recurring periods of chaos and unification. It also formed the ideational basis for the East Asian international order whose institutional arrangements were, at least during the periods when the empire was strong, forced upon the surrounding states and other political entities.

Throughout the thousands of years since the its emergence during the early Zhou dynasty, the concept of tianxia has taken many different forms. Initially, the concept was pointing to the cultural sphere of the Chinese vassal states, similar to the Greek 'inhabited world' of the oikumene. During the Warring States and the subsequent imperial eras, the concept gained its political connotations and started to be equated to the Chinese political realm. Both, cultural and political connotations, however, existed at the same time and often diffused into each other: sometimes tianxia was meaning a limited geographical unit, which was directly governed by the emperor, while at other times it represented a larger cultural realm, in which 'the middle kingdom' formed only one, although a central part. The tianxia cosmology, moreover was often (i.e. during early Han-, later Tang- and Song-dynasties) in complete contradiction with the political reality around the ruling dynasties, but it was kept alive by the Confucian officials who, in the end, defined the master narrative of world politics in their official historical records. Benjamin Scwartz summarizes:

> When Chinese power prevailed, the empire was able to force its tribute system and its language of diplomatic discourse on surrounding peoples. When the empire was weak, the Chinese perception of world had little effect on the course of events. The ultimate fact is the fact of power.[190]

When compared to other centrist political cosmologies that have emerged in history, tianxia does not pose as particularly unique. Tuan Yi-Fu, in his classic study of human geography, *Topophilia* (1974), provides fascinating examples of cultures – ranging from the Aivilik Inuit peoples of northeastern Canada to the ancient Egyptian and Persian empires – unified by an ethnocentric worldview, in which one's own culture is seen as existing in the middle of the world, and in which is one's own culture is believed to be superior to all other cultures and peoples. Even the geographical features of most such worldviews are surprisingly similar: the cultural influence of the center fades the further one goes from it, and at the ultimate rim the world is surrounded by a vast ocean. Such geography is evident in the Chinese conception of layers of civilized and

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[190]   Schwartz 1968, 278.

barbarian peoples existing 'within the four seas' as well as in the Medieval European 'T-O -geographies', in which the three continents of Europe, Asia and Africa circle around the center of Jerusalem, and in which the whole round earth is surrounded by the vast *oceanus*. For Tuan, "the illusion of superiority and centrality is probably necessary to the sustenance of culture".[191]

The tianxia cosmology itself, therefore, does not include many – if any – completely unique features. What is notorious, however, is that the cosmology and the sophisticated philosophical system supporting it endured in China for thousands of year – much longer than any other similar cosmology. For Tuan, such an illusion of centrality and superiority was easy to sustain, because China was isolated from other civilizations by overwhelming geographical barriers:

> population declined sharply beyond the central pains. To the north is the steppe, to the west are deserts and the earth's highest mountain system; to the south lies the tropical forest, and to the east the sea.[192]

The tianxia cosmology collapsed – hesitantly – during the 19th century as the Western great power forced its downfall. This cosmology and the institutional 'Chinese world order' surrounding it, has returned to the attention of scholars, understandably motivated by the rise of China returning to the center of international politics. Many scholars see the tianxia as an interesting alternative system of international politics, which is complicated to analyze from the perspective of the sovereign-states -framework, and whose analysis could even help to understand and anticipate also the foreign policy orientations of modern China.[193]

The first generation of scholars to focus on the issue included Joseph Levenson and John King Fairbank. Levenson, a historian of ideas, was among the first non-Chinese scholars to bring up the notion (developed a few decades earlier by Liang Qichao and others) that traditional China was a tianxia instead of a state in his 1968 major work *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*.[194] A contemporary of Levenson, John King Fairbank (1907–1991), a sinologist-historian, was one of the earliest pioneers on the research of the actual tributary system. Fairbank's research interests concerned foreign relations of the Ming- and Qing-dynasties, and a volume, edited by him and published in 1968, *Chinese World Order* is a modern classic of the study of the tributary system. Its essays are still often quoted within contemporary discussions.

During the late 1990's and early 2000's, following 'China's rise' and concomitantly with the 'traditional learning fever' in mainland China, the concept of tianxia as well as the institutional order around it (the tributary

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191   Tuan 1991, 31. According to Tuan, Greenland Eskimos believed that, in addition to be living in the geographical center of the world, their island was also the cultural and population center. When European foreigners visited Greenland, the Eskimos thought that "Europeans were being sent to Greenland to learn virtue and good manners from them". See Tuan 1991, 34. the 30–45.

192   Tuan 1991, 37–38. Also see Schwartz 1968 and Pines 2012, 33.

193   Evans 2010.

194   Levenson 1968.

system) have emerged as a focus of intense study by both Chinese and international scholars in various different disciplines including history, international relations and ethnology. Although all scholars do not use the concept of tianxia in their discussions, the studies are united by their interest in questions such as: how were the foreign relations of the Chinese empire organized? What was the institutional structure of the 'Chinese world order' and how did it evolve? How have the conceptual components of the tianxia cosmology evolved during the history of China, and how does the ancient tianxia order help to understand the conduct of modern China? This kind of research can be broadly divided in three different categories:

First, the research, which is operating within the framework of the established (Western) discipline of international relations, using its theoretical concepts and ideas. This research attempts to either make the tianxia-order *fit* into the theoretical assumptions of the established theories, or explores the possibilities of its study for new theoretical innovations. **Second**, historically oriented inter-disciplinary research, which is studying the history of the 'Chinese world order' as well as the history of ideas behind it, including of course, the concept of tianxia itself. **Third**, the normative tianxiaist theory, which is being developed mostly in mainland China, and which is interested in reviving the old tianxia concept for the use of Chinese foreign policy and for the reform of the international order.

The three categories are offered here only for the sake of clarification and the division of scholars or styles of research within them is, by all means, not rigorous. Indeed, many scholars (i.e. Jyrki Kallio, Zhang Feng) could be included within two, some even in all three of the categories. Vague as the categories are, they are still useful for introducing the various different approaches that have been applied for the study of the tianxia order, and by so doing, clarify the position of the tianxia theorists within this endeavor.

2.2.1   Tianxia system in the study of world politics

The first group of scholars, which is studying the tianxia order within the theoretical frameworks of the established, Western discipline of international relations can be further divided into those scholars, who regard the possibilities and prospects of studying the history of the 'Chinese world order' positively, and conversely to critics, who deny the relevance of the concept at the outset. The former group (including such scholars as David Kang, Barry Buzan or Zhang Feng)   claim that the historical developments in China and its surrounding East Asian regions have been neglected by the scholars of international relations, and that the study of this region would be beneficial for the development of theories of international relations. Erik Ringmar, for example, has argued that the fixation on the Westphalian system,

> […] presentism and Eurocentrism have made it difficult to understand the conflicts that arise when international systems come into contact with each other, but also

how the legacy of earlier international systems continues to influence foreign policy decision making in today's world.[195]

The latter group of scholars (for example Wang Yuan-kang, Wang Fei-ling) on the other hand, claim that the existence of a unique tianxia order with its distinctive institutional dynamics is but a mere myth, and that the Chinese empire has followed similar brutal principles of great power politics just like any other state in history.[196]

What unifies both groups of theorists is an interest in politics in East Asia and the international order centered around China before it was extinguished by the Western great powers. The *positive* group of scholars consider the Chinese tributary system as a unique form of international political organization, whose inner dynamics cannot and should not be explained by relying only on on the Westphalian framework and the established theories based on it (for example neorealism). For these scholars concepts, such as 'anarchy' or 'balance of power', are not always well suited in the hierarchic conditions of the tianxia. Approaches of these scholars are diverse. Zhou Fangyin, for example, has studied the stability of the tributary system by applying mathematical equilibrium analysis, and Yuen Foong Khong has even turned the whole perspective upside down and explains the foreign relations of the United States through a creative comparison with the Chinese tributary system.[197]

Representatives of the English school of international relations, Zhang Yongjin and Barry Buzan, have proposed, that the Chinese tributary system can be understood as an international society, which had a completely different institutional structure compared to the European Westphalian society of sovereign states. The authors claim that the tributary system was not a mere Chinese hegemony but that

> it is through long, tumultuous and never-ending historical and social processes of as-sertion, imposition, contention, contestation, rejection, acquiescence and acceptance that ideas, beliefs and metavalues constitutive of the constitutional structure of the tributary system become intersubjective, to varying degrees, between Imperial China and other constituent parties of the tributary system. Fundamental institutions de-fined and shaped by these processes, therefore, do not just reflect the hegemonic in-stitutional preferences, but also represent a collective solution invented by, and con-sented to among, East Asian states to the perennial problem of inter-state conflict, co-existence and cooperation.[198]

Zhang and Buzan therefore see the study of the tributary system as important for developing the English school's conceptual tools, especially its main concept,

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[195]   See for example Ringmar 2012, 1.

[196]   See Wang Y. 2013. Alastair Iain Johnston, although not studying tianxia order per se, could be included within this group. In *Cultural realism*, Johnston claims that even though Ming-dynasty officials often resorted to pacifist and Confucian discourses, the strategic conduct on China's borderland of the was based on rather straightfor-ward realpolitik calculations. See Johnston 1995.

[197]   Zhou 2011. Yuen 2013. For a commentary of Zhou's equilibrium analysis, see Wom-ack 2012.

[198]   Zhang & Buzan 2012, 34.

the 'international society'. The tributary system therefore does not threaten the main precepts of the English school, but instead, reinforces their validity.

Somewhat similarly, David Kang has published various articles and books on the China-centered East Asian order and it significance for the theories of international politics.[199] In his major work *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* Kang argues that during the peak of the Chinese world order (Ming and early Qing dynasties, 1368–1800), the core countries of the East Asian order (China, Vietnam, Korea and Japan) endured peaceful and stable relations with each other, and only few wars of large scale[200] erupted during this 400 year period. Kang argues, that the East Asian international order differed markedly from the Westphalian order within Europe, and that the rise of China could even bring stability to the conflict ridden region.[201]

Zhang Feng has been interested in studying the tributary system in a similar manner as Kang.[202] His work on the field has culminated in his book *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (2015), which develops a theory of international relations based on a profound historical research of the Chinese tributary system. Zhang claims that within the tributary system a certain form of 'expressive rationality' was followed besides the more interest-driven 'instrumental rationality'. By 'expressive rationality' Zhang means that the hierarchic relations between the units in the system were – under some conditions – appreciated also for their intrinsic value, and that explanations of the dynamics within the tributary system cannot be based solely on interest-based calculations used within Western mainstream theories.

For the likes of Zhang, Kang or Buzan, Chinese international order is thus worth studying for developing the conceptual tools of the theories of international relations and for broadening their coverage. Against these positively charged assessments, many scholars debunk the idea of the unique tianxia-system completely. Wang Fei-ling for instance claims that disseminating ideas about a unique, historical Chinese tianxia order is misleading but can be even dangerous. During its long history, Wang claims, China has always been ideologically and culturally most prosperous during the weaknesses of this system, i.e. during the Warring States period or during the militarily weak Song dynasty, when China was in a *de facto* equal relationship with its neighboring countries.[203] Wang Yuan-kang has studied regional political dynamics during Song and Ming dynasties in his *Harmony & War: Confucian Culture & Chinese Power Politics*. By applying the framework of neorealism into this setting, Wang claims that the rhetoric of 'Confucian pacifism' served mainly as a smokescreen for the fact that China among other regional players (i.e. Jin and Liao dynasties

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[199]   See Kang 2019b. Kang 2013.
[200]   The Ming campaign against Vietnam in 1407–1428 and the invasion of Japan into Korea in 1592–1598.
[201]   Kang 2010.
[202]   See Zhang 2010. Zhang 2014.
[203]   Wang F. 2015. Wang F. 2018.

and Xixia state) acted according to the iron laws of power politics as predicted by the realist theory.[204]

2.2.2 Historical study of tianxia

The second group consists of scholars interested in studying the history of the concept of tianxia as well as the institutional structure (the tributary system) behind it. What separates these scholars from tianxia theorists is that they are not necessarily interested in formulating a theory or any normative model based on the concept, but simply focus on the meanings of the concept within its historical contexts. However, their input can be seen as important for theorists of tianxiaism as they provide historical raw material for the theorists to elaborate on.

Historical scholars include for example John Fairbank and Yuri Pines. Some historians, such as Peter Perdue are skeptical of the tributary system. Perdue has been debunking the whole tributary system as a mere myth, yet a useful one for the Chinese government's soft power need.[205] Wang Gungwu, one of the original contributors of Fairbank's 1968 edited volume has also approached the concept of tianxia on many occasions.[206]

Many Chinese historians such as Hsing I-tien, Li Fang, Lei Yi, Luo Zhitian, Ge Zhaoguang and Ge Jianxiong, are not focused on tianxia especially but have touched upon the topic in their research. Hsing has studied ancient development of the concept, Li has explored the connotations of the concept during Tang dynasty and Lei, Luo and Ge Jianxiong and among many others, have studied the transformation of the tianxia cosmology into world cosmology.[207] Chen Yudan has compared the Confucian tianxia conception with the contemporary stoic cosmopolitanism.[208] Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng also provided a whole chapter for the concept in their seminal study on the history of Chinese political concepts.[209] Within the related sciences, Wang Mingming has studied the early development of tianxia cosmology from an ethnological perspective.[210] Finally the tianxia system has been studied intensively by Japanese scholars, whose works have had a large influence on Chinse scholars.[211]

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[204] Wang Y. 2011.
[205] Fairbank 1968. Pines 2002. Perdue 2015.
[206] See for example Wang 2013.
[207] Ge 1994, Ge 2010. Ge 2015. Hsing 1981. Li 2007. Lei 2011 and 2011b. Luo 2008.
[208] Chen 2016.
[209] See Jin & Liu 2010.
[210] Wang 2012.
[211] See Murthy 2017.

2.3 Tianxiaism / Tianxia theory

Tianxia theorists differ from the above mentioned scholars by their strong normative interest. From the historical materials developed by historians as well as from classical writings within the Chinese intellectual canon, tianxia theorists pick up elements they see appropriate and aim to construct a new grand narrative of international politics as well as a normative theory for reforming the Western led international order.

The concept of tianxia is seen by these theorists as a valuable and genuinely 'Chinese' idea, which, if developed under modern conditions, could offer fresh perspectives for the problems of the globalized world. At the same time, the theorists use the concept as a rhetorical device for arguing their viewpoints. As seen above, the concept of tianxia has remained rather ambiguous and has had multiple differing meanings through its evolution. But exactly because of this ambiguity and because of its rich historical and cultural heritage, the concept forms a perfect ground for new definitions and rhetorical undertakings.

Modern tianxia theory is not a completely new invention. It is in many senses a continuation of ideas proposed by late 19th and early 20th century thinkers, such as Liang Qichao, Liang Shuming, Qian Mu or Kang Youwei.[212] These scholars, witnessing the decline and collapse of the Qing dynsty along with its political cosmology, established the dichotomy of the concepts of tianxia and the state, and argued that China had originally been, not a state nor an empire, but a tianxia, which was now transforming itself into a state.

Such ideas vanished from discussion in China during the orthodoxy of 'Mao Zedong thought', but they have returned after cultural policies were loosened in the 1980's and as traditional philosophies were being found again. The idea of a unique Chinese tianxiaist worldview, in its current form was first brought up by the liberal intellectual Li Shenzhi in his 1994 article *Globalisation and Chinese culture* (全球化与中国文化, *Quanqiuhua yu Zhongguo wenhua*). Li's article analyzes the massive transformations of the post-Cold war era, but it also brings forth the notion of the Chinese traditional tianxiaist conception of world politics.[213]

Li never elaborated the concept of tianxia any further but his idea was picked up by Sheng Hong, who developed the idea in his short but influential 1996 article *From nationalism to tianxiaism* (从民族主义到天下主义, *Cong minzuzhuyi dao tianxiazhuyi*). It is in the article of Sheng where the main ideas of tianxiaism are developed: the Western international order is like the 'warring states' of China's ancient past, and, just like its historical predecessor, should be replaced with a new, unified tianxia order. Sheng has since elaborated on his ideas, for example, in a collection of essays (万世界太平, *Wan shijie taiping*) and in various shorter articles published in journals and blogs.

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212   See Luo 2008. See also Zhu 2010.
213   Li 1994.

Zhao Tingyang, a philosopher from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, is seen as the main developer of tianxiaism. His 2005 book *Tianxia system: Introduction for a philosophy of world institution* (天下体系：世界哲学导论, *Tianxia tixi: Shijizhexu daolun*), which was based on two, originally English language articles brought the ideas of tianxiaism in to the mainstream. Zhao has since published many articles (both in English and Chinese) and his second book, published in 2016, *The contemporariness of tianxia* (天下体系的当代性, *Tianxiatixi de dangdaixing*) developed his arguments in a more consistent and polished manner. In 2019 a short collection of Zhao's writings was published in English under the title *Redefining A Philosophy for World Governance*.

Although tianxiaism is often seen as a theory of international relations (especially outside China) the theorists themselves are not only scholars of international relations or even of social sciences. In fact, main proponents of tianxiaism work within quite varying different fields: Zhao Tingyang and Bai Tongdong are philosophers, Sheng Hong is an economist and Xu Jilin is a historian. Tianxiaist scholars therefore do not necessarily quote scholars from the discipline of international relations, or apply their concepts, or in any other sense discuss with them. Yan Xuetong, the most well-known Chinese scholar of Western style of international relations, does not consider tianxiaism to even be represent the discipline of international relations and places the whole ordeal into the realm of political philosophy: "in fact I find it quite strange that Western scholars consider his work as part of the China IR schools".[214]

Zhao, Sheng, Bai and Xu can be identified as the main proponents of tianxiaism, both within China and internationally. They have also written most on the topic. Besides them, however, many other Chinese scholars from varying disciplines have taken interest on tianxiaist ideas and presented their own remarks and comments in shorter articles. From the early 2000's on, a rather vibrant discussion around the concept of tianxia has emerged, and the scholars, through their discussions, are producing a rather coherent narrative of what tianxiaism is and what it is trying to achieve. These discussions are unified by the use and definition of the concept of tianxia and on its role in understanding international politics of today. The theorists and discussants can be very broadly divided into the representatives of *hard tianxiaism* and *soft tianxiaism*.

Hard tianxiaism. From the point of view of the hard tianxiaist theorists, such as Zhao Tingyang or Sheng Hong, the current international order is flawed beyond repair and it needs to be completely reconstructed. Hard tianxiaists see the sovereign nation-states and their constant battles as the fundamental problem of international politics. They thus propose that a strong hierarchic institutional order, analogous to the ancient Chinese empire, needs to be established in order to pacify this chaos. Hard tianxiaist theorists tend to represent traditionalist or neo-Confucianist elements of the Chinese intellectual spectrum.

Soft tianxiaism. Theorists, such as Xu Jilin or Bai Tongdong are critical of the hierarchic and centrally led model of the hard tianxiaists. In its stead, they

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[214]   See Rigby 2013.

propose a more liberal and egalitarian version, which would adopt some cosmopolitan principles and values from China's traditional world order, yet combine them creatively with appropriate Western ideas. Xu Jilin and Bai Tongdong for example have branded their version of tianxiaism as 'new tianxiaism' (新天下主义, *Xin tianxiazhuyi*) to distinguish it from the harder tianxianist variant. Within Xu's new tianxiaism, the idea of a centrally led tianxia is scrapped in place of a less authoritarian model.[215] New tianxiaists attempt to redefine the meaning of tianxia and not surprisingly, tend to represent the more liberal end of the Chinese ideological spectrum.

This division is by no means strict and serves mainly demonstrative purposes. Bai Tongdong, for example, identifies himself as a Confucianist yet represents the liberal, soft tianxiaist camp. Sheng Hong, on the other hand, can be identified as a liberal in many economic and societal questions yet is a proponent of the hard, hierarchic tianxia model. Many, perhaps even most theorists taking part in the discussion do not suggest any visions of a new tianxia order at all (especially evading the idea that China should rise to become the new central institution) but simply contribute in developing the worldview and its supporting concepts and remain at the level of abstraction and philosophical pondering.[216] Also many scholars quoted within the dissertation have contributed into the discussion only through an article or two, and their primary focus is in some other aspect of international politics or political philosophy.[217] Taking all this into consideration, tianxiaism in this dissertation consists more of the wholeness of ideas and concepts offered by the various scholars. It does not necessarily point to an actual, physical group of scholars themselves. Therefore also the term 'tianxianist' in the following pages of the dissertation merely points to a scholar who has contributed into this wholeness of ideas, since very rare scholars – save for perhaps Zhao Tingyang – would actually identify as a tianxiaist.

Who form the main audience of tianxiaism? Most of the discussion has taken place in Chinese monographs and journals in Chinese language, which implies that the concept is at least currently developed mainly for Chinese discussions. New books by Zhao and Bai as well as some articles have been published in English. Some shorter articles have been also published in Western magazines.[218] Through the English publications and through works of scholars who can read Chinese, tianxiaism has received considerable attention also within the international scholarly community.

Reactions to tianxiaism have been mostly critical outside China. William Callahan, for example, has argued that the tianxia model is simply another

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[215]   One of Xu's main arguments for *new tianxiaism* is that the centrally led tianxia model is widely seen as menacing and hegemonic by the international community and should be discarded also for that reason. See Xu & Bai & Liu 2015

[216]   Zhu Qiyong, for example, argues that while the concept of tianxia in itself is valuable, the project for developing an *ism* (主义, *zhuyi*) out of it is problematic. See Zhu 2010.

[217]   Some authors might indeed be merely riding on the popularity of the concept and exploiting the 'national learning fever' that the Chinese government has been amply supporting.

[218]   See Zhao 2019; Bai 2017; Zhao 2018b. Bai 2019b.

hegemonic order, in which "imperial China's hierarchical governance is updated for the twenty-first century".[219] June Dreuel argues that tianxiaism heavily distorts history for the needs of contemporary politics:

> Their efforts to contrast an allegedly ideal ancient past with a wretched recent past to promote a better present and future do so by selectively comparing the theories of one system with the practices of the other, essentially rewriting history in a manner that is at best disingenuous and at worst dangerous.[220]

Tianxiaism has generated a lot of criticism also in China. It is condemned especially vocally by historians such as Ge Zhaoguang and Lei Yi, who claim that the image of a harmonious tianxia 'without outside' is in strong contradiction with the actual, sinocentric empire found from historical sources.[221] Some critics – similar to the conclusions in the – tianxiaism relies too much on a distinction between China and the 'West'[222]. Other scholars criticize the possible, latent hegemonic ambitions found within tianxiaism but are otherwise positive towards the possibilities of the concept. These critics, such as Xu Jianxin or Li Mingming, can be also seen as supporters of soft tianxiaism. They agree that the concept of tianxia holds some innovative value, but it should be studied carefully and instead of proposing that the international order should be overthrown, tianxiaist ideas should be incorporated within it.[223]

To conclude, although the discussion is very diverse and includes scholars from varying disciplines and backgrounds, virtually all the theorists seem to agree on the fundamental principles of the tianxiaist worldview: they all build on the grand narrative of the different, essentialized civilizations, the West and China, and their profoundly different conceptions of world politics. Important differences begin to emerge only on the questions of how the new tianxia should be organized, or whether it should be established at all. The focus of the dissertation now shifts into the actual tianxiaist discussions. Chapter three focuses on the commonly shared tianxiaist worldview, and chapter four examines the possible different tianxia systems of the future.

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[219] Callahan 2008, 749. See also Callahan 2013.
[220] Dreyer 2015, 1031.
[221] Ge 2015. Lei 2001b.
[222] See Zhang 2006.
[223] See Li 2011. Xu 2007.

3 HISTORICAL ROOTS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER: WESTERN ORDER AND TIANXIA

This chapter examines the worldview of tianxiaism, whose central elements and core concepts are shared by all the tianxiaists. The chapter argues that the tianxiaist worldview is based on a civilizational cosmology, in which the world is divided into competing and essentially different Western and Chinese civilizations. The chapter further argues that this central dualism is used for criticizing and delegitimizing the Western led liberal international order as well as for helping to construct a unique great power identity for China. Fragments of this chapter have been published previously in Puranen 2019 and Puranen 2019b.

3.1 Tianxiaism's Occidentalist intellectual roots

Tianxiaism aims to delegitimize the liberal international order by claiming that the order and its core institutions and values (i.e. sovereign states and international organizations, democracy and human rights) are not logically inevitable and neither do they represent the most optimal system for organizing international politics. The liberal international order, in short, is not to be considered as universally valid, since it is only a product of the Western civilization and historical developments within this particular region. This historical core narrative can be found in all tianxiaist arguments and is an essential element of tianxiaist thinking.

Tianxiaism is constructing a grand narrative of two distinctly different civilizations, China and the West, which, during their long histories, developed different political institutions and political ontologies – unique solutions for their surrounding spatiotemporal political realities. Zhao Tingyang has summarized this notion as follows:

由于早期社会的政治经验不同， 西方和中国各自发展出在分析框架， 问题体系和价值观上都有很大差异的政治思想.

Because the political experiences of their early societies were different, both the West and China developed political thoughts, which greatly differed on their values, analytical frameworks and question systems.[224]

Another way to organize and to think about world politics did exist in China – the tianxia – but it was extinguished as the Western great powers expanded their order upon the world. By pointing out these fundamental differences between the two civilizations and their essential elements, an image of a unique Chinese civilization is constructed and at the same time, an image of a sinister West is built as its opposite, as a 'strawman' to be applied in argumentation. The West, in tianxiaist writings, is a broad category in which everything from ancient Greek philosophy, Christianity and Machiavellian great power politics of the modern era can be stacked, and which is never truly explicated within the discussion. It works as an ever present anti-tianxia, against which the unique and harmonious civilization of China is presented.

The dualism between tianxia and the West is central to tianxiaist thinking and it forms the very core of its worldview. It is building the groundwork for tianxiaism's argument against the universality of the prevailing international order, but also against the universality and superiority of Western values and intellectual creations in general, including theories of international politics. Both are presented as having developed under certain regional conditions in Europe and as not applying in traditional China, which had its own tianxia order with its own value and thought systems. The Western 'universality' thereby need not apply in the political world of today either.[225]

This kind of China-West -dualism is, by all means, not unique to tianxiaist ideology, as it is generally applied in most Chinese discussions on international politics. Even the official rhetoric of the Chinese government is similarly based on the contradiction between the 'Chinese way' (中国道路, *Zhongguo daolu*) or 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' and the infamous 'Western values'.[226]

Neither is the dualism new as similar dualistic interpretations of the world have deep roots in Chinese intellectual history. Ever since the Qing dynasty and the Western great powers collided during the 19th century, Chinese intellectuals were forced to reorient China's position within the larger world, and the image of the West had to be similarly updated.[227] Instead of "red haired beasts driven by their animal-like instincts", the West was slowly imagined to represent another civilization, perhaps even of an equal standing with China, and possessing, in the words of a contemporary scholar Wei Yuan (1794–

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[224] Zhao 2010.
[225] Many tianxiaist thinkers, especially at the 'soft-tianxiaist' end of the spectrum are critical of this dualism but nevertheless, cannot definitely avoid it either. 'The West', although more carefully described, remains as an essential 'contrasting concept' in their argumentation. See subsection 4.2.3.
[226] See Shi-Kupfer & Ohlberg & Lang & Lang 2017. See also chapter 5.
[227] One could trace the idea even further back in history, to the ancient concept of 'China-barbarian distinction' (夏夷之辨, *xia yi zhi bian*). See subsection 3.3.2.

1857), "knowledge of astronomy and geography and [being] well versed in things material and events of past and present".[228]

In the process of China's opening to the world, the West as a collective entity became the extreme 'other' and a benchmark into which the Chinese intellectuals reflected China's own achievements. Chinese thinking included both idealizations and enemizations of the West, as the West was seen as either a model to follow, or as a menace to fight against. Of the former, the liberals of early 20th century China, for example, saw the Chinese tradition in an extremely negative light, and the modernization and westernization of China was urged as inevitable for China's very survival. Others, representing more traditionalist viewpoints argued that even though the West was indeed powerful, it was lacking in spiritual quality. China should therefore apply chosen Western technologies and governmental innovations as needed, but it should leave the Chinese cultural and intellectual *substance* intact (中学为体, 西学为用, *Zhongxue wei ti, Xixue wei yong*).229

For many, especially traditionally oriented intellectuals, the West served as a device, from which China could reflect its own uniqueness. For example, one of the most important Confucian philosophers of the 20th century, Liang Shuming (1893–1988) dedicated his magnum opus, the *Substance of Chinese Culture* (中国文化要义, *Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi*) for comparing Chinese and Western civilizations and their cultural origins. In his words:

> Chinese people will never gain a clear understanding if they only remain within the structures of Chinese society; if only they first look to others and then at themselves, then they will immediately understand.230

During the early decades of the People's Republic, the West was temporarily pushed under the all-encompassing rhetoric of a global class struggle. A demonic caricature of an imperialist 'West' did exist, but it was used mainly for domestic purposes, for maintaining the legitimacy and the dominant position of the Communist Party.[231] Cultural interpretations of the West re-emerged in China after the end of the Cold War, when Maoist ideological orthodoxy was relaxed and as the cultural and civilizational models returned to the focus of international politics scholarship on a global scale.[232]

The publication of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of the Civilizations* in 1996 especially animated traditionalist Chinese intellectuals. In his book, Huntington forecast that international politics would not enter an era of dominance of the

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228   Ch'en 1979, 59–91.
229   Wang G. 2013, 103–124.
230   Quoted in Lu & Zhao, 2009. Very similar kind of dualism can be found later in sociologist Fei Xiaotong's classical study of Chinese society *From the soil* (乡土中国, *Xiangtu Zhongguo*). Fei claims that the Western and Chinese societies are organized on completely different ethical foundations: the West as an 'organizational mode of association' (团体格局, *tuanti geju*) and China as 'differential mode of association' (差序格局, *chaxu geju*). Accordingly, Western theories of sociology cannot apply in Chinese conditions. See Fei 1992.
231   Chen 1995.
232   Jun & Smith 2018.

Western liberal values as visioned by Francis Fukuyama a few years earlier, but instead, civilizations would emerge as the main actors of world politics. For Huntington, civilizations are state-like units with their essential features and their unchanging interests.[233] His book can be seen as an enlargement of the traditional realist logic, only expanded from the scale of the states to the scale of civilizations.

In China, Huntington's core argument was interpreted to be that the West was simply one civilization among many others and its ideological values and political institutions, even though currently triumphant, were not to be taken as universal. The ominous clash of the civilizations argument, ironically, offered hope and confidence for the Chinese scholars as they were once again forced to continue on their search for China's position in the global order.

Tianxiaism is building its own civilizational narrative on this legacy of Chinese 'Occidentalism'. Within tianxiaist cosmology the West and China are presented as Huntingtonian, essentialized civilizations, whose cultural and intellectual traditions are almost like opposites facing each other. According to tianxiaism, the Western thought system and its derivative, the liberal international order, are now temporarily ruling supreme, but they could – and should – be replaced by a Chinese variant: a modernized tianxia world order and a harmonious, semi-Confucian value system behind it.

Both civilizational concepts, the West and tianxia, are by their nature rather ambiguous and broad, and thus offer perfect grounds for conceptual contestations and redefinitions. This chapter will focus on these core concepts, analyzing how they are constructed within tianxiaist texts and what kind of adjacent concepts are used for their definitions. The methodology of conceptual history as developed by Michael Freeden (in subsection 1.5.1.) is used for identifying and analyzing the core concepts shared by the tianxiaist thinkers, and for thereby elucidating the beliefs and assumptions forming the worldview of the tianxiaist thought.

The first section (3.2.) will focus on how the tianxiaists construct the international systems of the West and China. The following section (3.3.) will then move on to examine how tianxiaism constructs the ideological characters of both civilizations: how the Western and Chinese civilizations conceptualize politics and what kinds of implications these differences have on how both civilizations act in world politics still today.

Both subsections will first present the tianxiaist worldview and concepts through the tianxiaist thinkers, allowing the theorists to speak for themselves in a way. These descriptions are then summarized with brief concluding remarks and the final section (3.4.) will offer a synthesizing analysis on the cosmology as a whole. It argues that the tianxiaist cosmology is aiming to delegitimize the status of the liberal international order and helps to construct a new great power identity for China.

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[233]   Huntington 1996. See also Katzenstein 2010b.

3.2 International systems: states-system vs. the world

The central argument on which all the tianxiaists agree, is that the Western political system is based on competing, sovereign and independent states, whereas the Chinese tianxia was based on a centrally led and hierarchically structured, unified world. It follows that in the Western political imagination, the highest possible level of political order is *internationalness* (国际性, *guojixing*) – a state of anarchy between the sovereign states. In this state of internationalness, the interests of the whole world cannot be seen or promoted as there is no higher institutional or philosophical framework beyond it. In tianxia, however, the world was always understood, *a priori*, as being a unified whole and there also existed a central world institution – the emperor – taking care of it. Within the political imagination of China, the highest level of political order was thus *worldliness* (世界性, *shijiexing*).

3.2.1 Historical starting points of politics in China and the west

How did such different international orders with their distinctive political cosmologies come into being? The historical origins of both civilizations are defined differently by the tianxiaist thinkers, but the narrative has been developed furthest by Zhao Tingyang. Zhao claims that the first political orders were established in ancient Greece and in Zhou dynasty China. Before them, various dynasties, kingdoms and chiefdoms had of course existed, but they had not been 'political' (政治, *zhengzhi*) orders, but simple 'rule' (统治, *tongzhi*) based systems i.e. they were based on naturally occurring power of the strong over the weak, but they did not apply 'rational use of power' or develop a system for distributing interests among the people.[234]

Ancient Greece and the Zhou dynasty were the first political orders, but because the surrounding conditions of both systems were different, they established accordingly different institutional and intellectual solutions. The Greeks developed a political system based on city states (城邦国, *chengbangguo*) whereas the Zhou dynasty established the tianxia model, in which the whole known world was unified under the Zhou kings.[235]

Most other tianxiaist scholars set the inception of the tianxia system at the unification of China by the Qin dynasty in 221 b.c.e. and are rather ambiguous about the origins of the West. Importantly however, they all agree with Zhao that the West is based on competing states whereas China has, for most of its history, been able to unify the states under a central institution.

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[234]   Zhao 2016, 49–50.
[235]   Zhao 2016, 49–50. See also Zhao 2010.

3.2.2 The West – States-system

Tianxiaists argue that the currently existing liberal international order is an offspring of Western political developments. The Western order consists of individual competing units (states), which do not, or are unable to seek any deeper cooperation. Sheng Hong points out that China was in a similar condition during its 'warring states period': it was divided into small independent and nationalistic kingdoms, which fought and competed against each other fiercely.[236] Bai develops the analogy further, claiming that China's Warring States system actually closely resembled the Western states system, which developed in Europe during the early modern era:

> 西周的中国中世纪的欧洲都是一级级贵族代理、自治的制度。从无论是从对上还是从对下的关系看，诸侯对其国都没有绝对主权。在这种制度的崩溃中，各级贵族都凭借自己的实力，卷入了存在或死亡的混战。最终涌现出来的胜利者领袖着广土众民的大国，而在他们之上，再没有天下共主或者更高的权威，在他们之下也不再有具有自治权的贵族。这样，虽然战国没有用主权国家的概念，但是在欧洲与中国，由陌生人构成的实质上的主权国家都出现了。当然，欧洲于此的特殊性在于对主权的法律认可（威斯特伐利亚诸条约）.

> The political systems of the Western Zhou and medieval Europe were both based on hierarchically arranged lords, ruling their domains autonomously. When these systems collapsed, lords at every level had to rely on their own power, which led to a chaotic battle for survival. In the aftermath, victors of this battle emerged ruling large and populous states, which did not have masters above them, nor any autonomous lords below them.

Thus, even though the concept of a 'sovereign state' was not used during the Warring States era, both the Chinese and European states were essentially sovereign states constituted of strangers. Only Europe developed an institutional framework for recognizing the principle of sovereignty in the Treaty of Westphalia.[237]

In the past, the argument goes, the West and China followed quite similar historical trajectories. The crucial difference emerged, as pointed out by both Sheng and Bai, when China managed to unify and pacify the warring states in 221 b.c.e. by creating the Chinese empire, and it was able to uphold this unification until the arrival of the Western great powers. The West on the other hand, except for the reign of the Roman empire, has remained in its own 'warring states' period during most of its history, which is why the Western conception of international politics and the current international order are bound to follow the 'warring states logic' (战国规则, *zhanguo guize*).[238]

Zhao claims, that the peace of Westphalia 'legalized' (合法化, *hefahua*) the dividing of the word. It accelerated the development of nation states, but at the same time it negated the possibility of a 'world concept' and the idea of 'world interest' (世界利益, *shijie liyi*) within the Western political imagination. Although states do attempt to maximize the justice and benefits of their own

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[236] Sheng 1996.
[237] Bai 2014.
[238] Sheng 1996. See also Sheng 1996b.

citizens, in relations to other states they will only strive for their own interests.[239] And even if they succeed in creating harmonious societies within the states, the outside is always haunting in the background; states can never feel entirely secure as long as the outside exits, and the outside will always exist in an *international* system.[240] Similarly, for Bai, the nationalist idea of a one imaginary 'bloodline' living within one state has proven to be very effective for unifying and organizing the state within, yet at the same time it means that the state divides strictly between its inside and the outside. Bai summarizes, using traditional Chinese terms, that the "nation state is kingly towards the inside but hegemonic towards the outside."[241]

Why were the Chinese and Western civilizations locked into these dissimilar institutional structures? Shang Huipeng has proposed that both civilizations have always had fundamentally different ethical principles when it comes to relations between individuals at the lower, societal level. Patterns of individual interaction of the micro level are reflected on the macro level of international politics: Chinese family-based ethics create a worldly tianxia order, and the western individualist ethics create a 'warring states' type order.[242]

In the West, Shang argues, relations between individuals have always been arranged following the principle of free and equal individuals, which Shang calls the 'equal units principle' (单位平等原理, *danwei pingdeng yuanli*). But in China, relations between individuals are based on differing roles in hierarchic relationships: every human being is first a member of a hierarchical unit, for instance a member of a family. Shang calls this the 'role principle' (角色原理, *juese yuanli*).[243]

From the Western perspective of 'equal units', all human beings are considered to be equal, and expected to respect each others' individuality. A Western human being is *first* a unique, individual person, and only after that a member of a larger unit. For Shang, the Western conception of international politics and the institutions and laws of the current Western international order stem from this 'equal units principle': nation states are the core units of this order and their interests will always come first. The states may join in international organizations, but only if they can gain benefits from them, and fierce competition between these units is only natural as it is also on the individual-to-individual level.[244]

Ren Xiao has created a similar kind of distinction between the individual-to-individual level relations within the Chinese and the Western civilizations. According to Ren, Western relations between individuals are organized as a 'contract system' (契约秩序, *qiyue zhixu*) whereas the relations in tianxia were

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[239]   Zhao 2016, 214–215.
[240]   Zhao 2011, 83–94.
[241]   "民族国家的模式是对内王道，对外霸道", Bai 2014. Compare to Sheng Hong: "within the state there are only brothers" (国家之内皆兄弟, *guojia zhi nei jie xiongdi*) but "outside the state there are enemies" (国家之外有敌人, *guojia zhi wai you diren*). Sheng 1996b.
[242]   Shang 2009.
[243]   Ibid.
[244]   Ibid.

organized as a 'status system' (名分定秩序, *mingfen ding zhixu*). The Western 'contract system' places the contracts, laws and rules above anything else: individuals are equal in face of the law, and there can be no compromise, interpretation or situational awareness when it comes to law.[245]

The principles of Western international order emerge from the 'contract system' of individual-to-individual relations: states are seen as equal units and there is no juridical hierarchy in state-to-state relations – at least in principle. Sovereignty for individual states is achieved, but at the price of losing the greater, worldly vision of politics from sight.[246]

Zhao Tingyang builds on a similar kind of dualism between an individualist West and a collectivist China. For Zhao the hierarchy of political units in the Western conception of politics is as follows:

1. individual (个体, *geti*)

2. community (共同体, *gongtongti*)

3. nation state (国家, *guojia*).

In the Western conception of politics, above the nation state there exists only the level of the international (国际, *guoji*). 'The world' is not a part of West's political imagination, but merely a geographical concept – a playing field or a stage, which the national states divide with their borders, and in which they compete for power and interest. Zhao argues, that from a Chinese tianxiaist perspective, this Western world conception is a 'non-world' (非世界, *fei shijie*) or even a 'chaotic world' (乱世, *luanshi*).[247]

The West, Zhao goes on, has never been able to overcome the level of the 'international' nor even imagined surpassing it and seeing the world as a unified political unit, like China's tianxia. As an example, Zhao points out that even such illustrious philosophers as Immanuel Kant have failed to think in tianxia-like global terms. Kant's cosmopolitan vision, as laid out in the book *For Perpetual Peace* (*Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf*) is only a 'world federation of nation states'. For Zhao, it is unable to get rid of the concept of the state and thereby remains at the level of 'internationalness'. It is not a unified world in the manner of tianxia and Kant's conception of politics was under the influence of Western narrow-minded tradition of international politics.[248]

A running theme in tianxiaism is that the Western conception of international politics has swallowed the world, suppressing all other alternative visions, including China's tianxia. For Sheng:

随着中国这个几乎可以说是唯一的天下主义文化的消失，整个世界实际上回到民族主义均衡状态之中。与民族主义相伴相生的战国规则，即"军事力量强者胜"的规则从西方走向了全世界.

[245] Ren 2014.
[246] Ren 2014.
[247] Zhao 2011, 11–17, 91.
[248] Zhao 2011, 11–17. See also Liang 2016.

> With the disappearance of the only tianxiaist culture, which was in China, the whole world returned into a balance of nationalisms. Nationalism was accompanied by the 'warring states logic', that is the logic of 'militarily the mightiest wins', which spread from the West to all over the world.[249]

As the alternative model of tianxia was extinguished, China too was forced to internalize the Western concepts of nationalism and social Darwinism. In the end, China thus wholly adapted to the 'warring states logic' of international politics and became a warring state among the others.[250]

For Zhao, the liberal international order operates under the 'Hobbesian law of jungle' (霍布斯丛林假定, *huobusi conglin jiading*), but the West is not interested in changing this logic. The West understands the problems involved and attempts to civilize the order so that the fierce, Hobbesian competition between the states would be transformed into a more civilized economic competition based on rules, yet the basic idea of individual nation states and state-level interest would remain intact. But even in this civilized form of state competition, nothing prevents powerful states from emerging and breaking the rules as they see fit.[251] The West cannot completely reform this logic, Zhao claims, because it is unable to see the core of the problem, to transcend the 'international' and obtain a 'worldly' outlook on international politics.

In attempt to pacify this chaos, the best practical solution the West has been able to create is the United Nations. On the surface, the UN might seem like a genuine world institution, but it is merely a forum for the nation states for gaining benefits for themselves.[252] As such, it too represents the Western mindset of the international. The interest of the whole world is absent from its scope, and hence it is "an agora without its polis".[253]

Zhao and Li Mingming both agree that the West sees the warring states system as a natural phenomenon and is not interested in transforming it. The fragile peace within the order is being upheld by only two highly volatile mechanisms: the first is setting up a hegemony by one great power, which will dominate all others. It can be efficient for some time, but the hegemon will never have the acceptance of everybody, and there will always emerge mutinies against it. The hegemony will sooner or later end up collapsing back into an all-out war.[254]

The second way is to set up a 'balance of power' between the great powers and their alliances. It is also an unstable situation as it will eventually burst into wars of massive scale. And even during peaceful times, the risk of a great power war is always lingering above, causing unnecessary economic/cultural competition between the states as well as wasting of resources.[255] For Zhao, the Western international states-system is thereby always on the verge of collapse,

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[249] Sheng 1996.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Zhao 2011, 11–17.
[252] Zhao 2011, 56–64, 101–105.
[253] Zhao 2009, 6–17.
[254] Zhao 2016, 24–26. Li 2011.
[255] Zhao 2016, 24–26.

and the West, because of its philosophical roots, is unable to see the core problem.

Finally, the Western states system is also extremely hard to transform as it has enlarged to become global and because it has reached its pinnacle in 'American imperialism' (美帝国主义, *mei diguozhuyi*). The American empire is upholding the states system, and unlike any of its predecessors, it has updated the traditional means of control of the modern empires in that it has enforced also *cultural* and *knowledge hegemonies* upon the world, forcing other cultures and civilizations to abolish their own traditional knowledge systems. It has made it almost impossible for the world to even see the alternatives, such as the worldly conception of tianxia.[256]

Even if the American empire would aspire to use its power for the good of the world, Zhao argues, it is also unable to move beyond the *international* logic of the Western states-system. Though claiming to be a universally valid world order, the American empire is in fact merely a hegemonic order of the old style; a distorted and crooked version of a real tianxiaist world system.

3.2.3   China – World system

In contrast to the chaotic international system of the West, the Chinese international system, according to tianxiaist thinkers, developed from the viewpoint of the whole world as a political unit, *a priori*, and the Chinese ideal has since the dawn of history been that 'all under Heaven' should be unified and pacified. Like the description of the Western states system, the tianxia order is also highly essentialized and there is similar ambiguity on when the tianxia was in existence and what were its explicit characteristics.

Zhao Tingyang, for instance, argues that a true tianxia system existed only briefly during the early Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–771 b.c.e.). Almost all other theorists are much more ambiguous, and for them, tianxia system is more or less equal to the Chinese empire and the tributary system around it after the Qin-unification of 221 b.c.e. Shang Huipeng has summarized these diverse views by claiming that the "tianxia was an ancient East Asian international order, based on the tributary system. Although it had different variations during the course of history, its core model did not change".[257] For Zhu Qiyong and Li Mingming, the details of the actually existing political orders or tributary systems are not as important, as the fact that an idealistic 'tianxia worldview' (天下观, *tianxia guan*) remained in place throughout history – though often in contradiction with political reality.[258] In the words of Li, besides the actual political orders there always existed "a kind of cultural consciousness, which

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[256]   Zhao 2011, 68–74, 105; Zhao 2018.
[257]   "以"朝贡体制"为主要内容的古代东亚国际秩序。尽管这种体制在历史各个时期内容有所不同, 但其基本模式并无本质变化。" Shang 2009, 31. Bao Jianyun has proposed that the traditional tianxia conceptions could be categorized under the rough categories of 'classical tianxia' (古典天下, *gudian tianxia*), 'kingly tianxia' (王道天下, *wangdao tianxia*), 'hierarchic tianxia' (等级天下, *dengji tianxia*) 'hegemonic tianxia' (霸权天下, *baquan tianxia*) and 'imperial tianxia' (皇权天下, *huangquan tianxia*). See Bao 2016.
[258]   Zhu 2001; Li 2011. See also Li 2002.

surpassed nationalism, and which was under the influence of traditional Confucian culture."[259]

Indeed, even though the theorists employ historical examples and philosophical texts from very different historical eras in a haphazard manner, and though exact details are missing, a shared set of core components can be found uniting all the theorists. Even if a true tianxia order cannot be found from actual history, the theorists are in effect constructing it with their mutually shared concepts.

Zhao Tingyang has developed the tianxia to the most detailed level. He claims that the tianxia system was established by the Zhou dynasty, which, after displacing Shang in c. 1046 b.c.e., had to develop a system for stabilizing and governing the political diversity of the whole North China plain. Being a comparably small state itself, military dominance was not an option. Instead of the hegemonic policy of 'the big governing the small' (以大治小, *yi da zhi xiao*), as is usually the case in politics, Zhou rulers had to create an institution for 'governing the big with the small' (一小治大, *yi xiao zhi da*) or 'governing the various by one' (以一治众, *yi yi zhi zhong*).[260]

This was accomplished with the tianxia system, in which the Zhou court served as a leading 'suzerain state' (宗主国, *zongzhuguo*) and the various feudal states, tribes and bands accepted its central status. The feudal states had a high degree of autonomy in their domestic policies, and the Zhou court's main task was to maintain the stability and prosperity of the whole realm. Zhao argues that this was an ideal situation: instead of constant war and insecurity, the known world was unified, yet a diverse and harmonious whole.[261] For Zhao, the establishment of the tianxia represents the first time in human history that the concept of 'world politics' came into being.

This ideal tianxia order lasted only some 200 years, after which it collapsed into the chaos of the warring states. Even though unification was achieved again with the centralized empire of Qin and the dynasties after it, Zhao does not consider them as being tianxia orders anymore. Importantly however, they all considered the original Zhou order as an ideal ethical model, which they attempted to achieve.[262]

For Sheng Hong and Bai Tongdong on the other hand, the unification of the empire is seen as the starting point of the tianxia order; when the chaos of the Warring States was pacified under the leadership of the emperor and when, in a gradual process, people ceased to recognize the warring feudal states and their peoples, such as Qi state, Lü state or Qin state, as independent units.[263] For Bai, even the warring states had, despite their grievances, still identified themselves as being the 'civilized ones' vis-à-vis the barbarians and thus as forming a common cultural sphere of *huaxia* (华夏) together. Thus, the imperial

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[259]   "一种超越民族主义的文化意识,它受传统儒家文化的影响", Li 2011, 110.
[260]   Zhao 2016, 49–60.
[261]   Zhao 2016, 49–60
[262]   Zhao 2008, 26. See also Zhao 2019, 36–42.
[263]   Sheng 1996b.

unification simply created a unified civilized state, in other words, the tianxia.[264]

Xu Jilin, representing the liberal end of the tianxia theorists, agrees with the general description, but for him, the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911) represented the ultimate realization of the tianxia ideal. During Qing, different racial and social groupings, such as the Han and the Mongols, the nomads and the farmers, were finally coexisting harmoniously together in a system that Xu calls 'one body with diversity' (多元一体, *duoyuan yiti*).[265]

As can be seen, the descriptions of tianxia can occupy a historical range of three thousands years and involve a multitude of political orders, extending from the centralized empires of Han or Qing, to the loose feudal system of the early Zhou. The core idea, however, is the same for Sheng, Bai, Zhao and others: in tianxia, the known world was unified and the competition of sovereign, regional units was seen as a dangerous, unstable anomaly, which should never be allowed to emerge. This was safeguarded by the hierarchic order, in which the emperor served as a balancing center.

Tianxiaists argue that because of this historical tradition, Chinese political thinking evolved towards a 'worldly' approach of politics, which valued stability over liberty, peace over war and hierarchy over anarchy. It was a holistic polito-cultural cosmology, in which the Western concepts of sovereignty, nationality and race, could not be developed. This core difference between the Western and Chinese political cosmologies can, according to the tianxia theorists, be observed in the world concepts themselves: whereas the Western concept of the world (世界, *shijie*) is shallow and merely geographical, China's world concept, *tianxia*, is thick and layered, encompassing various different aspects of human life. Tianxiaist generally describe the concept of tianxia as consisting of three important aspects:

First, just like the Western concept, tianxia also means the geographical world: all under Heaven and thus all the geographical formations in it.[266]

Second, tianxia has a (social) psychological meaning. Tianxia, supposedly, included all the people under Heaven, and for tianxia to enjoy peace and prosperity, all the people needed to acknowledge its legitimacy. For the emperor to obtain the mandate for ruling all under Heaven (得天下, *de tianxia*), it was not enough to simply conquer all the territories by warfare and hold them with brute force, but to obtain the approval of the world, the so called 'people's will' (民心, *minxin*).[267]

Third, tianxia bears an ethical or political meaning. Tianxia was considered to be a hierarchically arranged ethical world order, resembling a big family (天下一家, *tianxia yijia*). The emperor was thought to be like a respected and righteous 'father' while the smaller political entities were the 'children',

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[264]   Bai 2014b. For Bai, this unified and centrally led tianxia order, is not however, the most optimal arrangement. See subsection 4.2.3.

[265]   Xu 2015b.

[266]   See Gan 2009.

[267]   Zhao 2016, 60–62.

which would need to demonstrate their submission, but which would also enjoy the security and economic benefits offered by the emperor.[268]

What were the core institutions of this order? At the center was the emperor, Son of Heaven (天子, *tianzi*). Not much is revealed about the nature of the emperor by the tianxiaists, except that, although virtually omnipotent, he was supposed to follow the will of Heaven, which in reality meant high ethical standards. According to Gan Chunsong, political legitimacy in China has "from the Zhou dynasty on, always sought a transcendent ground, established in virtue." Although political reality could often drift away from the virtuous idealism, the emperor was still supposed to follow the ideal 'kingly way' (王道, *wangdao*) as his moral conduct radiated all through the world and could drive the political order in either *chaos* or *stability*.[269] Zhao argues similarly that the will of Heaven is in essence the same as the 'people's will' – an immoral tyrant, albeit militarily powerful, could therefore never obtain the status of a Son of Heaven.[270]

These ethical ideals were not limited to guiding the conduct of the emperor. On the contrary, the whole tianxia order was governed by 'ritual politics' (礼政, *lizheng*), which, according to Ren Xiao, developed during the Spring and Autumn period:

> 春秋时期,对礼的关注从形式性转到合理性,形式性的仪典体系仍然要保留,但贤大夫们更为关心的是礼作为合理性原则的实践体现。 贤大夫们都视礼的政治、行政意义过于礼的礼宾、仪式意义,这使得礼文化的重点由"礼乐"向"礼政"转变。礼的意义的这种变化极为重要,从此,礼不再主要被视作制度、仪式的文化总体,被突出出来的是礼作为政治秩序的核心原则、作为伦理规范的原则的意义。礼文化的发展使礼成为规范和体现中国天下主义的重要形式.

> During the Spring and Autumn period, the concern on the rites developed from the outer appearances of the rites to their rationality, and although the outer appearance of the ceremonies remained intact, the sage officials were concerned of the rites acting as practical embodiments of rational principles. The sage officials saw the political and administrative value of the rites, which caused the core of the rite culture to develop towards ritual politics. The rites were thus no more seen principally as a cultural and ceremonial system, but as core principles of political order and as models guiding ethical conduct. This development of the ritual culture caused the rites to become a standard and a central element of tianxiaism.[271]

The rites, according to Ren, evolved from mere superficial ceremonies into a socio-political glue, which kept the Chinese society together at the individual-to-individual level. On a larger scale they also became the guiding principles of the Chinese international relations. The distinctiveness of Chinese 'ritual politics' is again brought forth with a contrast to the West. The West, according to Ren, was organized around strict laws as a 'contract system', in which individuals were equal in face of laws and contracts. But within tianxia's 'status system' (名分定秩序, *mingfen ding zhixu*), relations between individuals were

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[268]   Ren 2014.
[269]   "将国家和"天下"联系起来，其实是给中国传统的政治合法性寻求一种超越性的基础。而自西周以来，中国政治的基础逐渐确定为德", Gan 2009.
[270]   Zhao 2011, 33–37.
[271]   Ren 2014, 35.

always tightly connected to the personal statuses of the individuals i.e. their positions in social hierarchies.

Individuals at every level of the society had internalized their statuses in relations to others, and the interactions emphasized ritual conduct instead of strict laws or rules. They were therefore always open for interpretation, compromise and situational awareness. This ethical model at the individual level became the guiding principle of the tianxia's international order: there was no international law as such in tianxia because in principle, the political units were supposed to act only as their statuses within the system allowed, following discrete ritual etiquettes.[272]

Shang Huipeng has argued in a similar vein, that at the individual-to-individual level of the Chinese society everyone could be expected to *act* towards others according to his/her current *role* in the society. The same 'role principle' (角色原理, *juese yuanli*) is found at the international level of the tianxia, in which the political units under the Son of Heaven acted as subordinates, and the Son of Heaven acted according to his role as the father of nations, being authoritative and demanding, but also by offering security and economic benefits – the public goods of the time. Smaller kingdoms accepted the emperor's supremacy and the tribute they paid was a material symbol of this relationship. Because of the foundation in role-based individual-to-individual relations, equality or sovereignty between political units could not even be imagined within tianxia.[273]

According to tianxiaism, Chinese society is based on a family-oriented ethic, which has heavily affected Chinese understanding of politics. Gan Chunsong, for example, claims that the Chinese have always understood relationships between varying ethnic and political groups by applying families or clans as metaphors. As a result, Chinese understanding of a 'state' has been based on cultural instead territorial or dynastic conceptions.[274] Zhao claims similarly, that because the core unit of its political imagination is the family, the Chinese civilization has enlarged the metaphor to apply also at the level of world politics, imagining the optimal world order as 'the world as a one family' (四海一家, *si hai yi jia*).[275] Compared to Western levels of political imagination (see subsection 3.2.2.), for Zhao the Chinese levels of political imagination are accordingly:

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[272] Ren offers an interesting example of these different systems colliding in 1793, when George Macartney visited China as an ambassador for King George III of England. When meeting with the Chinese emperor Qianlong, Macartney declined from the customary 'kowtow ritual' everybody was supposed to perform when facing the Son of Heaven. Macartney thought he represented his own King, who was an equal with the Chinese emperor. He could not understand the value and meaning of the kowtow, because from his 'contract system' point of view, there were no hierarchies or any relationality between the heads of states.

[273] Shang 2009.

[274] Gan 2009.

[275] Zhao 2016, 80–89; Zhao 2011, 27–33. Another similar metaphor is 'within the four seas there are only brothers' (四海之内皆兄弟, *sihai zhi nei jie ziongdi*). See Sheng 1996b.

1. Family (家, *jia*)

2. State (国, *guo*)

3. All under Heaven, (天下, *tianxia*)[276]

According to tianxiaism, this idea of a family-like world order was institutionalized in the tributary system, in which the states and political entities around China's imperial core had to submit voluntarily in the face of the emperor. Although the actually existing tributary system had various different institutional forms during its existence (and some researchers would claim that it never even existed[277]), the tianxiaist theorists develop a coherent picture of its essential elements, whether like Zhao referencing to the early Zhou dynasty, or like most others, referring to the centrally led empire of the later dynasties.

Zhao Tingyang, again, has described the most detailed version of the institutional structure of the tianxia order (the order is described in more detail in subsection 4.2.2.), which was a hierarchic order, with a leading central state and surrounding, subservient feudal states. The central state was responsible for the stability and well-being of the whole system by, for example governing the important cross-border resources, such as rivers, lakes, mines and holy mountains, ensuring their fair use for all. The feudal states, on the other hand, were highly autonomous in their domestic policies, but were forced to share the costs with the center by paying it tribute and partaking in public works. According to Zhao, the whole tianxia system was *transitive* so that each level was a microcosm of the level above it, and held an autonomy suitable to its level.[278]

Other theorists do not go in such details or provide as explicit claims about the institutional nature of the tianxia order. For them, the tianxia consisted of a central institution and various different tributary states or vassals around it. A typical description is given by Ren Xiao and Li Mingming, who claim that the tianxia consisted of the central state and of three concentric spheres of vassals around it: the 'inner subjects' (内臣, *neichen*), the 'outer subjects' (外臣, *waichen*) and the 'non-subjects' (不臣, *buchen*). The depth of the relationship between the units weakened the further one traveled from the center: the outer subjects, for example, were not taxed and the non-subjects were considered to be outside the grasp of the center's influence altogether, or even as its enemies.[279] Sheng Hong uses the concept of 'five services' (五服, *wu fu*) instead of the three *chen*, but the basic idea remains almost identical.[280]

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[276]   Zhao 2010. See also Zhao 2011, 27–33.
[277]   See Perdue 2015.
[278]   Ibid.
[279]   Ren, 2014; Li 2011, 1–6
[280]   Sheng 2014.

All the differing depictions of the tianxia share the same components, consisting of a benign central institution and regional actors (whether *zhuhouguo* or *chen* or *fu*), whose level of autonomy was considerably high, but which were in no sense sovereign or independent versus the central state. Although depiction like this could serve as a textbook example of a typical imperial structure (seen in many forms through history everywhere) the tianxiaists want to strictly distance tianxia from any historical empires outside of the Chinese sphere. Xu Jilin, for example, claims that the traditional empires' relations with their subjects were one of 'unidirectional dominance', in which the empires were merely extracting resources and other benefits from their vassals. Tianxia, on the contrary, was based on a reciprocal relationships, which attempted to create benefits for all of its members.[281] Li Yangfan argues similarly that the use of the concept of 'empire' for describing tianxia is a misleading product of modern Western scholarship. China, for example, did not use military force for subjugating its tributaries, nor posit viceroys or governors to rule them; to the contrary, the tributary states joined the tianxia voluntarily since they gained remarkable economic and political benefits from it. Instead of an empire, tianxia, Li claims, was kind of an 'international resource pool' (国际公共产品, *guoji gongong chanpin*). Its institutional system and its Confucian ideological core were indeed supplied and upheld by the Chinese central state, but the system was never unilaterally dominated by China, but mutually constructed with it and the tributary states.[282]

For Sheng Hong, tianxia provided a mutually shared framework for economic and political cooperation, and the 'tribute' involved was merely symbolical.[283] In addition to economy, the central institution of tianxia safeguarded security and stability of the whole system. Sometimes the center even helped the tributaries if they were attacked. The official titles the center state bestowed, on the other hand, offered considerable legitimacy for the tributaries for governing and stabilizing their domains.[284]

All the theorists emphasize the open nature of tianxia. According to tianxia theorists, there were no clear borders within the system and as the emperor's domain was thought to cover all under Heaven, there was also 'no outside' (无外, *wuwai*) in it. Unlike in the West, where there were (and are) borders along with a sense of 'inter-ness' (之间关系, *zhijian guanxi*) between units, the tianxia, according to the *wuwai* principle, did not have any 'others' who it would delineate as existing outside its borders.[285]

Instead of 'others', the peoples and states existing far from the center of the tianxia would be considered as 'strangers' (陌生, *mosheng*) or analogous to

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[281] Xu 2015b.
[282] Li 2016b.
[283] According to Sheng, an important principle of the tributary relations was for China to always give the tributaries gifts of greater value in return (厚往薄来, *hou wang bo lai*). Thus, in effect, the exchanges of tribute were economically unprofitable for China.
[284] Sheng 2014.
[285] See Zhao 2011, 27–33.

distant relatives (遥远, *yaoyuan*, 疏远, *shuyuan*). According to Zhao, though the true geo- and ethnographic scope of the world was not known, the whole world and its inhabitants were still understood to constitute a complete whole, *a priori*, and even the distant and unknown ones were thought to exist in the inside (内部, *neibu*).[286]

When describing tianxia geographically, most theorists apply the idea of 'concentric circles structure' (同心圆关系结构, *tongxinyuan guanxi jiegou*) developed by sociologist Fei Xiaotong.[287] Moving the concept creatively from an intellectual domain into another, the tianxia order is depicted as being formed of concentric circles, reaching form the center of the world to its outer rims, similar to the effect of a stone thrown in to a pond: the ripples will be strongest near the center, but they will, although weakened, eventually reach the edges of the pond. In tianxia, the emperor did hold the whole world in consideration, but his reach and influence weakened the further from the center one traveled.[288]

This selective reading of history attempts to omit the fact that the Chinese empires throughout the dynasties maintained a strong awareness of the differences between the civilized center and the 'barbarians', denoted by the concept of 'China-barbarian distinction' (夏夷之辨, *xia yi zhi bian*; sometimes 华夷之辨, *hua yi zhi bian*).

Tianxia theorists recognize this paradox, and the concept of 'China-barbarian distinction' is often analyzed within the discussion. The solution, agreed universally by all the tianxiaists is, that the 'China-barbarian distinction' was based on *cultural* differences of the ethnic groups instead of racial or political differences. Gan Chunsong, for example, explains that the barbarians were evaluated according to their 'level of enlightenment' (教化程度高低, *jiaohua chengdu gaodi*) and on how well they had internalized the Confucian rites.[289] The distinction was also flexible and adjustable, and if the barbarians were willing to learn, they could transform and become members of the civilized world. However, the transformation should ideally happen only through the powerful example of the civilized core, and in awe of its power and virtuous conduct (畏威怀德, *wei wei huai de*).[290] According to Sheng, the Chinese themselves could even be transformed into barbarians if they lost their civilized and ethical guidelines.[291]

Following to this tianxiaist reading, although there existed a sense of 'China-barbarian distinction', it was only a device for upholding the level of enlightenment of the civilization. The civilization itself was considered to be universal and not tied to any ethnic group, race or ruling dynasty, and it could be joined by anyone who respected its basic values. The Chinese conception of

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[286]   Zhao 2011, 33–36.
[287]   See Fei 1992.
[288]   See Ren 2014.
[289]   "儒家本着天下一家的立场，主要不是从种族，而是从进于礼乐的先后和教化程度高低来区分的"Gan 2009.
[290]   Ren 2014.
[291]   Sheng 2013. Se also Li 2015.

civilization thus did not provide any legitimation for enslaving, colonizing or otherwise exploiting the barbarians as did the Western, racially based distinction between the civilization and the barbarian / lower races (文明–野蛮, *wenming–yeman*).[292]

3.2.4 Summary: International systems and their core concepts

The tianxiaist narrative presented above argues that the essential differences between the international systems of the two civilizations can be summarized in the concepts of **holism** and **atomism**: China's tianxia system is a holistic whole**,** while the Western states-system is an atomistic and fragmented patchwork. From these underlying essences it also follows that the Chinese tianxia is naturally gravitating towards **stability and order** whereas **chaos and disorder** are the prevailing conditions within the West.

The **atomistic** Western states-system is described by such adjacent concepts as **international/warring states**, **individualism**, **nationalism**, **state**, **race**, **equal units principle** and **rule principle**. Within the Western system, all the units are – like the individuals in Western societies – well aware of their inner and outer borders and of their national and racial compositions, with which they isolate and differentiate themselves from others.

The states do interact with each other through certain rules and institutions, but the underlying logic is a relentless search for individual interest. The 'world' in the Western states-system, as in the image, is represented as a pale shadow in the background. It merely forms the geographical borders of the playing field, in which the states interact, but it is not seen as a possible political unit in itself. Being as such, the tianxiaist description of Western states-system is rather similar with typical realist descriptions of an anarchic international system.

The **holistic** tianxia system, in contrast, is described by such adjacent concepts as **world**, **no outside**, **all under heaven as a one family**, **culture**, **status system**, **role principle**. The tianxia is best understood as an hierarchic yet undivided holistic sphere, in which the emotional strength and the hierarchical status between the units might vary, but in which no clear-cut divisions between insides or outsides, or friends and enemies exist. With the harmonizing governance of the emperor, differences and disputes of the smaller states can be managed and the system as a whole can uphold healthiness and stability.

Tianxia, according to tianxiaism, is unable to understand such concepts as sovereignty, nation or race, and even though it is internally as diverse and multicultural as the West, all the different entities are still existing within the same system. The world resembles a gradient sphere, fading into the distance as the emperor's care and affection diminishes, but with no clear border to separate it from the outside. Even the barbarians, although existing in the rim of

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[292]   Ibid. Not all scholars agree with the culturally based definition. For example Chong Ming claims that 'China-barbarian distinction' contained evident elements of racism. See Chong 2015.

the world, are still within the world. Similarly the member units of tianxia (*fu, chen, zhuguo*) are represented as gradient spheres, which exist in the world led by the Son of Heaven and do not have strict borders with each other.

From an ontological perspective, within the tianxiaist descriptions of the Western and Chinese international systems, the ideational *structure* of the system is clearly determining the essence of the system; its institutions and ideational features. To move beyond the 'warring states logic' or 'internationalness' would require the West to completely re-imagine its conception of politics, to transform the ideational structure of its international system; something, which the West is obviously unable to do. Western states system is thus bound to remain chronically **chaotic** (乱, *luan*), **disorderly** and off balance.

However, China's tianxia is presented as operating under an alternative ideational structure, which is based on hierarchic and family-like relations between the units. This structure, in a similar vein, causes the tianxia system to naturally enjoy **stability, good governance** (治, *zhi*) and balance.

Because the ideational structure determines the nature of the political system in tianxiaist thinking, the world is not doomed to follow the chaotic *international* politics of the West. A different ideational structure and a better international order can be established and the material reality will bend under the ideational forces. It is almost as if the West is under a 'false consciousness' of the international, but can be awaken into the worldly consciousness of tianxia if a tianxiaist great power would rise again and obtain the initiative.

3.3 Political philosophies: politics of opposition vs. politics of harmony

Tianxiaism takes an *ideational* ontological stance towards the question of how international systems are organized. The roots of the differences between Chinese and Western international systems thus lay in the ideational level: both international systems are supported by their corresponding ethical and political philosophies and even differing conceptions of what *politics* itself is all about.

According to Zhao Tingyang, the etymology of both the Western and Chinese concepts of 'politics' points to this essential difference: the Western concept of 'politics' derives from the name of the Greek city state, *polis*, whereas the Chinese concept of politics, *zhengzhi* (政治) means more broadly correct governance.[293] The different political conceptions (or political philosophies) of the West and China are important since, according to the idealist view of the tianxiaists, they have been influencing and molding both the international systems as well as the essences of both civilizations as actors in international politics: the West was bound to become a shattered, aggressively expanding

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[293]   Zhao 2010.

civilization whereas China was since its beginning a harmonious, defensive and a peaceful actor.

3.3.1 The West: Politics of opposition

According to tianxiaism the Western conception of politics is, just as its existing international system manifests, based on dividing and separating political reality into competing, self-centered actors. This chaotic essence of international politics is seen by the West as natural and understandable, but in a larger scheme the Western civilization sees itself as the only capable actor able to pacify the chaos by universalizing it under its own principles.

This notion is developed furthest by Zhao Tingyang, who defines Western conception of politics as 'politics of oppositional struggles' (对立斗争, *duili douzheng*) and politics of 'dividing' (划分, *huafen*). For Zhao, the Western political mind has an uncontrollable urge to divide the political reality into insides and outsides, or into different competing groups, which causes the West, – either in the scale of the individual states or in the larger scale of the Western civilization as a whole – to constantly search for enemies or 'others' to suppress.[294] This political conception of dividing came into existence already in the Greek polises, but the logic was further strengthened and enlarged with the rise of Christianity:

> 自从基督教征服了希腊文明之后，西方就形成了异教识别的斗争逻辑，从此把世界看作是互相对立的和战争性的，以征服世界的使命而毁灭了"世界"概念的先验完整性.

> Since Christianity abolished the Greek civilization, the West created the logic of heretical battles. Ever since, it has seen the world as a warzone of mutual enemies. It has the mission of conquering the world, and meanwhile, it has destroyed the ideal of the world as a complete whole.[295]

Christianity, being a monotheist region, holds a 'monistic conception of truth' (一元真理观点, *yiyuan zhenli guandian*), which makes it logically impossible for Christians to accept or even acknowledge the validity of other knowledge systems.[296] Accordingly, Christian cosmology has always divided the world into the world of the righteous Christians and the remaining world of pagans/heretics, which has to be converted to the only truth. Ren Xiao argues in a similar manner that an essential element of Christianity is its offensive (进攻性, *jingongxing*) missionary attitude, as the Western missionaries would brave even the high seas in order to spread their gospel for the pagans.[297]

Zhao argues that even though Christianity has lost its explicit influence as a political theory in Western thinking, the legacy of its monistic truth conception and confrontational thinking is still implicitly causing the West to

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[294]   Zhao 2016, 18–26.
[295]   Zhao 2016, 235–236.
[296]   Zhao 2010.
[297]   Ren 2014.

search for 'others' to suppress or to convert into its own image.[298] This 'confrontational thinking' has since evolved to take various different forms:

> 异教徒， 种族主义， 热战冷战，殖民主义， 人权干涉， 经济军事金融霸权，技术霸权， 文化霸权， 星球大战之类的幻想中也可以看出寻找敌人的冲动.

> The seeking of enemies can be found from heretics, racism, warm and cold war, colonialism, human rights interventions, economic/militaristic/financial hegemonism, technological hegemonism cultural hegemonism, and even in fiction such as Star Wars.[299]

Because of the legacy of Christianity and its monotheist worldview, the West sees also its own conception of international politics as universal and as the only possible model to follow. The current international order is thus not, by its ideological essence, different from the Christendom of the old, and the West similarly sees as its central mission to convert every state and culture into its 'universal' principles and doctrines.[300]

Besides Christian ethics, the confrontational and dividing logic of Western politics also arises from deep-rooted individualism and its 'individualist conception of rationality'. As mentioned many times above, the West is essentially an individualist civilization and the central unit of its political philosophy is the individual.[301] The very concept of *rationality* is understood in the West as the maximization of one's own interests without concern for others. The same logic applies also in the larger scale of the nation states and within the international system, as all the states act following this narrow understanding of rationality.[302] The fact that the West is excessively relying on 'individualist rationality' - or what Li Mingming calls 'instrumental rationality' (工具理性, *gongju lixing*) – prevents the West from establishing or imagining anything greater than the level of the international.[303]

To summarize, the Western conception of politics, according to the tianxiaist narrative, consists of a continuing tension between the *dividing* and *universalizing* tendencies. Politics is understood as game between individual units, which act and compete for their own interests, and in the larger civilizational level, the West sees as its mission to unify the world according to its own principles. Because the Western conception of politics does not even aim to harmonize differing interests and viewpoints, for Zhao, it should be better seen as 'war disguised as politics' (伪装为政治的战争, *weizhuang wei zhengzhi de zhanzheng*).[304]

The confrontational political conception is at the core of the identity of the Western civilization. It explains why the West acts as it does in international

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[298]   Zhao 2011, 16–17.
[299]   Zhao 2016, 21.
[300]   Li Mingming uses the term 'binary opposition' (二元对立, *eryuan duili*). See Li 2011, 121–122.
[301]   Zhao 2011, 42–49.
[302]   Zhao 2016, 31–49; Zhao 2018; Sheng 2014.
[303]   Li 2011, 122–123.
[304]   Zhao 2016.

politics, yet it also guides and limits the way the West understands how international politics unfold. Western theories of international politics are bound to analyze the world within the confrontational framework of the 'warring states logic', unable to develop a transformative model.[305]

Sheng Hong argues that the Western 'China threat' narratives, as an example, arise from this 'warring states' minded thinking, in which the rise and fall of hegemons is a frequently occurring, almost a natural condition. The China threat narrative fits logically within the Western framework, but the framework inhibits the West from understanding the possibility of a tianxiaist mode of international politics, or the rise of a peaceful, tianxiaist great power.[306]

3.3.2 Tianxia: Politics of harmony

Compared to the Western conception of politics of constant warlike confrontations with the 'other', China's political conception, according to tianxiaism, is oriented towards unity and tolerance. Chinese political conception was, since its very beginning, based on the idea of *a priori* wholeness of the world. It was also tied to strict moral principles serving as ideals for the actual politics, even if in actuality China was not always able to follow them.

According to Zhao, Chinese political philosophy began from the level of the world, tianxia, and all the political questions were surveyed from the point of view of its worldly perspective.[307] Chinese political philosophy was thus 'philosophy **for** the world' (为了世界的哲学, *wei le shijie de zhexue*) with an aim to make the world as a whole function and to benefit all its inhabitants.[308] Individuals or individual states were seen as important parts of the world, but their interests were considered to be inferior compared to the interests and stability of the world. They were understood as units of life, or as units of economy, but not as *political* units.[309]

As in the West, a chaotic, diverse and multicultural political reality of the world also troubled China and its neighborhood. But according to Sheng Hong, "the difference between ones own tribe and the other tribes always remained unclear" within the tianxia.[310] Instead of dividing the reality into competing and strictly isolated units, the tianxiaist ideal was to 'harmonize the myriad tribes' (协和万邦, *xiehe wanbang*) and to unify the world together under a harmonious central institution. Harmony (和, *he* or 和谐, *hexie*) is indeed a central concept within tianxiaist narratives, and according to it, differences between cultures or political institutions are not extinguished but allowed to coexist within the larger framework of the tianxia. Zhao quotes ancient Zhou dynasty statesmen who claimed that 'harmonious coexistence of difference is

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[305]   See Zhao 2011, 93–94.
[306]   Sheng 1996, 1996b.
[307]   Zhao 2016, 11–18.
[308]   Zhao 2011, 82.
[309]   Zhao 2011, 12.
[310]   "天下主义则分不清本族与异族", Sheng 1996b.

better than sameness' (和而不同, *he er butong*).[311] Ren Xiao claims similarly that within traditional political philosophy, harmony was understood like a delicious soup, in which all the flavors support and limit each other. The tianxia, in a similar manner, allowed a harmonious multitude of religions and philosophies to exist within it.[312]

Similarly, at the larger level of its foreign relations China, according to Zhao, did not recognize or seek 'others' but attempted to 'transform the outside into inside' (化外部性为内部性, *hua waibuxing wei neibuxing*), or in other words 'transform the enemy into a friend' (化敌为友, *hua di wei you*). If it met with outsiders or strangers, it did not delineate them as 'others' or 'enemies' but attempted to transform them peacefully to become members of the system as they were already seen, a priori, as existing under the same Heaven.[313]

According to Ren, tianxia did acknowledge the existence of barbarians – the above mentioned 'China-barbarian distinction' – but instead of forcibly converting them, tianxia attempted to peacefully transform (化, *hua*) them by its virtuous example. China followed the principle of 'the rites should not be preached upon others' (礼不往教, *li bu wang jiao*), which meant that instead of sending Confucian missionaries around the world to convert the barbarians into the one right ideology, the Son of Heaven expected the barbarians to stand in awe of his virtue, and that all the peoples under the Heaven would enthusiastically travel to the center to learn its civilized ways. And if they did not come, it simply meant that the center's virtue was weak and it did not deserve the admiration of its subjects.[314]

According to Zhao, an important and unique element of the tianxiaist political conception was its conception of rationality: the 'relational rationality' (关系理性, *guanxi lixing*). Because the most important units of the Chinese political thought were the family and the world, which was also seen through the family-metaphor as an enlarged family, the Chinese conception of rationality developed to emphasize the interests of the community instead of mere interest of an individual. Relational rationality thus understands as rational only such conduct that increases the interests of the whole.[315]

Just as the Western 'warring states' framework still influences the Western civilization and its conception of world politics, China's tianxiaist culture also influences how China understands world politics and on how it acts on the international stage. According to Zhao, remnants of the tianxiaist political conception can be found even in Mao Zedong's use of the concept of 'looking at the world' (放眼世界, *fangyan shijie*):

毛泽东思想中那种"放眼世界"的自觉意识以及试图让全世界人们团结起来的国际努力也表现了天下意识以及某种程度上的实践意图.

311 Zhao 2010.
312 Ren 2014.
313 Zhao 2016, 1–12; Zhao 2011, 83–94.
314 Ren 2014.
315 Zhao 2016, 31–40; Zhao 2017; Zhao 2018; Zhao 2019, 58–59. Qin Yaqing develops his 'relational theory of international relations' along a quite similarly defined conceptual pair: Western 'rationality' and Chinese 'relationality'. See Qin 2018.

> The concept of 'looking at the world' within Mao Zedong thought and the related attempt of bringing all the peoples of the world together demonstrates tianxia consciousness as well as a certain kind of higher-level planning.[316]

Though China has changed to become a normal nation-state like the other states, the ancient tianxiaist conception of world politics is still influencing China's conduct, at least unconsciously behind its outside appearance. For Sheng, China is a 'post-warring states culture' (后战国文化, *hou zhanguo wenhua*).[317] Although it has almost fully embraced the rules and institutions of the global 'warring states' system – including nationalism – Chinese nationalism is defensive and open, tianxiaist nationalism. This can be seen from such Chinese policies as the 'no first use' of nuclear weapons as well as from China's central foreign policy ideas, especially the 'five principles of peaceful co-existence' (和平共处五项原则, *heping gongchu wu xiang yuanze*).[318]

Beyond this, Li Mingming has argued that although engaging with the international order China remains wary of its 'chaotic' nature. According to Li, the collapse of the Zhou dynasty ingrained the Chinese civilization with a mass-psychological 'order complex' (秩序情结, *zhixu qingjie*), which forces China to analyze world politics from the point of view of 'order'. Peaceful chaos, such as in the Western international order is not 'order' in a Chinese sense, as there also has to exist a kind of 'ethical order' in the world. By this Li means certain collectively shared cultural or political values, which unite the political units even if changes in the balance of power emerge.[319]

3.3.3 Summary: Political ideologies and their consequences

From the tianxiaist discussions emerges a coherent description of the Western and Chinese conceptions of politics, which are claimed to influence how both civilizations act in world politics. The Western political thought is based on atomistic dividing of the political reality into individual units with insides and outsides. At the micro level, the West sees competition between individuals driven by their individualist rationality. At the level in the middle, the West divides politics between states and at the macro level of global politics, the West sees itself as a civilizational unit, which also divides itself from the pagan civilizations and is in constant conflict with them.

Because of the dividing logic and the monistic conception of truth, the West loathes cultural diversity and wants to extinguish all alternative visions of politics but its own. Contrary to the ideal of harmony (和) of the Zhou dynasty statesmen, the West exactly wants to unify (同) everything according to its own vision. Adjacent concepts for defining Western political conception within the tianxiaist narrative include **confrontational thinking**, **unity**, **nationalism**, **social-darwinism** and **aggressiveness**.

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[316]   Zhao 2008.
[317]   Sheng 1996b.
[318]   Sheng 1996.
[319]   Li 2011.

Chinese political conception, on the other hand, is inclusive and harmonious. Instead of dividing the world into atomistic units or rejecting 'otherness', the Chinese civilization has always valued, even cherished diversity. Chinese political conception takes the world as a whole, and because of its relational rationality its vision goes beyond its own narrow interests. Adjacent concepts for defining Chinese political conception in the tianxiaist narrative include **acceptance of difference** or **harmonization** (协和, *xiehe*), **transformation** (化, *hua*), and **defensiveness** (防卫性, *fangweixing*).

Even though the Western and Chinese political conceptions are almost mirror images of each other they, however, share a similar objective in striving to unify of the world. This similarity notwithstanding, the method for unification is very different: The West wants to convert and universalize the world according to its own monist truth conception. China, to the contrary, wants the world to be united, but allows harmonious difference to exist within it.

3.4 Conclusion: All (except the West) under Heaven

The worldview of tianxiaism, shared by both the hard and the soft tianxiaists, presents a coherent grand narrative of two civilizations, the West and China, which came into existence in remarkably different conditions, and which also evolved into very different directions during the course of history. Both civilizations developed their own philosophies and value systems as well as unique institutional solutions for the sociopolitical realities surrounding them. Development of world politics and the emergence of the currently existing global international order based on competing, sovereign states, is presented within the narrative as a contingent process, which could have taken a very different path.

At the background of this civilizational narrative is an ideational ontology, in which the essence of international politics is seen as rising not from material factors, but from ideational structures, which are socially constructed. Ideas thus define the nature of international politics and in an optimistic sense, the international order is not doomed to follow the 'warring states logic' established by the West. Alternative forms, such as the tianxia, can be established, although they would perhaps require a Kuhnian style of paradigmatic shift in order to to become effective.[320]

Building on this basic setting, the tianxiaist narrative claims that China's tianxia order was in many senses supreme to the 'warring states' order, because it had no outside, and because it was tolerant, harmonious and non-coercive.

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[320] According to Thomas Kuhn, science develops through revolutionary 'paradigm shifts' in which the whole ontological outlook on the world is transformed. Kuhn's descriptions of paradigms and paradigm shifts could be applied to political worldviews as well. See Kuhn 1996.

Paradoxically however, as we have seen above, the tianxiaist narrative is based on the dichotomy of tianxia and the West. As tianxiaism constructs its narrative, it constantly uses the concept of the West for clarifying the unique and benevolent nature of the tianxia itself. The West is urgently needed as a mirroring anti-tianxia concept, in which all the negative connotations can be stacked. Such dichotomy is, of course, not at all different from most other ideologies and political thought systems, since ideologies generally tend to have the evil 'other' against which the ideology is defending and describing itself: Christianity has Satan, Marxism has Capitalism, and liberalism has socialism to only mention a few examples.

For tianxiaism, this other is the West and the tianxiaist narrative is attempting to squeeze and essentialize a vast multitude of cultures, languages, philosophical ideas and thousands of years of historical development under the simplifying labels of the 'West' and 'China/tianxia'. By 'cherry picking' historical facts and anecdotes, the two civilizations with their essential and seemingly eternal elements are constructed by the tianxiaists, and the concepts of tianxia and the West, because of their ambiguous and indeterminate nature, are well suited for such redefinitions.

The use of the West as an anti-tianxia concept is a form of Occidentalism, which means the construction of more or less distorted images and narratives of the 'West' as a coherent socio-cultural entity and as an actor in world politics. In this, Occidentalism is similar to what Orientalist rhetoric is doing with the vast and diverse regions of Asia or the 'East'.[321] According to Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, Occidentalist thinking and argumentation is often utilized for drawing an inhumane and brutal image of the West by its enemies and opponents.[322] Occidentalism can be also applied for positive and inclusive purposes: Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, for example, has argued that an idealized Western civilization was rhetorically invented after the Second World War for incorporating Germany into the transatlantic alliance against the growing menace of the Soviet Union.[323]

Tianxiaist cosmology can be said to consist of the core concepts of the Occidental West and the Oriental tianxia. They form an oppositional conceptual pair around which the larger narrative is generated. Similarly almost all the adjacent concepts used to define these core concepts often form oppositional pairs: family – individual, sameness – harmony, division – making friends, aggressive – defensive, individualist rationality – relational rationality, and so on. Table 1 below summarizes these conceptual pairs.

[321]   Jouhki & Pennanen 2016, 1–10. See also Takeuchi 2010.
[322]   Buruma & Margalit 2004.
[323]   Jackson 2006.

TABLE 1   Core and adjacent concepts of tianxiaism.

China / Tianxia (天下)	The West (西方)
Stability / Order (治)	Chaos (乱), Chaotic world (乱世)
Harmony (和)	Unity (同)
Harmony (和)	Oppositional conflicts (对立斗争)
'No outside' (无外)	Insides / outsides (内外), borders (边界)
Worldliness (世界性)	International (国际)
Family (家), community (共同体)	Individual (个体)
Relational rationality (关系理性)	Individual rationality (个体理性)

The narrative around these core and adjacent concepts is constructed by choosing (or sometimes fabricating) historical elements, which best fit its arguments. Although it is beyond the scope and focus of this dissertation to challenge the spectacular claims, it should be mentioned that many of the tianxiaist claims are highly dubious and disproportional. First, when describing tianxia, only such thinkers and ideas that fit its peaceful and harmonious essence are cited: Confucian thought is emphasized, while thinkers from China's rich realist-statist tradition, such as the legalist Han Feizi, or strategists, such as Sunzi are rarely mentioned at all. Such emphasis is used to support the claim that the Chinese imperial dynasties were somehow more peaceful and harmonious actors compared to other historical powers, yet according to a statistical comparison by Wang Feli-ling, a total of 3,765 wars have occurred in China within the historical range of 685 b.c.e.–1989, with an average of 1,4 wars every year. Furthermore, at the height of the allegedly peaceful and stable tributary system during the Ming and Qing dynasties there were respectively 2,1 and 1,5 yearly wars, which is even more than the historical average.[324] Even though there might have existed a rather consistent and persistent tianxia conception among the Confucian elites, the political conduct of the dynasties was not in concord with it. Chinese empires, in short, have not been

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[324]   Wang 2018, 36–37.

considerably more peaceful than any other states, and studies by both Alastair Johnston and Wang Yuan-kang have proposed that the Chinese strategic culture has always consisted of an interplay between the pacifist Confucian rhetoric and the more pragmatic strategic calculations.[325] Furthermore, Matti Nojonen proposes that Chinese intellectual history has evolved through a tension between the proponents of the 'civil' (文, *wen*) and 'martial' (武, *wu*) cultures, whereas the tianxiaist narrative only emphasizes the former.[326]

Second, tianxiaism's claims of diversity and harmony are contradictory, since the tianxia worldview – as well as the actual empires allegedly supporting it – was based on the concept of 'China-barbarian distinction' (夏夷之辨, *xia yi zhi bian*, see subsection 3.2.3.) In other words, all the cultures which would not be subdued under the Confucian orthodoxy and its values were designated as barbarians, which, according to the tianxiaist terminology, would need to be 'transformed' into 'friends'. To claim that this distinction was based on *cultural* instead of *racial* differences is anachronistic, since, as William Callahan has correctly pointed out:

> if we accept that ''race'' is a pseudo-scientific concept deployed to explain cultural differences, then the category of ''racism'' did not exist before modern science and social Darwinism.[327]

Finally, the claim that there has been a continuous and consistent tianxia system or a tianxia worldview is altogether weak, since tianxiaists seem to have a haphazard habit of drawing their concepts from various different eras, which have had very different institutional tianxia systems. Zhao Tingyang is aware of such a problem and therefore claims that the true tianxia existed only during the Western Zhou dynasty. But his delimitation is not helpful either, since very few reliable historical sources remain from the Western Zhou era, and, as pointed out by Yuri Pines, even the concept of tianxia is very rarely used during the era.[328]

Furthermore, in tianxiaist writings, the West is constructed by reckless choice of random elements from European and American histories, and by claiming that these random elements somehow represent the unchanging essence of a civilization called 'the West'. Representative thinkers of the West are, in this construction, often chosen from the realist and controversial philosophical end, for example Carl Schmitt or Thomas Hobbes, while cosmopolitan or liberal thinkers are seldom mentioned at all. With all these contradictions taken into consideration it can be argued that tianxiaism consciously constructs extreme forms of Occidentalism and Orientalism on both sides. By such reliance on the central dichotomy between China and the West, tianxiaism is hard to live up to its worldly, tolerant and harmonious principles, but even more significant, the whole rationale of thinking through such

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[325]   Johnston 1995; Wang 2011.
[326]   Nojonen 2008, 9–27.
[327]   Callahan 2008, 755.
[328]   See Pines 2002; Shaughnessy 1999.

essentialized civilizations as China or the West must be questioned. For Patrick Jackson, essentializations like this constitute a 'West Point Fallacy', by which he means:

> the presumption that because people refer to a civilization like the West, it follows that there is an entity called the West to which they are referring — and that there-fore there is an empirically correct answer to questions about that entity's essence.[329]

This for Jackson, is what scholars like Samuel Huntington are doing by giving 'dispositional' attributes to civilizations although they should be seen as social constructs, developed and molded by political discussions. [330] Civilizations should not be understood as 'substantial' or 'real' objects, but the focus of study should be on the:

> dynamics and implications associated with claims to belong to a given civilization, and the political and social consequences of debates about what that membership means in practice.[331]

What then are the "political and social consequences of the debates" that are being held around the concepts of tianxia and the West? The study argues that tianxiaism, as a whole, is a form of political argument, attempting to gain ground within the 'Skinnerian debate' on the essence of world politics that is going on in a global scale. Such arguments can distort or even cause direct falsification of history, but the focus in this dissertation is not on the veracity of the tianxiaist argument, but on what tianxiaism is aiming to *do* within the current context.

3.4.1   Delegitimzing the international order through *reframing*

First, and perhaps foremost, tianxiaism is attempting to delegitimize the international order by *reframing* the essence of world politics. According to Neta Crawford, framing is a form of argumentation, which tries to establish new interpretations on the prevailing conditions. It is a form of a 'meta-argument', which, at its deepest level, aims to set the ontological and epistemological bounds of belief systems. When a frame is established, the limits of rational discussion are set, and even the conflicting parties of discussions can "agree on what they are arguing about." [332] For a revisionist actor, tearing down established frames and setting up new ones is, naturally, of crucial importance. In a typical reframing situation, the actor is:

> drawing vivid pictures of the 'reality' through exaggeration, analogy, or differentia-tion. Representations of a situation do not re-produce accurately so much as they creatively re-present situations in a way that makes sense. […] Certain features are

329   Jackson 2006, 8.
330   See Katzenstein 2010b.
331   Ibid.
332   Crawford 2002, 19–23.

emphasized and others de-emphasized or completely ignored as the situation is re-characterized or reframed.[333]

The established frame of international politics is based on the legitimacy of the system of sovereign states, which are interacting and competing through multilateral institutions and in accord with international law. Tianxiaism is trying to reframe this order as a 'warring states' system or as a 'non-world' / 'chaotic world', which is unable to respond to the challenges posed by globalization. Moreover, the frame describes the order as a contingent Western creation, forced upon the world by the Western powers, and not agreed upon mutually by the international society.

Within this reframing, the central institutions and values of the liberal international order (i.e. sovereignty, human rights, democracy) are presented as being only elements of the Western civilization. They might be (or were) suitable within the conditions of the West, but they are not universally valid nor do they offer the best components for establishing a stable and prosperous world order. Similarly, tianxiaism is also delegitimizing the established tradition of international thought (including theories of international politics), which it sees as being reliable only within the framework of the 'warring states' or the 'international'. This framework limits the vision and imagination of the theories, and they therefore cannot guide the world towards true 'worldly' politics. A total paradigm shift and a rethinking of what world politics is, is thus needed.

The tianxiaist frame is full of essentialized, inaccurate and exaggerated claims on the nature of the West and of China, but this is at the core of framing and of political arguments in general. Crawford points out that:

> emphasizing whether frames articulate accurate or inaccurate perceptions misses the rhetorical import of representation – how frames affect what is seen, or not seen, and subsequent choices.[334]

Keeping this in mind, tianxiaism presents a rhetorically powerful attempt to reframe international politics. Components of this frame offer valuable and useful materials for the Chinese leadership as it is developing its own frames, aimed for the international society outside of academic circles at large.

3.4.2 Exceptionalist great power identity

Besides delegitimizing the international order, tianxiaism is also taking part in constructing a great power identity for China. With its stark distinction between tianxia and the West, tianxiaism is following the traditional model of thought endorsed by such Occidentalists as Liang Shuming at the beginning of the 20th century, arguing that the Chinese, by looking "to others and then at themselves, then they will immediately understand."[335]

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[333] Crawford 2002, 20.
[334] Crawford 2002, 20.
[335] Quoted in Lu & Zhao 2009, 52.

The 'other' is omnipresent in Chinese thinking, past and present, contrary to what the tianxiaist are claiming about the 'no-outside' (无外, *wuwai*) -nature of the tianxia. Even if the conception of the 'barbarian' in traditional China was more lenient and tolerant than in the West (i.e. barbarians do not have to be forcibly converted and so on) the distinction has still always existed. The West and the alleged Western 'warring states' style of international politics, in tianxiaism, is the new other against which China's own uniqueness is brought forth. Such paradoxical juxtaposition of cosmopolitanism and nationalism is not only a peculiarity of tianxiaism, but it can be found, according to Yiqun Zhou, within the thinking of modern Chinese intellectuals in general. When the Chinese intellectuals are championing nationalism, Zhou claims

> [they] have not for a moment abandoned the ideal of a universal utopia that transcends nationalistic boundaries, and [...] they are in fact also always expressing nationalistic concerns when they embrace cosmopolitanism or any other worldview with universal pretensions.[336]

With its bipolar narrative tianxiaism frames China as a uniquely peaceful, defensive and harmonious actor in international politics. China was the center of its own world order, the order was stable and diverse, and although China held the militarily and economically strongest position within the order, it is not described as a 'hegemon', because its method of governance, arguably, was not based on coercion.[337]

By such an interpretation of history, tianxiaism attempts to unite modern China with its dynastic past, and project values and concepts for China's new great power identity. It is an identity of a great power that has a unique, peaceful, and worldly approach to world politics. It is also a great power, which strives for stability, yet also cherishes harmony and cultural and political diversity within the world. China, in short, is a tianxiaist great power.

This identity is again contrasted against the imagined West as an actor in world politics. The West is driven by its individualist rationality and it is only seeking benefits for itself. The Western order is also narrowly limited to the level of 'international', and even when the West establishes a hierarchic world order, the order is described as 'hegemonic'. United States, for example, is a hegemonic, imperial power, which does not see the 'world interest' and is driven by its own state-level interests.

By developing this narrative on the unique and essentialized civilizations of China and the West, tianxiaism is offering help for China's leadership as it is positioning China within the international order. According to Pu Xiaoyu discussions on China's position within the international order have intensified within the academic and official circles. There is a high level of uncertainty on such questions as what kind of image China should project of itself (i.e. that of a developing country or a major great power) and what does the 'China dream'

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[336]   Zhou 2017, 106.
[337]   See for example Li 2016b.

and the 'rejuvenation' mean for China and for the world?[338] These questions are important for the country itself, but for the international community as well, as China's actions and rhetorical initiatives are under increasing scrutiny. Official definitions of China's identity and position within the world offer important signals for the international community on how China might relate to the order in the future.

Tianxiaism offers ideas for this identity construction by claiming that China has long since overcome the Western style of hegemonic mentality, and instead contemplated politics in worldly terms and through its conception of 'relational rationality'. The Chinese tianxiaist conception thus still supersedes the realpolitik logic of world politics and it could be enlarged globally for the benefit of the world. At the minimum it means that China should not be seen as a threat, and that even China's rise to a central position within the world would only bring a tianxiaist blessing with it.

Such narrative on China's tianxiaist great power identity and of the illegitimacy of the international order, offers important rhetorical components for China's leadership, which wants to "tell the China story well". Indeed, interesting similarities can be found between tianxiaism and the official narrative as Chapter 5 will attest. But how realistic is the tianxiaist narrative on world political change? What would this new tianxia order look like institutionally, how could it be actually established and how different is it from other supernational frameworks? These questions are the subject of the next chapter.

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[338]   Pu 2017.

4   NEW TIANXIA OR A LIBERAL HEGEMONY?

建立一个有着共享利益和共同利益的天下体系，使所有国家和所有人都愿意接受这个体系及其游戏规则，或者说，使任何国家或任何人接受天下体系所能够获得的好处大于破坏这个体系所能获得的好处.

To establish a tianxia system with mutually shared and universal interests, means to cause all the states and all the people to voluntarily accept the rules of the system. In other words, within the tianxia system, the states and the people will gain bigger benefits than the benefits obtained from destroying the system.

Zhao Tingyang: 天下体系的当代性 (Contemporariness of the tianxia system), 80.

Lesser states in an international system follow the leadership of more powerful states, in part because they accept the legitimacy and utility of the existing order. In general, they prefer the certainty of the status quo to the uncertainties of change. Also, the ruling elites and coalitions of subordinate states frequently form alliances with the dominant powers and identify their values and interests with those of the dominant powers. Empires and dominant states supply public goods (security, economic order, etc.) that give other states an interest in following their lead.

Robert Gilpin: *War and Change in World Politics*, 30.

This chapter moves the focus from the 'pure ideology' and worldview of tianxiaism – mutually shared by both the soft and the hard tianxiaists – to the actual propositions the tianxiaists have introduced for the reform of the international order, that is, the 'practical ideology' of tianxiaism. These are brought into light by comparing tianxiaist core ideas with a chosen group of theories from the established tradition of international politics: theories of hegemonic stability, theories of liberalism and theories of cosmopolitanism (both decentralized and world state -variants). What the chapter argues is that although tianxiaism aims to portray itself as a unique theoretical construct, on a closer evaluation its core concepts hold many similarities with the concepts of the three traditions mentioned. Through comparison with the established theoretical traditions the chapter also aims also to point out deficiencies in the tianxiaist narrative and especially in its Occidental image of the West. Parts of this chapter have been published previously in Puranen 2020.

4.1 Tianxiaism and the established thought of world politics

Tianxiaism is based on the dichotomy of tianxia and the West, and a recurring argument in the tianxiaist discourse is that the West does not possess 'worldly' thought or a genuinely 'worldly' conception of politics: the West's political thought consists of individualist interest calculations, and the world beyond the states is seen as a mere geographical arena, in which the competition between the states can and perhaps even should continue unchallenged. According to the tianxiaist oversimplification, the West has always been a divided political entity and because of this atomism, its political imagination is unable to offer a vision beyond the international warring states system.

Almost completely ignored within this selective narrative are the six hundred years of the Roman empire, which similarly to the Chinese empires, understood itself as *the* civilization ruling the whole known inhabited world, beyond which "only lions lived".[339] Nor is the medieval vision of a unified Christendom under the dual leadership of 'the sun and the moon' – the pope and the emperor – ever mentioned within the discussions. Furthermore, even if it is agreed that the West was stuck in a 'warring states' model during hundreds of years of incessant intra-European wars, the dream of a unified European empire was, and has always been a major recurring theme in European political imagination. The unification has been attempted many times by such individuals as Napoleon Bonaparte or Adolf Hitler, and the latest proponents of the idea include such thinkers as the father of the Pan-European movement, Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi (1894–1972), and especially Jean Monnet (1888–1979), who both envisioned Europe unified as a multinational state. Finally, the European Union itself is the latest incarnation of these dreams.

Furthermore, the Western intellectual tradition possesses a long and rich canon of thought, which has problematized exactly the anarchic system based on competing states and their selfish interests. It begins from the cosmopolitan Stoic and Cynic philosophers of ancient Greece, goes through early modern or enlightenment philosophers such as Hugo Grotius and Immanuel Kant, and continues in the work of modern Cosmopolitan thinkers such as Charles Beitz, John Rawls, David Held or Ulrich Beck – all of whom have envisioned and theorized global cosmopolitan arrangements, in which the state sovereignty principle would be weakened in benefit of the global community. This tradition of thought, though failing to fully materialize its ideas, has always been precisely in search of the 'world interest' (世界利益, *shijie liyi*) to borrow the phrasing of Zhao Tingyang.

The tianxiaist narrative of the West focuses narrowly on the 'realist' elements and thinkers, however, throughout its existence the history of Western political and international thought has consisted of a tension between the realist and statist elements, with the liberal, cosmopolitan and universalist elements, balancing each other. The tianxiaist narrative emphasizes the statist elements.

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[339]   Andornino 2006, 3.

The alleged 'father of realism', Thucydides (c. 460 b.c.e –c. 400 b.c.e.) had the Stoics, Thomas Hobbes had Hugo Grotius, the 20th century realists had liberals and functionalists, and the modern neorealists have neoliberals, neofunctionalists and cosmopolitans. To state shortly, the narrow state interest and the broader 'world interest' have co-evolved through a mutual dialogue for thousands of years, and the dialogue is still going on.[340]

Almost all of this is ignored within the tianxiaist discussions, ample with simplistic and Occidental claims that the West is fixated on the nation-states and realist geopolitics, and that a true worldly perspective on politics was developed only in China under the influence of China's unique tianxia cosmology. Most tianxiaist thinkers have thus 'cherry picked' the realist, Machiavellian pieces of the Western philosophical canon and presented them as the major or even the only prevailing thought systems on world politics within the West.

In the previous chapter it was argued that the tianxiaist worldview consists of two major civilizations, which form the starting point for the criticisms and delegitimations of the international order. For correcting the problems of the order, tianxiaist theorist argue that a new tianxia should be established in place of the 'warring states' system. In this chapter, the focus is moved into the *practical ideology* of tianxiaism, that is, what the tianxiaist theorists actually propose as the solution for the problems of our era, and what the proposed new tianxia order would resemble.

This is done by comparing the core concepts of tianxiaism to three established theoretical traditions of world politics: hegemonic stability theories, liberal or liberal institutionalist theories and cosmopolitan theories. None of the chosen theories frames world politics as existing in an Hobbesian 'warring states' condition, or maintains the claim that individual nation states would be the only or even the most important units of world politics. To the contrary, all the three theoretical traditions are interested in political systems that reach beyond the level of the states, and which have – some even for hundreds of years – attempted to find solutions for the very same problems, which are depicted in the tianxiaist narratives as being almost pathological conditions of the West. All the three theories are also based on a some kind of a central institution and on its relation to its secondary units.

The hegemonic stability theory (HST) claims that a stable and functioning world order has always required a powerful hegemonic state to serve as a balancing center. Liberalist theories, meanwhile, suggest pacifying the 'warring states' condition by institutionalizing the competition between the states and by increasing the interdependence of the states through trade. In this chapter, a 'constitutional order' developed by John Ikenberry is chosen for closer examination since it advocates the presence of a hegemonic 'leading state' or a 'liberal hegemony'. The third theoretical family chosen for comparison is

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[340] In a similar vein, the tianxiaist narrative over-emphasizes the harmonious and pacifist elements of Chinese intellectual tradition and downplays thinkers and ideologies with a more *realpolitik* orientation including Shang Yang, Han Feizi and Sunzi.

cosmopolitanism, which has since its beginnings in Greek antiquity understood the world as a 'world city', and which has in its modern form attempted to transform the whole world into a single, democratically governed polity. Borders between these three traditions are not strict but merely demonstrative: Immanuel Kant, for example, has served as a paragon for both the modern cosmopolitan tradition as well as for the liberalist tradition, and John Ikenberry's model can be seen as a liberal variant of the hegemonic stability theory.

Methodologically the chapter continues to identify and analyze the core concepts of these theories. The chapter analyzes if tianxiaism is simply applying different *wording* for concepts, which are *de facto* shared with the above mentioned, established theories. As brought forth in the first chapter on methodology, a concept can be imagined or thought of even if there is not a word signifying it, and similar or even the same concepts can therefore also have different 'signifiers' (words). Concepts therefore, in the words of Felix Berenskoetter are "attached to a word, although – and this is important not necessarily always to the same word."[341]

Tianxiaist thinkers are developing redefinitions of concepts such as the West, tianxia or hegemony; adding new mixtures of meaning within these word containers. But the question is, are they merely using different wording on the surface while the concepts, the "concentrates of several substantial meanings", as defined by Reinhart Koselleck, remain rather similar if not identical to certain existing concepts? Although the tianxiaists shy away from *words* such as 'hegemony' (霸, *ba*) or 'empire' (帝国, *diguo*), the question must be raised of whether the *concept* of hegemony (powerful entity in international politics) can be found behind their definitions, and could it even be found behind the arguably novel concept of the tianxia itself?

The focus in this chapter is on the core concepts of tianxiaism and the concepts of the established theories of international politics at the raw level. All the four theories under examination, tianxia, HST, constitutional order and cosmopolitanism have as their core concepts, first a concept for a leading central institution (i.e. hegemony, world government) and a concept for secondary units (i.e. 'regional unit', secondary state). Although the central concepts of these theories might initially seem to be quite different from each other – and although the very rhetorical purpose of tianxiaism is to strictly deny any similarity between them – on a closer analysis many similarities can be identified. The analysis in the chapter is not definitive. The three traditions selected for comparison are not the only ones worthy of analysis, but to the contrary, one could easily use a number of other theoretical initiatives, which would bear fruitful and interesting comparisons (see section 4.4.). Furthermore, by focusing only on certain thinkers or threads of thought within each tradition the three traditions used in the chapter receive a shallow examination.

The chapter begins by first hypothesizing what a new tianxia order could be like based on the writings of the hard tianxiaists. The model is almost

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[341]   Berenskoetter 2016b, 2. See also subsection 1.5.1.

completely based on the writings of Zhao Tingyang, who has defined the concept of tianxia and the possible new international order based on it with the most detailed and systematic manner. The chapter also describes certain models developed by the soft tianxiaist theorists, but these models are omitted from the actual comparison for reasons explained in more detail in subsection 4.2.3. The chapter then moves into comparing Zhao's hard tianxia and its central concepts to the above mentioned three theoretical traditions of world politics. For providing context, historical developments of the three traditions are explained in the beginning of each subsection. While the subsections describe the theories and their traditions on a more general level, the concluding section (4.4.) compares the core concepts of the chosen theories with those of tianxiaism.

4.2   New tianxia on the shoulders of the Western Zhou dynasty

As proposed in the third chapter, the ontology of tianxiaism is heavily ideational, that is, ideas more than material conditions determine the nature of the international order. The precedent for establishing a new tianxia would be the establishment of a new ideological structure or a paradigm; a transformation from the hegemony of *international* thinking into the hegemony of *worldly* thinking. It is only after this transformation that the new tianxia can begin to function as it is only within this wholly new social reality that the state level actors will be able to diminish their national interests and understand the world interest.

As discussed in the third chapter, tianxiaist theory construction has remained at a rather abstract and vague level. Its descriptions of the new, superior tianxia world order or designs of its institutions are scarce. It also appears that many theorists consciously refrain from designing such future tianxia models due to the possible hegemonic and sinocentric connotations involved.

The only hard tianxiaist theorist to offer any precise details on the inner functions of the tianxia system is Zhao Tingyang, who claims that the true tianxia system existed only during the early Western Zhou dynasty (ca. 1046–771 b.c.e.). Zhao takes the Western Zhou model of foreign relations – the *fengjian*-system (封建) – as an archetype, which he uses for developing a somewhat detailed, if still vague description of the modern tianxia. Zhao's model has to be taken as the reference point when analyzing the new tianxia, since there is almost nothing else more exact available. Even Zhao refrains from describing the institutions and functions of the new tianxia order in detail and usually only concentrates on the elements of the Western Zhou tianxia. Zhao himself has described the relationship of the Western Zhou and the new future tianxia, quite cryptically, as follows:

我们无法预想未来天下体系是否能够实现，也无法预想未来天下体系的具体制度安排，因为无法预知未来社会的情况。但假如未来天下体系是可能的，新天下体系的"词典"里将可能包含一些与古代天下观念有着继承关系的关键词.

We are unable to foresee if the tianxia system will be realized in the future. We are similarly unable to foresee what kind of concrete institutional structures the future tianxia will have, since we are unable to foresee the societal conditions of the future. But let us hypothesize that a future tianxia is possible, then the "dictionary" of the new tianxia will most likely include certain words inherited from the ancient tianxia.[342]

For Zhao, the Western Zhou tianxia system serves as an inspiration for the new tianxia, and by studying Zhao's descriptions of this ancient tianxia model, a rough draft of a new tianxia can be developed for the purposes of this analysis and comparison. An important point needs to be made, however, that whether there ever actually existed anything like the model that Zhao describes is highly unlikely. Historical sources from the early Zhou period are extremely scarce and mostly shrouded in legends. They can be interpreted in various ways and importantly even the very concept of tianxia itself is barely mentioned in the sources of the era.[343]

The tianxia system that Zhao constructs on early Zhou history is therefore his own philosophical invention, and Zhao himself has indeed claimed that he is not doing historical research but mainly applies "ancient materials for the problems and thinking of today, in hopes of theoretical innovation."[344] It is not at all within the scope or in the interests of this chapter to examine the historical accuracy of Zhao's model, since the model is approached here as a philosophical argument.

4.2.1 The Western Zhou tianxia and its institutional structure

Zhao claims that the tianxia system was established by the Western Zhou dynasty and none of the later Chinese imperial dynasties were, in essence, tianxia systems. They did still inherit some ideological components of the tianxiaist worldview. The Zhou thus founded, if only for a brief historical flash, the tianxia system that represented an ideal world order, which the later dynasties and even the People's Republic of China of today would attempt to achieve.[345]

What was so unique about the Zhou dynasty? According to Zhao, the Zhou, although a small state, had to govern the known world – 'governing the big with the small' (一小治大, *yi xiao zhi da*).[346] It had to establish a system, which was not reliant on military power, but which could uphold the stability of the known world and boast such levels of 'attractiveness' (诱惑力, *youhuoli*)

[342] Zhao 2019b.
[343] For actual historical research on the early Zhou based on written and archaeological sources, refer to for example Li 2006 and Loewe & Shaugnessy 1999. For research on the use of the concept of tianxia during the Zhou era, see Pines 2002.
[344] Zhao 2008, 85. "试图利用古代资源提出一个 当代问题和当代思路 ,以此期望理论创新."
[345] Zhao 2008, 26.
[346] Zhao 2016, 49–60. See also subsection 3.2.3.

that every state and tribe would join it voluntarily.[347] Zhou thus established a system of 'universally shared interests', which offered more benefits for joining it instead of remaining outside of it, and whose members supported each other instead of being driven by their own interests (as in the Western 'international' systems).[348]

At the center was the state of the Zhou king (天子之国, *tianzizhiguo*), also called by Zhao as the 'central guardian state of the world' (世界监护中心的宗主国, *shijie jianhu zhongxinde zongzhuguo*). Around the center were the 'feudal states' (诸侯国, *zhuhou guo*), which Zhao also sometimes calls 'geographical structures' (局域, *juyu*) or 'regional regimes' (地方性统治, *difangxing tongzhi*) to distance them from the infamous Western concept of the state. Zhao further divides the feudal states into 'vassal states' (封国, *fengguo*) and 'servant states' (服国, *fuguo*), and below the level of the feudal state were the lords and officials in their villages.[349]

Within the Zhou tianxia, according to Zhao, the center possessed 'full authority' (所有权, *suoyouquan*). It controlled all the global resources, such as rivers and holy mountains, which could not be owned by any single state. The feudal states possessed 'using rights' (使用权, *shiyongquan*) in their own domains, and the center would not interfere in their internal affairs. The whole system had three levels: the world level, the state level and the local level and the system was 'universally transitive' (普遍传递, *pubian chuandi*): the units at the three levels were similar in essence but would only tackle the political challenges of their own level.[350]

Although the Zhou center, according to Zhao, should not be called a military hegemon, it still possessed the largest military with its six 'armies' (军, *jun*). The feudal states had smaller armies so that a large state would be allowed to have three armies, and a small state only one army. Taken together, the feudal states could easily overthrow the center if it would become morally compromised, but they could also pacify any chaotic developments within smaller states. A balance of power or a type of a collective security arrangement was thus founded between the feudal states.[351]

Military deterrent, Zhao claims, was not important however, as the order was based on the 'attractiveness' (诱惑力, *youhuoli*) of the center, and on the benefits that the system offered for all its members. The tianxia was ruled by the principle of 'no outside' (无外, *wuwai*) and 'for all' (为公, *weigong*) so that any state or tribe was allowed to join the system and also leave it and remain outside of it. A distinction between the civilized members of the Zhou tianxia

[347]   Zhao 2010; Zhao 2016, 49–60.
[348]   Zhao 2010.
[349]   Zhao 2010; Zhao 2016, 69–75.
[350]   Zhao 2008, 26. Zhao claims that the problem with the Western conception of politics is exactly that it is not *transitive*. For example democracy might work well within a state but it cannot be established at the level of the world.
[351]   Zhao 2010.

and the 'barbarians' outside its borders did remain, but the barbarians could always join the tianxia by voluntarily submitting to the Zhou court.[352]

4.2.2 New tianxia

Zhao claims that this Zhou system should serve as a blueprint for the new, modernized tianxia order. If it is now hypothesized that the current liberal international order would be transformed into a new tianxia following the model of the Zhou, a new world institution would need to be established or emerge among one of the great powers. The institution would have to be well versed in world philosophy, that is, to see the world as a political unit in itself and to internalize the principle of 'relational rationality', according to which it saw only such conduct as rational that would

1. Decrease the harm of all and increase the interests of all.

2. Protect the long-term interests of the world as a whole.

This is a central point, since although one could claim that the United States has served as a central world institution of the current international order, Zhao has argued that it is only a hegemon searching for its own interests instead of the interests of the world as a whole.[353]

Besides the essential philosophical outlook, the world institution would have sufficient military and economic power for reigning supremely above all the other states. The new world institution would take charge of all the global issues as well as resources of global reach. In other words, it would possess 'world sovereignty' (世界主权, *shijie zhuquan*).[354] Zhao has proposed that in the modern world, such global resources could comprise of space, seas and such resources as oil or nuclear power, which should be shared for the benefit of the world.[355]

Current nation states could remain in place and their internal affairs would similarly remain untouched, but their sovereignty in foreign affairs would be seriously downgraded. Various other regional units differing from nation states could also be allowed within the tianxia as long as they submit to the central institution. Foreign relations of all the regional units would be supervised by the central institution, and similarly, all conflicts between the regional entities would be arbitrated by the central institution. Drawing a line on 'foreign' and 'domestic' questions would not be easy, but the central institution, enjoying unchallenged respect and submission by the regional units would have the final word.

The regional units would be allowed to have their own military forces, but they would also have to offer troops for the central institution. Besides troops,

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[352]   Zhao 2016, 77–80.
[353]   Zhao 2017. See also p . 95–96.
[354]   Zhao 2016, 27–30.
[355]   Zhao 2010.

the regional units would have to offer workforce for global projects, although the latter could likely be organized through some kind of global tax.[356]

Although the new tianxia would have a clear hierarchy and the regional units would not have, for example, independent foreign policies, the new tianxia would be ideologically free and tolerant. Zhao's main criticism on the current international order concerns its 'ideological hegemony', meaning West's tendency to force its 'universal values' and political ideologies upon everyone else. According to Zhao, the new tianxia would not have such ideological hegemony, but instead a harmonious diversity would exist between different cultures and political ideologies. Under the principle of 'no outside' there can be no 'otherness' within the tianxia. Zhao claims that

由于天下模式只承认政治一致性和人性普遍性，而不再更多地承认任何别的原则，尤其是否认了任何意识形态(特别是宗教)的普适性，否认把任何特殊价值观强加于人的合法性(所谓"礼不往教"原则)，否认把特定价值观普遍化的合法性，从而认可了各种文化的自由存在和自然存亡.

the tianxia model only recognizes political consistency and the universality of humanity, and it does not recognize any other principles, especially universality of any ideological or religious principles. It denies the legitimacy of ideas, which are forced upon others (the so called 'rites should not be thought' principle), and it denies the legitimacy of chosen ideas declared as universal. It thus approves the freedom of all types of cultures to exist and to naturally die.[357]

This has to be interpreted so that the new tianxia would not have *any* unifying ideological constructs or common values at all, expect the fundamental principle that the various regional units were sharing the world peacefully together and would respect the differences of others. Zhao has also described it as a 'one (global) system, many kinds of (political) institutions':

天下概念指向"一个体系，多种制度"的兼容体系，其兼容性建立在关系理性所建构的共在关系上，而不是建立在统一的宗教或意识形态之上.

Tianxia concept means a compatible system of 'one system, many institutions'. Its compatibility is based on the concepts of relational rationality and co-existence. The system is not established on the rule of any single religion or ideology.[358]

Within the new tianxia, various differing institutions could exist under the leadership of the central institution. Conservative Islamist states and liberal democracies would then coexist within the shared framework, as long as they decide to yield their sovereignty on foreign affairs to the center and the center would harmonize their interests.

Joining the tianxia would be simple and include only one condition: the regional unit has to cede its sovereignty in foreign affairs to the central institution. Similarly a regional unit could break away from the tianxia without any repercussions. Paradoxically, although tianxia has 'no outside', Zhao's

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[356]   Zhao 2010.
[357]   Zhao 2011, 100.
[358]   Zhao 2018.

description does not rule out the possibility of a regional unit or various units deciding to withdraw from the tianxia and even to create an alliance against it. As the tianxia with its world institution is militarily quite weak, the central institution needs to constantly uphold its moral supremacy and its 'attractiveness' so that leaving the system is not seen as a viable option.

Just as the original Zhou system, the new tianxia would not necessarily consist of the whole geographical world, at least not in the beginning. Like the Zhou, it would consist of voluntary member units (the civilized world of the Zhou) and the regions outside it (barbarians of the Zhou era). The new tianxia would, however, constantly attempt to pull the non-member regions within the order, so that the final stage of 'all under heaven shared by all' (天下为公, *tianxia wei gong*) would be one day reached.

For the central institution itself, a whole new body should be established. Zhao does not consider the United Nations as a credible world institution, first of all because its 'universal values' are dictated by the Western powers and do not necessarily represent the interest of the world.[359] Secondly, and more importantly, the United Nations for Zhao, is merely a forum for the nation states for gaining interests for themselves and it does not care or discuss the interests of the world as a whole. It operates at the level of state interests instead of world interest and is not possessing real sovereignty over the world.

The new tianxiaist central institution would thereby not be a parliamentary meeting place for states and it would not be democratic at all. The world institution has to follow the 'people's will' (民心, *minxin*) but there are other methods for doing so than democratic elections, which distort the will of the people. Election results, for Zhao, are always shortsighted and prone to all kinds of manipulations by power-hungry political and business elites.[360] Secondly, Zhao claims that global democracy is not possible, while only briefly elaborating why, and while ignoring all the abundant theories and models of global democracy altogether.[361]

Zhao seems to imply that the central institution has to be ruled by certain well chosen, morally superior elites who constantly observe and survey the moods among the world's peoples and are thus able to read the will of the people more accurately than the distortive elections. It would gain its legitimacy through it performance in delivering to the world what is needed.[362] How would this system be concretely achieved is again not explained.

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[359] Zhao does not discuss the possibility of an empowered United Nations. He briefly hints that an empowered United Nations might run the risk of becoming a new empire. See Zhao 2011, 104.

[360] Zhao 2011, 17–23.

[361] Zhao 2011, 94–95.

[362] Zhao 2011, 17–23; Zhao 2006. The system seems suspiciously similar to the governing system of 'democratic centralism' of the People's Republic of China. Furthermore it remains an open question how the 'transitivity' (传递, *chuandi*) principle of tianxia should be interpreted. Since all the units of tianxia at different levels should be 'transitive', should not the members of the tianxia also be forced to follow the governance based on 'the will of the people'?

Even though the central institution would not be democratically selected its position would not be fixed. Zhao argues that any of the member units can potentially rise to become the new central institution, so there can be movement within the hierarchy. However, the method of this transformation of the central institution is, again, not explained.[363]

How would the new tianxia be established? The theorists (including Zhao) do not offer any precise guidelines, but they all agree that the tianxia cannot be established by using military power. Zhao seems to hope that the tianxia simply somehow emerges within the next hundreds or thousands of years as the interdependence of the world keeps increasing.[364] Sheng Hong has suggested that the tianxia will emerge as one of the currently existing nation-states develops itself into a 'gentleman state' (君子国, *junziguo*). It would have to be powerful both militarily and economically, but more importantly it would have to be a morally highly conscious 'strong reciprocity state' (强互惠国, *qiang huhui guo*), which would apply its power for harmonizing relations between other states and for preventing international conflicts from arising. This 'tianxiaist center' (天下主义中心, *tianxiazhuyi zhonxin*) could then slowly pull other countries into its 'tianxiaist alliance' (天下主义联盟, *tianxiazhuyi lianmeng*), and eventually, the alliance could reach across the whole world.[365]

4.2.3 Soft tianxiaist visions

Besides the hierarchic and centralized version of the tianxia (hard tianxiaism), some tianxiaists propose a softer version, which would allow sovereign states to exists, and which would not have an all powerful central 'world institution' governing the system. In this dissertation, such ideas are collectively defined as soft tianxiaism. Whereas hard tianxiaists can be said to center around the writings of Zhao Tingyang, a central figure for soft tianxiaism is Xu Jilin, whose 2015 article "New tianxiaism and China's internal and external order" (新天下主义与中国的内外秩序) made a vocal case for the development of a more liberal modernization of the tianxia ideal. Proponents of the softer tianxia want to emphasize this distinction from the harder tianxia-variants, and are sometimes labeled in Chinese discussions as 'new tianxiaists' (新天下主义, *xin tianxiazhuyi*) following Xu's redefinition.[366] Within this dissertation, 'new tianxiaism' exists under the larger category of 'soft tianxiaism' however, since not all scholars use Xu's definition yet still endorse and develop more liberal and de-centralized renditions of the tianxia theory.

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[363] Zhao 2016, 69–75.
[364] Zhao 2016, 30.
[365] The concept of *junzi* refers to the ideal, morally cultivated and well learned Confucian gentleman. Sheng 2014.
[366] Xu 2015b. Xu's redefinition has not yet established it place since – to make things confusing – terms such as 'new tianxiaism' and 'new tianxia' are also often used in a loose manner to describe anyone discussing the concept of tianxia in the contemporary context, including also Zhao Tingyang.

The proponents of soft tianxiaism are generally wary of the hegemonic, nationalistic and sino-centric overtones found within the harder variants of tianxiaism. Most soft tianxiaists are also critical, or at least highly conscious of the dangers involved in relying on a strictly defined and essentializing China-West -dichotomy, even though they cannot completely escape operationalizing it in their own thinking.[367] Another notable difference with hard tianxiaists is that the work of some soft tianxiaists (i.e. Xu Jilin, Chong Ming) is perhaps more focused on China's foreign relations within its immediate neighborhood in East-Asia instead of visioning a tianxia of global proportions. Such theoretical initiatives can be seen functioning as a (not so thinly) veiled critiques on China's territorial disputes with its maritime neighbors in East- and South-China Seas, as well as on China's policies towards its ethnic minorities, especially in Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner-Mongolia.[368]

Although soft tianxiaists agree that China's traditional tianxia order held many benefits compared to the warring states systems of the West, they claim that the modernized, centrally led and hierarchic tianxia proposed by Zhao Tingyang and other hard tianxiaists is essentially an imperial construct, which has no place in the modern world of sovereign states. Dreaming of the world remade according to this imperial image is, in the words of Xu Jilin, utter utopistic nonsense.[369] Li Mingming, has suggested in a similar fashion that

> 赞同用帝国模式来治理世界, 不过要用中国的"天下"来思考帝国和构建帝国。 他在某种程度上复活了中国传统中天下一统的世界秩序,并希望以此来构建一个"世界制度"来取代西方国家主导的主权国家体系.

> [Zhao Tingyang's tianxia-system] approves the imperial model for governing the world, but applies the Chinese term of "tianxia" to think about empires and to establish an empire. He wants to resurrect China's traditional, unified tianxia world order, and through establishing a "world institution" to replace the Western system of sovereign states.[370]

For Li, the Chinese term 'tianxia' is applied merely to conceal the essentially imperial nature of the system and such a system is no more relevant under conditions of increasingly multipolar and globalized world.[371] Bai Tongdong furthermore argues that when observed from a strictly institutional perspective, the Western Zhou dynasty tianxia-system that Zhao endorses is not at all as 'unique' as Zhao would like us to believe:

> 如果西周的天下体系的创制能够指导我们的实践的话，其结论似乎是要通过一个国家（或者国家群体）去征服世界，并将其理念强加给世界，而不接受这种强制的，将被定义为蛮夷，最终要被精神上或者肉体上消灭.

> If the tianxia system of the Western Zhou shall guide our practice, then the conclusion is that the world should be conquered by one state (or a group of states), which should impose its own philosophical system upon the world. Those states, which

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367   See Xu 2015b; Xu & Bai & Li 2015.
368   See for example Chong 2015.
369   Xu 2015b.
370   Li 2011, 114.
371   Ibid.

would not yield, would be defined as barbarians, and they would eventually be either physically or spiritually extinguished.[372]

While criticizing the imperial project of the hard tianxiaists, soft tianxiaists assert that the currently existing system based on sovereign states is too well established and too deeply ingrained to be completely overturned. For soft tianxiaists, the system of states is hence seen as an unavoidable starting point for tianxiaist theoretization. The system, in addition, is not seen by the soft tianxiaist thinkers as malign and chaotic as the hard tianxiaists claim. Chong Ming, for example, points out that the emergence of nation states has basically delegitimized war and most other forms of aggressive use of military force. The system of nation states has also – at least in principle – extinguished differences between small and large states, as well as hierarchies between different ethnicities and races, and even disbanded global colonial empires.[373] Soft tianxiaists, therefore, range from ambivalent to sympathetic in their attitudes towards sovereign states and the international system based on them.

While the system of states is in essence supportable, soft tianxiaists argue that it should be enhanced or complemented with ideas and concepts from China's tianxia cosmology. Particularly the nationalist and racist elements of the system should be replaced with more tolerant and worldly tianxiaist values, or in the case of Bai Tongdong, Confucian values. Li Mingming has summarized these ideas so that while the institutional system of governance of the tianxia (政道, *zhengdao*) with its imperial and hierarchic structures should be discarded, its philosophical essence (治道, *zhidao*) should not.[374]

What this tianxianization of the international order would entail when brought from the level of high abstraction down to actual practice, is a murkier issue. Most soft tianxiaists remain vague and obscure on the exact details of this new tianxia of sovereign states. There are, however, some scholars who have proposed at least initial, pre-theoretical frameworks of such an tianxiaist international order, and it is worthwhile to provide the ideas of Li Mingming, Bao Jianyun and especially Bai Tongdong as examples.

Li Mingming introduces the concept of 'tianxia of commonly governed cooperation' (合作共治的天下, *hezuogongzhi de tianxia*). With the concept Li proposes a middle ground between the extremes of the 'warring states' condition and a hierarchic and imperial tianxia order. Current international order, for Li, is not a chaotic world (乱世, *luanshi*) that would require a dominating central institution, and the prevailing historical mega-trends seem to point towards increasing multilateral cooperation. In Li's 'commonly governed tianxia', nation states would retain full sovereignty in both their domestic and foreign affairs, yet they would cooperate through a dense network of multilateral institutions, and the European Union serves a functioning example of such a 'governance without a government' (没有政府的

Bai 2019.
Chong 2015.
See Li 2011.

治理, *meiyou zhengfude zhili*).[375] Although sovereign states are thus accepted as a foundation for Li's commonly governed tianxia, certain Western values and ideational structures ingrained in the current system should be complemented or replaced by tianxiaist concepts.

Tianxiaism could, according to Li for instance, provide the world a new and more humane conception of international ethics. Li argues that the current international order is based on Western individualist and self-centered ethics, of which, Li mentions as exemplars such realist thinkers as Hans Morgenthau and John Mearsheimer. Li claims that in the Chinese traditional philosophy, individualist conduct is transformed through correct ethical education, and in a larger scale, political systems should be ruled in a virtuous and humane manner. By bringing this notion of 'virtuous rule' (德治, *dezhi*) into the consciousness of the wider international community, ethical grounding of the international order could be perfected. For Li, tianxiaism could bolster the tolerance of the international order towards difference. Tianxia, according to Li was tolerant and broad-minded towards cultural, ideological and religious difference, something that the current order, based on Western oppositional binaries (二元对立, *eryuan duili*) is not. Li's commonly governed tianxia would thus attempt to harmonize the differences between different cultural and ideological groupings by applying the ancient tianxiaist principle of 'harmony without sameness' (和而不同).[376]

All in all, Li's tianxia of 'commonly governed cooperation' does not provide a systematic blueprint for governing the world, but merely proposes certain minor additions to the already established order at the level of its values. However, when presenting the tianxiaist values, Li relies on the archetypal China-West -dichotomy and its Occidental and essentialized 'strawman' figure of the West as an individualist and intolerant civilization, for which political thought consists of Machiavellian realism. What is left in the end, is the international order of today, which would be supplanted by thinly described 'Chinese values', that, to the contrary of being uniquely Chinese, have their counterparts in the established theoretical traditions of political philosophy and world politics. In the end, the difference between 'tianxia of commonly governed cooperation' and for example, the plethora of liberal institutionalist theories (see subsection 4.3.2.) remains hard to establish.

Somewhat similarly vague is the model of 'public tianxiaism' (公共天下主义, *gongong tianxiazhuyi*) proposed by Bao Jianyun, which attempts to distance itself from both the centrally led hard tianxia models and from the concept of 'new tianxia' (such as Xu Jilin proposes).[377] Public tianxia, Bao suggests, would similarly build on the existing system of nation states but it would accept all cultures and nationalities within it. No single nation, state or a part of

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[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid. On 'harmony without sameness' see subsection 3.3.2.
[377] See Bao 2016. Bao also calls his model 'public cosmopolitanism' (公共世界主义, *gonggong shijiezhuyi*) and 'neo-classical tianxiaism' (新古典天下注意, *xin gudian tianxiazhuyi*).

the world could hijack the meaning or ideological essence of the public tianxia, and the system should be collectively governed by the 'people of tianxia' (天下人, *tianxia ren*). Similarly, all the resources and benefits of the world should be equally enjoyed and shared between the people of tianxia. Beyond these abstract guidelines it remains unclear, for instance, what kind of institutions should be established or what the level of sovereignty of the nation states would be. Bao seems to discard ideas of hierarchy and a central world institution, but at the same time claims that the people of tianxia should be able to govern themselves in a cosmopolitan manner. Indeed, whereas Li's 'commonly governed tianxia' is reminiscent of the theories of liberal institutionalism, the distinction of the public tianxia compared to already well established and thickly theorized models of cosmopolitanism (see subsection 4.3.3.) is hard to notice.[378]

Finally, there is the model of 'Confucian new tianxiaism' (儒家新天下主义, *rujia xin tianxiazhuyi*) introduced by Bai Tongdong, which is perhaps the most systematic and elaborate of the soft tianxiaist models. Confucian new tianxiaism draws its inspiration from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States eras of China's history (c. 771–254 b.c.e. See subsection 2.1.1.), during which China was divided into competing, sovereign states. For Bai, this era had many similarities with the early modern European, and later global modernity (i.e. strictly delineated territorial states, market economies), and it could be seen as 'modern' in its own sense. Therefore also the ideational and institutional solutions that the philosophers of this era were suggesting could be applied in our current circumstances of global warring states.[379] Since the Warring States era was ridden with war, violence and cunning political machinations, Bai does does not view it as an ideal golden era in the same manner as Zhao Tingyang values the Western Zhou. He simply claims that the Confucian theories that attempted to pacify the warring states – especially those of Mengzi – hold universally applicable solutions for pacifying the global warring states of today.[380]

As for other soft tianxiaists, the current international order with sovereign states also remains the starting point for Bai, although the social glue that holds the modern states together (shared conceptions of nationality, race and bloodline) should be reformed according to Confucian principles of graded benevolence. Bai claims that an archetypal Confucian state is a politico-cultural community, which emphasizes cultural norms instead of racial or national elements. Confucian polity is based on benevolence towards ones own countrymen, but benevolence is not 'universal love' (兼爱, *jianai*) and equality towards everyone. Benevolence must have gradience and fade as it distances from its center towards the outside. Similar logic applies to international politics: instead of universal love of the mankind (as the 'no outside' principle of Zhao Tingyang would attest), states should prioritize their immediate

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[378]   Ibid.
[379]   On Bai's notion that the Spring and Autumn and Warring States eras should be seen as representing 'modernity', see Bai 2012, 16–27.
[380]   On Mencian philosophy and conception of international politics, see Kallio 2020.

interests and take care of their own citizens first, and only then would their benevolence radiate towards other states. Such gradience does not mean indifference: a Confucian state cares about the whole world, but has priorities in its care.[381] Through such reconceptualization of the state, Bai claims, peaceful relations between states can be established while retaining patriotism (but not nationalism) towards ones own community, while holding responsibility towards the larger globe at the same time.

For Bai, such states, which follow the ways of 'humane governance' (仁, *ren*) are called the 'civilized states' (华夏, *Huaxia* or 文明, *wenming*). Although Bai uses the ancient Chinese concept of *Huaxia* to signify the group of civilized states, he is quick to point out that they do not have to be Confucian and even less ethnically Chinese. Bai's modern rendition of the concept is strictly 'cultural' and can include any state, which is ruled in a humane and benevolent way, and which protects the basic human rights of its citizens. In the Confucian new tianxia, these civilized states should establish a tianxiaist alliance, which would protect the cultural and humane achievements of mankind. The institutional structure of this alliance of the civilized states is not defined, but again, the European Union and Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) are mentioned as inspiring examples. As other soft tianxiaist models, the tianxia alliance would not have any leading central institution, but Bai proposes in a rather cryptic sense that 'humane governance' should serve as the center of the alliance, perhaps as an ideational glue or a code of conduct to be voluntarily followed.[382]

All other states, such as authoritarian states, which would not bestow basic human rights for their peoples, or states in complete disarray, would be left outside of the tianxiaist alliance and defined as barbarians (蛮夷, *man yi*). The alliance would defend the civilization against the incursions of the barbarian states, while also attempting to aid them in becoming members of the civilization. The alliance would have military forces for self defense, but military interventions against gross violations of human rights within the barbarian states are allowed.[383]

Central questions for the Confucian new tianxia remains who defines what makes a 'civilized state', what are 'humane governance' or 'basic human rights'.[384] As long as these concepts have loose and abstract definitions as in Bai's writings, Confucian new tianxia could already exist: the liberal core of the international order could be defined as the 'Huaxia civilization' and other states outside it as 'barbarian' states.

Even though Bai's Confucian new tianxia model has a more systematical development than other soft tianxiaist models and it even presents certain steps to be taken towards its establishment, the system remains – just as Li Mingming's and Bao Jianyun's systems – superficially described compared to

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[381] Bai 2019. See also Bai 2019b, 187–206.
[382] Bai 2019. Bai 2014.
[383] Bai 2019. Bai 2014.
[384] Interestingly Bai claims that it remains an open question whether the People's Republic of China belongs into this group of civilized states. See Bai 2019.

the various theories of liberal institutionalism and cosmopolitanism already in existence.[385] As an example one could point to John Rawls's theory on the Law of the peoples, which suggests in an analogous manner the establishment of a union of 'decent peoples' (i.e. *huaxia*), which is set against 'burdened societies' (i.e. barbarians). Besides Rawls, various other theoretical ideas from the liberal canon, for example the 'benevolent empires' of the 19th century come close to Bai's new tianxiaism. (See subsection 4.3.2.) The question therefore remains, what is new, what is especially Confucian and what is tianxia other than an attempt to reframe established theories of international politics by applying Chinese terminology?

To summarize, except for Bai Tongdong, soft tianxiaists do not offer systematic and deeply theorized liberal variants of the tianxia order. Generally soft tianxiaist arguments attempt merely to complement the existing international order with certain Chinese values, which are however vaguely defined and do not appear as unique as they are claimed to be. Furthermore, it is not even the aim of the soft tianxiaists to completely remold the international system, or to claim absolute superiority of Chinese concepts. Taken together, soft tianxiaist models do not, at least in their current state of development, provide enough theoretical substance for a comparative study and a closer reading of such ideas is left outside of this dissertation.

4.3   Established theories

Removing the soft tianxiaist theories from the actual comparison, the focus of the chapter returns to the hard model proposed by Zhao Tingyang. Rather than merely complementing the established system of sovereign states with Chinese ideas, Zhao's hard tianxia presents itself as an innovative and unique system of world politics, completely different from any other, and especially Western systems of global governance. This draft model and its central concepts will next be compared to the theories of hegemonic stability, liberalism and cosmopolitanism.

4.3.1   Hegemony and tianxia

'Hegemony' may seem like an ill-suited concept for comparisons with the tianxia system since the claim that tianxia is specifically an anti-hegemonic and anti-imperialist system is at the core of all tianxiaist arguments. Zhao claims that:

> 世界秩序不是某个霸权国家或列强联盟统治世界的秩序，而是以世界共同利益为准的世界主权秩序；不是一国为世界建立的游戏规则，而是世界为所有国家建立的游戏规则.

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[385]   Indeed, Liu Qing does not bother to define his ideas as tianxiaism but as 'new cosmopolitanism' (新世界主义, *xin shijiezhuyi*). See Liu 2015.

> A world order is not some hegemon or an alliance of great powers ruling the world. It is a 'world sovereignty order', which takes the interest of the world as its criterion. It is not 'rules' set to the world by one country, but rules set to all countries by the world.[386]

Zhao claims that framing tianxia as a hegemonic system is merely a product of Western 'China threat' theories, and of the Western anxiety as its monopoly on global values is facing a superior concept.[387] But is this simply a play with words? The concept of 'hegemony' stripped of any moral value judgments or normative connotations in basic terms points to an international order with a militarily or otherwise strong, balancing central force.[388] Adam Watson, for instance, describes hegemony bluntly as

> some power or authority in a system [that] is able to 'lay down the law' about the operation of the system, that is to determine to some extent the external relations between member states, while leaving them domestically independent.[389]

Zhao's actual description of the Zhou era tianxia system, as well as its modern rendition, although using different language, has more than a few similarities with models and concepts developed by the theorists of hegemonic stability.

Discussions on the role of hegemonic leadership within international systems emerged during the late 1970's and early 1980's. At that time the leading position of the United States was estimated to be in decline, and new, economically strong actors such as Japan and Germany were seen to rise as its potential challengers and as the Vietnam war seemed to have exposed the limitations of US military power.[390] Studies on hegemony and hegemonic world systems were done in various different disciplines, which, although not all using the concept of hegemony, were interested in the dynamics of centralized systems larger than nation states. Immanuel Wallerstein's 'world systems theory', for example, understood nation states as mere cogwheels in the larger machinery of the 'world system'. Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and fall of great powers* examined historical empires to explain the structural reasons behind their rise and decline.[391]

Within the discipline of international relations, hegemonic stability theories (HST) built on the premises of realism and accepted its assumptions on the prevalence of military and economic power in international politics.[392] For the hegemonic stability theorists, however, international anarchy and the balance of power are not seen as dominant configurations as neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz would argue. For Waltz, hierarchy, while constantly present within the domestic politics of states, seldom appears in international politics.[393]

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[386]   Zhao 2016, 211.
[387]   Zhao 2008, 85.
[388]   For a history of the concept of 'hegemony' in the discipline of international relations see Colás 2016.
[389]   Watson 1992, 15.
[390]   Wyatt-Walter 1996.
[391]   Kennedy 1989. Wallerstein 2011.
[392]   Wohlfort 2011.
[393]   The basic tenets of neorealism were influentially expressed in Waltz 1979.

To the contrary, the HST theorists claim that during most historical eras international orders have formed hierarchically around certain powerful states or groups of states – hegemons – which have stabilized the anarchic power conflicts among the *secondary states*.

Theories of hegemonic stability can be either strictly analytic or they can include normative assumptions on the desirability of the hegemonic system. Michael Webb and Stephen Krasner have described them similarly as the 'security variant' and the 'collective goods variant' of the hegemonic stability theory.[394] The former, analytic strand of HST, represented by such scholars as Robert Gilpin, takes no sides on the desirability of global hegemony but merely sees the rise and fall of hegemons as objective historical reality, perhaps almost a law of international politics. Gilpin, in his 1981 *War and Change in World Politics* claims that all international systems have a propensity "to evolve in the direction of a universal empire".[395]

The normative strands of HST on the other hand, represented by such scholars as Charles Kindleberger, John Ruggie or John Ikenberry (see subsection 4.3.2.) claim that the presence of a strong hegemon within the international order is preferable or even required for an international order to function. Hegemony – although the word itself bears somewhat negative connotations also in most Western languages – does not have to be tyrannical in nature. It can also be benign and responsible towards its inferiors, just like the vaguely described central institution of tianxia.

Kindleberger's major argument goes that the economic crisis of the late 1920's and the rise of ultra-nationalist states eventually leading to the Second World War, were caused by the lack of a strong hegemon within the international order.[396] The hegemon is thus needed for providing certain public goods for the international order and, as an economic historian, Kindleberger puts emphasis on such goods as

> a steady if not counter-cyclical flow of capital, and a re-discount mechanism for providing liquidity when the monetary system is frozen in panic. [...] The world leadership must also manage, in some degree, the structure of foreign-exchange rates and provide a degree of coordination of domestic monetary policies.[397]

A world government would technically serve the same function as the hegemonic state, but Kindleberger sees it as too utopian. Instead he proposes that the position of hegemon should be held by the most powerful state within the system. It has to be very powerful compared to other states since "a world of Denmarks is as unstable as a world of Prussias".[398]

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[394] Webb & Krasner 1989. Andrew Wyatt-Walter has further divided the hegemonic stability theories also into the versions of 'neorealist' and 'neoliberal' theories. See Wyatt-Walter 1996, 128.
[395] Gilpin 1981, 27–30.
[396] Kindleberger 1981. See also Kindleberger 1986, 289–305.
[397] Kindleberger 1981, 248.
[398] Ibid. 253

Kindleberger goes on to claim that the hegemon needs to continue providing the public goods even as the secondary states denounce it as an 'exploiter' or as some free-riding states attempt to benefit from its position. The hegemon needs to understand the larger good of the system, especially the fact, that the erosion of its power would be worse for all, and would follow a "long, drawn-out, and dangerous process of establishing a new basis of legitimacy, under a new leader."[399]

This 'dangerous process' for Gilpin is a recurring theme in history since his theory proposes that hegemonies have always risen after hegemonic wars, in which power is redistributed among the great powers. The position and legitimacy of the hegemon in the international order is thereby based on its superior military and economic power, but also on its *prestige*, by which Gilpin means its universally recognized and admired capability for wielding its power. Gilpin thus puts the emphasis on hard power, but also mentions that the hegemon always supports its position with a "religion or ideology that justifies its domination over other states in the system".[400]

Gilpin mentions religion and ideology as a source of the hegemon's power but other theorists, such as Robert Cox, have developed the idea further, building on so called 'neo-gramscian' ideas. For Cox, the hegemonic state

> would have to found and protect a world order, which was universal in conception, i.e., not an order in which one state directly exploits others but an order, which most other states (or at least those within reach of the hegemony) could find compatible with their interests.[401]

For Cox, material power and 'direct exploitation' has never in history been enough for a hegemonic system to be established. Instead, world hegemonies establish their position by – using Gramscian terms – exporting the national (domestic) hegemony of the 'dominating class' beyond their borders, after which "the economic and social institutions, the culture, the technology associated with this national hegemony become patterns for emulation abroad."[402] Through international institutions it has established, the hegemony will expand and solidify the position of its ideology, norms and its worldview, while the secondary states of the system will passively integrate themselves within the order.

A similar idea, although coming from a completely different perspective and focusing mostly on the aspects of political economy, was proposed by John Ruggie, who defined the post-war liberal hegemony of the West as 'embedded liberalism'. According to Ruggie, the regimes established under the hegemony form an "intersubjective framework of meaning", which is based on shared assumptions and values of their members. International authority (hegemony)

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[399]   Ibid. 252.
[400]   Gilpin 1981, 30.
[401]   Cox 1993, 61.
[402]   Ibid.

is thus always "a fusion of power and legitimate social purpose" and the exact nature of the hegemonic order is left open for social construction.[403]

With these parameters a multitude of different hegemonic orders with varying mixes of power, prestige and ideology can be described; from *pax Romana* and *pax Americana* to the medieval Islamic caliphate at its mightiest. Tianxia system, as described by Zhao, would also fit within these parameters quite well: its 'central institution' is the militarily most powerful unit within the order, expecting unquestioned loyalty from the secondary units while allowing them considerable autonomy in their domestic issues. Tianxia is arguably based on its moral supremacy and on its attractive nature, and on the central institution's untiring efforts for the benefit of the world, but as seen, the hegemonic stability theorists by no means disqualify the possibility of such a hegemony. Cox, indeed, describes such universal aspiration as a necessary ingredient for a functioning hegemony. A militarily weak, but ideationally strong and attractive hegemony is perhaps rather unlikely but still possible within the bounds of the hegemonic stability theory.

In fact the hegemonic stability theorists such as Gilpin would likely interpret the Western Zhou system exactly as another hegemonic order, which stabilized the international system around it, and which – precisely as the theory would predict – collapsed after its material power and prestige waned. Even if a truly harmonious, open and worldly tianxia existed during the Western Zhou (which, as we know is highly unlikely), it would still fit the definition of the HST rather well. Since Gilipin's theory sees the history of international politics as developing through unending cycles of rises and declines of hegemons, the model also explains the developments within China's history, in which the ruling imperial dynasties (i.e. hegemons) have been rising and declining in succession.

From the point of view of HST, terms such as 'world institution' and 'tianxia system' would be a play on words, and attempts to redefine a phenomenon that has occurred for millennia with new names. In light of the HST, the tianxia system would seem like a hegemonic order, which relies more on the ideational aspects of power (prestige and ideology) than on hard power, but which would be supported by a strong military, since the world institution would still possess the biggest military forces of the world. It is reminiscent of the more benign type of a Kindlebergian hegemon, which holds the global perspective (world interest) in its view.

Although the new tianxia would not be dominated by any ideology, it would transform the Western ideas of 'international' and 'individual rationality' into tianxiaist ideas of 'worldliness' and 'relational rationality'. But how would this represent anything except another form of a neo-Gramscian ideological hegemony forced upon the rest of the world by the world institution?

[403]   Ruggie 1982, 380, 385.

4.3.2   Liberal hegemony and tianxia

The word *liberalism* (自由主义, *ziyouzhuyi*) is not well received within Chinese academic discourses as it bears connotations to democracy and human rights, and such concepts are not currently supported by the Communist Party of China. Tianxiaism has thus never been defined using liberalists concepts or presented as a liberal theory, but at its essence, tianxia system seems like a liberal arrangement. For example, even though tianxia is dominated by a strong central institution, its member-states enjoy considerable autonomy and membership in the system is voluntary. No ideological orthodoxy is forced upon the members of the tianxia either, and the order supports multiculturalism and diversity of ideas – i.e. liberalism.

Roots of liberalist thinking in international relations go back to at least such thinkers as Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Adam Smith (1723–1790). The basic idea is to establish an international order, in which both the individuals as well as their representatives, the sovereign states, would enjoy as much 'liberty' [404] as possible. While protecting the liberty of everyone, liberal institutions and deepening economic relations would tie the states together in interdependent networks of trade and diplomacy, and a peaceful and stable international order would be achieved, optimally without the visible hand of the hegemon, but with the invisible hand of the market.

Liberalist thinking has, however, also involved understanding and even preference towards hegemonic orders. Liberal thinkers of the 19th century such as John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Richard Cobden (1804–1865) and John Bright (1811–1889), for example, proposed that a benevolent 'liberal imperial order' is actually required as it is helping to lift the lower races from poverty and towards civilization.[405] Even such a vociferously anti-imperialist liberal thinker as John A. Hobson developed and endorsed a model of 'liberal internationalism', in which a strong central government would be established for distributing the benefits in a fair manner.[406]

The wide spectrum of liberalist theories of international politics can thus be seen as possessing various ideas, which the tianxiaists present as unique inventions of the Chinese civilization. Modern theories of liberal institutionalism are more ambiguous on the need of a hegemonic center within the international order. Robert Keohane, for example in his *After Hegemony*, argued that a stable and cooperative international order can be established with or without the help of a hegemonic center, but it can be sustained through enduring 'regimes' even if the hegemonic center declines from power.[407]

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[404]   Liberty is a problematic concept and can be divided into the forms of 'negative liberty' and 'positive liberty' in which the former means roughly lack of restrictions while the latter puts emphasis on the possibilities of reaching ones full potential as a human being. In this chapter the former, 'negative' meaning is emphasized.
[405]   Hobson 2012, 33–58.
[406]   See Hobson 1915. See also Long 1996.
[407]   Keohane 2005. See also Keohane 2002.

John Ikenberry has developed a 'constitutional model' of liberal institutionalism – to some degree reminiscent of Keohane's model of regimes –, which could be seen as a liberal variant of the hegemonic stability theory. Hegemonic stability theories understand the history of world politics evolving through a cyclical process of recurring hegemonic wars without any necessary progress to be observed. In his *After Victory*, published in 2001, Ikenberry agrees with such a cyclical nature of history and supports the notion that a hegemon is indeed necessary for a stable international order to be established. But Ikenberry asserts that the newly established hegemon can wield its powerful position in various ways, and therefore various different configurations of hegemonic orders have existed throughout the history of world politics and the "actual character of international order has varied across eras and order building moments"[408].

During the modern era, Ikenberry argues, international hegemonic settlements have developed towards increasingly advanced, democratic and multilateral institutional structures. From the Concert of Nations of 1815 to the League of Nations of 1919, and finally, to the establishment of the liberal international order after the Second World War in 1945, Ikenbrry claims, "it is possible to see growth in the sophistication and centrality of institutions as tools used by great powers – particularly democracies – for restraining and managing power and shaping international order."[409]

Ikenberry divides international orders roughly into three main categories: balance of power orders (anarchies), hegemonic orders and constitutional orders. A pivotal function of all of these orders is to balance and restrict the ambitions of the great powers by: 1. distributing their power and territory, 2. by building counterbalancing alliances, or 3. by establishing multilateral institutions and other forms of supranational cooperation.[410]

A balance of power order can develop into a hegemony, described by Ikenberry in terms very similar to Gilpin as an order, in which one or few great powers are in a militarily or economically dominant position. But a hegemonic order can in its turn develop into a *constitutional* order, in which the *leading state*, instead of applying brute coercion, will tie the *secondary states* into its orbit through rule-based institutions and regimes. If the hegemon has a long-term perspective, it can establish a constitutional order, which can be sustained even after the hegemon's own position has considerably declined.[411] This is almost precisely in line with how Zhao Tingyang claims the Western Zhou court established the tianxia through 'governing the big with the small' (一小治大, *yi xiao zhi da*).

By negotiating the nature of the order and of its institutions with the secondary states, the leading state will cede some of its power to the international community, but will, at the same time, achieve a more stable and

408   Ikenberry 2018, 3; Ikenberry 2001; Ikenberry 2006b.
409   Ikenberry 2018, 4. See also Schweller 2019.
410   Ikenberry 2001, 21–49.
411   Ikenberry 2001. 50–69.

lasting position within the order. Ikenberry calls this the policy of 'strategic restraint'. Although a formal constitution might not be written for the international order, there exists a shared framework of rules and institutions, which can be understood in a constitutional manner.[412] Sustainability of the constitutional order is based on the ability of the leading state to appear legitimate and trustworthy in the eyes of the secondary states. The leading state, therefore, has to remain open, transparent and predictable, and it will have to 'tie itself down with the order'. In economic terms, the leading state has to 'bond' with the international community in a similar sense as a corporation will have to bond with its shareholders or financiers.[413]

Ikenberry does not categorically rule out authoritarian states acting as the leading state, but argues that leading states with democratic governments are more predictable as their policy processes are more transparent than of those in authoritarian states. If an authoritarian state – let us say current China – would rise to become the leading state of the constitutional order, as long as it can open up to the international community and bond with it in a predictable manner, Ikenberry's theory does not dismiss such possibility.

Although Ikenberry's constitutional model can be argued to explain (and recommend) the policies of the United States during and after the Cold War, its pure theoretical core has many similarities with the tianxia order described by Zhao. The tianxia is supposed to be an order so 'attractive' (诱惑, *youhuo*) that all under Heaven will be enticed into joining it, but this is also at the essence of Ikenberry's constitutional order: it and its institutional structure offer more incentives for the states for joining it than being outside of it, yet it is also not mandatory to become a member. Furthermore, the concept of 'attractiveness' that Zhao uses seems practically identical to the concept of 'soft power' developed by another liberal thinker, Joseph Nye. Nye describes soft power as "getting the outcomes one wants by attracting others rather than manipulating their material incentives", which is exactly what the tianxia's central institution is arguably doing.[414]

The central institution of tianxia, just as the leading state of the constitutional order, obtains its legitimacy through its predictable and fair conduct, and neither the central institution of tianxia nor the leading state of Ikenberry's constitutional order are motivated only by their own interests, but would look after the order as a whole. The leading state and the world institution both follow a form of strategic restraint in their models of governance, and allow the secondary states considerable level of autonomy. The only notable difference between the two models concerns the democratic ideological system that Ikenberry endorses, but which Zhao's tianxia shuns. However, a raw theoretical model of the constitutional order, as envisioned by Ikenberry, does not have to be based on liberal or democratic values as long as

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[412] Ibid. Ikenberry compares the hegemonic and constitutional orders to their counter-parts in domestic politics: hegemony is analogous to an authoritarian state, while constitutional order is analogous to a liberal democracy.

[413] Ikenberry 2001, 50–69. See also Ikenberry 2006.

[414] See Nye 2008, 29.

it works. Ikenberry simply argues that it is more likely to work with democracies.

In many places, Zhao continuously describes the prevailing international order as an 'imperial' order:

> 曾经支配世界或仍在支配世界的帝国都只有国家理念和国家利益，都把帝国看作世界的统治者，而把懒得分别看待的"世界其他地方"看作被统治地域。即使其国内政治具有合法性，它们所建立的世界游戏规则却从来没有政治合法性，因为帝国主义世界观把世界看成被统治的对象，从来没有把世界看作政治主体

> The empires, which ruled the world in the past as well as in the present possessed only the concepts of state rationality and state interest. They saw the empire as the ruler of the world, and 'other parts of the world' as regions of domination. Though the empires were seen as legitimate in their domestic policies, the rules they imposed upon the world were never seen as legitimate. This is because imperialism sees the world as an object of rule, never as an active subject of politics.[415]

But the optimal constitutional hegemony Ikenberry is describing has obtained international legitimacy for its rule and established a sort of a world constitution. The existing liberal order established by the United States has not obtained this legitimacy throughout the whole world – and might never able to do so – but at the theoretical level the system could be expanded to become globally accepted.[416] By then, the conceptual difference between a new tianxia would be difficult to establish.

Comparison works the other way around too: just as the hegemonic stability theory would explain the tianxia system of the Western Zhou as simply another hegemonic order, the constitutional theory of Ikenberry could be used to define it as an example of a functioning constitutional order. The Son of Heaven served as the leading state of the order, and after winning the hegemonic contest with the Shang dynasty, it established a constitutional arrangement with the secondary states. It ruled the realm through 'strategic restraint', applying coercion only when necessary, and gained power over the realm through its well established institutions – the system of 'rites' (礼, *li*).

4.3.3 John Rawls, and the tianxia of ordered societies

The democratic nature of the constitutional order does not have to become the problem, however, since not all liberal models emphasize democratic governance. For example, John Rawls, although also representing the liberal tradition has proposed an interesting theoretical initiative, which differs considerably from the liberal institutionalist models. During the latter half of his career, Rawls, who is better known as a theorist of social justice, strove to

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[415] Zhao 2019b.
[416] Randall Schweller, arguing against Ikenberry, claims that multilateral institutions have never actually hindered United States' unilateral policies, and therefore a true 'constitutional arrangement' has never been fully realized. With the Donald Trump presidency, even the last remnants of the liberal order are being extinguished and the system is developing towards an openly 'illiberal hegemony'. See Schweller 2019. For Ikenberry's response to such criticisms, see Ikenberry 2018.

establish a philosophically waterproof theory of international justice. Explained in detail in Rawls 1993 work, *The Law of Peoples*, the model defends liberal democratic principles within individual states, without requiring the international order to be based on them. In this work, Rawls aims to develop a model of international justice stripped of overtly utopian precepts, or as he himself describes it, a 'realist utopia'.

At the core of Rawls' philosophy is the realistically grounded notion that the political world is, and will remain a diverse and heterogeneous place. Therefore the cultural and ideological diversity of the world is not something that should be transformed or changed, but a fundamental condition to be recognized and from which to begin. In *Political Liberalism* Rawls argued that liberal societies should allow religious, cultural and ideological diversity within them as long as the members of the society agree to respect each others' differences and support the democratic political system of the society. Rawls thus distinguishes *political liberty* – the ability to voice opinions and influence politics – from *ethical liberty*, which is the ability to do as one pleases without hindrances.[417]

Rawls takes the same fundamental idea of diversity into his theory of international politics. On a global scale, Rawls divides the peoples[418] into four categories: ordered societies, which include 'liberal democracies' and 'decent hierarchical peoples', and then less ordered societies, namely 'outlaw states' and 'burdened societies'. Although Rawls believes that democracy is the best form of governance in the long term, the ordered societies do not have to be democracies as long as their societies are able to provide certain elementary rights for their peoples. Rawls argues that the well-ordered peoples will have to establish a voluntary union or alliance, which will be a politically and culturally diverse group and which will not have any universally shared ideological orthodoxies except a shared respect for certain basic rights of their citizens.[419]

The union helps the burdened societies in establishing decent or liberal societies, but it does not dictate their forms of political or social order. It will offer poverty alleviation for cases of extreme need to prevent societal collapse, and if the outlaw states threaten the union, the union is allowed to apply military threat in self-defense. The union is also allowed to intervene in extreme cases of human-rights violations that have taken place within the outlaw states.[420]

Although Rawls' order lacks any strong central institution or hegemony – unless the union itself is seen as a hegemon – the model holds some interesting similarities with Zhao's tianxia system.[421] Both Rawls' union of the decent societies and tianxia are in essence, free orders, which can be joined or parted at will. Both orders also allow considerable cultural and political diversity within

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417 Sihvola 2004, 181–205.
418 In *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls' basic unit of focus is 'people' instead of 'state'.
419 Rawls 1999.
420 Ibid.
421 Similarities with soft tianxiaist models, especially Bai Tongdong's new Confucian tianxia are even more obvious. See subsection 4.2.3.

them, and neither holds an ideological orthodoxy on how the member states are to arrange their societies. Domestic sovereignty of the states is untouchable in both orders. The only precondition for a state to join the union is to reach the level of a decent society, which does not suppress its people. Further, Rawls' union and its distinction with the outlaw states and burdened societies more than resembles tianxia and the regions (barbarians) outside it. Both tianxia and Rawls' union will, through soft power or through their attractiveness, attempt to lure the regions outside for joining them, with the eventual utopia of a peaceful, stable and united world in mind.

4.3.4 Cosmopolis and tianxia

Liberalists are not the only political thinkers who have been inspired by the problematic nature of the 'warring states system' in Europe. Rather it has inspired various strands of political thinkers throughout history. One of the earliest schools of thinkers to problematize dividing the world into different states or groups of people altogether is the tradition of cosmopolitanism, which takes the equality of all human beings as its leading principle. While conducting comparisons with tianxiaism, cosmopolitanism is perhaps the most obvious philosophical match.[422]

The first seeds of cosmopolitan thought can be found among the Cynic and Stoic philosophers of the 4th century b.c.e. Greece, who claimed to represent 'citizens of the universe' (κοσμοπολίτης) instead of any single city state or any other local political entity. The Stoic worldview was based on an assumption that all human beings were essentially similar in their rational capabilities, that the intrinsic value of all individuals should be equally respected, and that consequently, everyone, no matter their origins, should be equally treated. Political organizations could, and should, of course be organized on a local basis, but the interests of mankind as a whole should always guide their political decision-making.[423] This attitude was promoted by perhaps the most famous of the Stoic philosophers, Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius (121–180 c.e.) who stated that

> there is a world-law, which in turn means that we are all fellow-citizens and share a common citizenship, and that the world is a single city.[424]

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[422] Established cosmopolitan theories are not at all unknown, but widely discussed within the Chinese academia. For an interesting comparison of ancient Confucian conceptions of tianxia and stoic cosmopolitanism, see Chen 2016.

[423] Sihvola 2004, 98–111. Hierocles (c. 100 b.c.e), a stoic philosopher about whose's life not much is known, argued that humans imagined their social relations in concentric circles around the self. Within the inner circles were the individual and his/her closest relatives and friends, and at the outmost circle was the mankind as a whole. The task of the individual was to develop his/her virtue and to draw these circles closer to the center. Hierocles's idea interestingly reminds the way tianxiaists describe foreign rela-tions in tianxia as being arranged in a 'structure of concentric circles' (同心圆关系结构, tongxinyuan guanxi jiegou). On Hierocles, see Mitsis 2011. On tianxiaist conception of 'concentric circles', see subsection 3.2.3.

[424] Inglis 2012, 11–25.

Cosmopolitanism of the ancient Greek and Roman world was not mere abstract philosophizing as it found expression also within the writings of 'universal historians', such as Polybius (c. 203–118 b.c.e.) or Plutarch (46–120 c.e.). Both men described a world, which was moving from a world of isolated political units and their particular histories towards a unified world with a commonly shared history. Polybius for example, following the Roman expansion, wrote in a language not so distant from our own era that

> the affairs of Italy and Africa are connected with those of Asia and of Greece, and all events bear a relationship and contribute to a single end.[425]

Plutarch, meanwhile, was comparably excited of how the conquests of Alexander the Great were uniting the known world and how the distinctions between the barbarians and the civilization were slowly withering away. Alexander, according to Plutarch,

> brought together into one body all men everywhere, uniting and mixing […] men's lives, their characters, their marriages, their very habits of life. He bade them all consider as their fatherland the whole inhabited earth.[426]

The ancient cosmopolitans did not envision or attempt to establish a unified world polity, and perhaps, at least for the later cosmopolitans, their vision seemed to have already realized itself in the Roman Empire at some level. The collapse of Rome, however, resurrected the longing for a stable and unified world. Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), who is better known for his epic poems, was one among many lamenting the warring states system raging around him. In his political treatise, *De Monarcia,* Dante argued for the unification of the known world under the leadership of the Holy Roman emperor. For Dante, political units would never cease to compete and fight against each other, and the people would more likely pledge their allegiances to the ruler of the *whole world,* instead of mere regional lords.[427]

European history was developing into the contrary direction, however, and sovereign states became the main units of international politics. In this new era, cosmopolitan ideas found a new home in the minds of political philosophers and international jurists, who were forced to examine the complex relationship of the individuals, who shared a common humanity although living in different, and often competing sovereign states. Francisco de Vitoria (1483–1546), for example, developed the concept of *totus orbi* (whole planet) after witnessing the brutal conquests of the Americas. For de Vitoria all the peoples of the world, notwithstanding their cultural origins, were to be treated equally, since they all shared the same humanity and similar rational capabilities.[428] The influence of cosmopolitanism can also be seen in the first international law theorists, such as Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) who argued that

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[425] Quoted in Inglis 2012
[426] Quoted in Inglis 2012.
[427] Murphy 1998, 1–8.
[428] Inglis 2012, 18.

similar 'natural morality' existed between the states as there was between the individuals. Sovereignty of the states should therefore not be seen as completely unchallenged, and the basic rights of the individuals, Grotius goes on, should be protected in extreme cases even through 'humanitarian interventions' by the other states.[429]

The main ideas of what we call modern cosmopolitanism were laid out by Immanuel Kant who envisioned a cosmopolitan union of liberal republics, united also by a sense of cosmopolitan rights of the individuals.[430] Building on this tradition, 20th century theorists such as Charles Beitz, Thomas Pogge, Seyla Benhabib, Mary Kaldor and David Held have developed ideas and theories, often collectively called a 'cosmopolitan democracy', which can be described as providing a compromise between a strictly centralized world federation and the anarchic battleground of nation states, whose sovereignty is completely untouchable.[431]

The cosmopolitan democratic arguments are based on the obsolescence of the sovereign state as an ultimate unit of world politics – an idea, which was argued by Beitz in his modern classic, *Political theory and international relations (1979)*. Beitz questions (neo)realist theories of international politics, in which international morality is seen as impossible, and in which states' brutal competition for interests is assumed to be inevitable and endless. For Beitz, the international system has developed institutional networks and interdependent relationships to the degree that the international arena could legitimately be said to represent a society – not unlike domestic societies –, in which morality between units is not only possible but necessary, and in which a global system of distributive justice should be established. [432] David Held and Daniele Archibugi follow similar argumentation by asserting that a world order based on only states – even a highly institutionalized liberal order – is no more tenable, since within a globalized world the sovereign states are constantly making decisions, which impact the wider community either regionally or even globally, and are at the same time, under the influence of various regional and global actors outside of their control.[433]

Held describes this evolving condition as 'global politics', in which the traditional demarcations between domestic and the foreign have lost their relevance, and in which even the most fundamental presupposition for the existence of nation states, national security, has taken a multilateral character. Unilateral military action – even initiated by superpowers such as the United States – is becoming untenable while regional security institutions are inceasingly important, and as even the production of military equipment has taken a more globalized nature through networks of subcontractors and co-production agreements. The institutional system of global governance, even

[429]   Sihvola 2004, 142–158.
[430]   Kant 2000. See also Sihvola 2004, 159–180.
[431]   Archibugi 1995.
[432]   Beitz 1979, 35–66.
[433]   Held 1995; Held 2004, 137–143.

though still flawed and limited, has already become a "significant arena in which the struggles over wealth, power and knowledge are taking place."[434]

Therefore for cosmopolitan democrats, world politics, in which the sovereign states are the ultimate actors, has not taken place in a 'warring states' condition for a long time – if ever. Furthermore, current trends of globalization are driving the world farther from such situation. Even though 'global politics' is already a fact of life, individuals remain citizens of their nation states and through current institutions, they do not have control on decisions made outside them. Cosmopolitan democrats argue that democracy needs to be enlarged from the level of the states into regional and global levels.

The central idea in cosmopolitan democracy is – in line with the 'transitivity' of the tianxia – that the citizens should get to decide on different levels of administration (for example city, state, regional and global levels) on the issues of importance, and that the citizenship itself should be expanded to multiple different levels. Democratic institutions at each level would focus only on the issues at their own level while the global level would adopt more 'framework setting' policies.[435] Cosmopolitan democracy thus does not recommend the creation of a world federation or a strong world government in a hard tianxiaist fashion. Instead it proposes the establishment of a decentralized network of democratic institutions, each focusing on the political challenges of its own level.

Out of the large variety of cosmopolitan democratic models and initiatives, a model proposed by David Held and Daniele Archibugi can be taken as a good reference point. On concrete terms, Held and Archibugi argue for the strengthening of regional institutions (such as the European Union or African Union) and for the creation of new ones where they do not exist. They also endorse the establishment of a world parliament, which according to Archibugi, could be most easily developed by enlarging the United Nations with a new, directly elected second chamber. The second chamber, World Citizens' Assembly, would represent the citizens of the world directly, instead of particular states or regions. According to one of the many proposed models of such an institution, the assembly would have deputies for every country roughly proportionate to its population, similar to the parliament of the European Union. For example an assembly of 560 deputies would have 31 deputies from China, and states of less than one million citizens would have one deputy each.[436]

The establishment of the democratic cosmopolis would also require the development of law enforcement and coercive capabilities, which would deal

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[434]   Held 2004, 79. For Held, the War in Iraq has demonstrated amply that even though unilateral military action can still be taken, solutions for pacifying the state after the hostilities have officially ended have forced the United States to seek multilateral co-operation through the United Nations, NATO and through bilateral cooperation agreements with for example Japan and India. See Held 2004, 85–86.

[435]   Held 1995; Held 2004, 114–116.

[436]   Archibugi 1995. See also Held 2004, 107–116.

with regional and global security threats.[437] For Held, it could be a global military force consisting of troops provided by all the member states. During a transitional period, Held proposes, a growing share of states' military forces would be transformed into regional and global military forces with the "ultimate aim of demilitarization and transcendence of the war system."[438]

The draft program of cosmopolitan democracy proposed by Held and Archibugi holds certain similarities with the tianxia system and certainly cherishes 'world interest', which tianxiaist thinkers claim that 'the West' is unable to perceive.[439] Instead of a strong, undemocratic central institution, the system would have various institutions controlled and supervised by the cosmopolites through elections. These institutions would concentrate only on the issues of their own level, and autonomy, if not full sovereignty, of the states and even smaller entities, such as cities, would be protected. Joining this cosmopolitan democracy would be voluntary: Archibugi has proposed that a state could indeed decide to stay out of the world parliament or any other institution without any repercussions other than losing the ability to impact on policies, which will have influence in it. Joining the parliament would require fair democratic elections, which the cosmopolitan democrats hope to further the spread of democracy globally, but which would be strictly against the precepts of tianxia.[440]

4.3.5 Cosmopolitan world government

Emphasis on the democratic process and the lack of a strong central institution are the major, and also rather significant contradictions between democratic cosmopolitanism and tianxiaism. Many cosmopolitan thinkers have considered the establishment of a world government as too utopian or, more importantly, too dangerous, since a world government that would develop into a tyrannical regime would pose a catastrophic scenario for the whole world. Immanuel Kant was among the first thinkers to dismiss the idea of a world government on the basis of a potential world dictatorship. Instead he proposed a peaceful league of free republics, which would be tied together through multilateral institutions and treaties, and the modern democratic cosmopolitanism has followed his lead.[441]

But the cosmopolitan democrats with their decentralized and loose cosmopolis are not the only representatives of the cosmopolitan tradition. To the contrary, for decades many thinkers have theorized a cosmopolitan 'world state', with a strong central government, which would override the sovereignty of the states in a hard tianxiaist fashion. World state-theories were especially in

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[437]   Held 2004, 113.
[438]   Held 1995.
[439]   Held and Archibugi do not necessarily share a common theoretical framework. Held, for instance, defines his own model a 'global social democracy'. See Held 2004. However, their approaches are similar enough to provide a simplified example of democratic cosmopolis for the sake of this chapter.
[440]   Archibugi 1995.
[441]   Kant 2000, 13–46.

vogue during the decades between the two world wars, when political thinkers everywhere were concerned with the question of how to pacify the 'warring states' and to unify the world under a commonly shared peaceful vision. Within the visions of these early 20th century thinkers, the whole function of the sovereign state was challenged. The inventor of the concept of 'anarchy' in the context of international politics, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson himself declared in his book *European Anarchy* (1916) that the sovereign state was at the core of the problems of his era, and that its sovereignty should be limited in place of deepened supernational cooperation.[442]

The problems of reimagining the state and the future of the world order were not pondered only by the scholars of world politics, but were discussed extensively in and outside of academic ivory towers. For example science fiction author H.G. Wells sketched his own model of a 'world state', which would be centrally led by scientifically oriented and morally virtuous 'faculties'. Democracy had no place in Wells' visions as the elitist faculties would not be elected by the population but their members would be chosen based on their merits.[443]

Soon after the Second World War, visions of world federation re-emerged, motivated by the impeding threat of a nuclear holocaust. For instance a highly ambitious Preliminary draft of a world constitution was developed in 1949 by a group of scholars, known as Committee to Frame a World Constitution, working under the support of the University of Chicago. Their proposed constitution suggested a powerful world state for which the highest governing institution, termed the Federal Convention, would be elected through regional constituencies (such as East Europe) instead of states.[444] Around same time, international lawyers Grenville Clark and Louis Sohn, in their 1962 book *World peace through world law* provided a systematic, detailed and perhaps more pragmatic framework for developing the already existing United Nations into a *de facto* world government.[445]

Most such models designed after the Second World War theorized a democratically elected world government, which would hold monopoly on global military power, since, in the words of Clark and Sohn,

> world peace cannot be ensured [...] by a continuous arms race, nor by an indefinite 'balance of terror'.[446]

States would not be able to break away from such a federation, and therefore, the world government would likely end up redistributing global wealth in a drastic manner – for the great loss of the developed Western countries. Such a

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[442] Dickinson 1916. See also Morefield 2013.
[443] Partington 2003.
[444] See Rosenboim 2017, 168–205. The committee was led by Italian author and philosopher Giuseppe Antonio Borgese.
[445] Clark & Sohn 1962. See also Yunker 2014, 5–8.
[446] Clark & Sohn 1962, xv.

redistribution of wealth was still seen at the time as a better option compared to nuclear war and the extinction of human race.[447]

As the Cold War intensified, world government utopias were pushed aside and the 'balance of terror' was accepted as an inescapable foundation of world politics. Models of realism with their gloomy assessments of human nature came to dominate thinking since they served the strategic needs of the great powers well. Dreams of a world state did not die off however, and even such staunch realists as Hans Morgenthau argued that in the long term, only a world state could pacify the clashes of the great powers and effectively implement international law.[448]

In the post-Cold War era, world government has often been deemed as a "utopian dream", a dangerous platform for world totalitarianism, or simply obsolete, since the rapid development of international organizations and regimes has made a central institution unnecessary. The idea is still discussed though, and Alexander Wendt has even argued that in the long run "global monopoly on the legitimate use of organized violence — a world state — is inevitable."[449] The rest of this subsection will review two modern models of world government developed by Torbjörn Tanssjö and James Yunker. Tanssjö's model represents a modern rendition of the strong world federation similar to the post-war visions, while Yunker defends a more loosely arranged, but evolutionary and ambitious world state.

Tanssjö's strong federation is motivated by his criticisms of both the liberal models of international politics, in which sovereign states volunteer to cooperate without any strong central institutions, but also of the decentralized models of cosmopolitan democracy, in which global and regional parliaments would not be able to secure the stability of the system in the long run. Against these models, Tanssjö proposes a full-blown world government, which enjoys ultimate 'world sovereignty', and which is supported by a global parliament.[450]

Tanssjö's world state is strong in the sense that upon its establishment, existing nation states would lose their sovereignty and become somewhat similar to states in federations. It would not be possible to withdraw from the world state and the world government would, thus, obtain full 'world sovereignty'. States and other regional organizations would, of course, retain considerable autonomy over the policies of their own levels, but it would be the world government which would ultimately decide the issues that would be discussed under national jurisdiction, or where, how and through which processes international disputes should be solved.[451]

The world state would be governed by the bicameral Global People's Assembly (GPA), which is quite similar to the governing group proposed by Daniele Archibugi above: the GPA would have a 'house of commons', directly

447   Yunker 2014, 5–8.
448   See Morgenthau 1973.
449   Wendt 2003. On discussions of the world state in contemporary IR, see See Yunker 2014, 20–49.
450   Tanssjö 2008.
451   Tanssjö 2008, 122–133.

elected by the world citizens through regional constituencies, and a 'house of lords', which would consist of representatives of national governments with single vote for each government. The GPA would elect the ministers of the world government, yet certain members appointed by the current great powers would also hold permanent seats in the government, at least in its initial phase. This government would, in a slow process, take charge of the military security as national militaries would be disbanded and the states would begin to enjoy the protection of the world government instead.[452]

A somewhat softer version of the world state has been developed by James Yunker, who is critical of 'omnipotent world states' such as Tanssjö's. Yunker calls his model the 'Federal Union of Democratic Nations'. It would be a 'state entity' with full authority to enact laws, collect taxes and ensure justice within its boundaries. Moreover, the federation would have a capital city and regional offices as well as an anthem, flag and other symbolic emblems of a state. Still, the Federal Union would differ from 'omnipotent world states' in certain important ways. First, all states would be able to join and leave the federal union as they please.[453] Second, selection of the parliament (and the government) of the union would be based on a 'dual vote-system', in which all decisions would have to obtain majority in both the 'popular vote' (based on the share of population) and a 'material vote' (based on material capabilities of the states). Basically the developed nations would be able to veto the decisions of the majority, but similarly, the less developed countries – through popular vote – could veto the decisions of the developed countries. The dual system would provide incentive to rich states for staying in the union, but the long term objective of the federation would be to diminish the difference between material and popular votes through a massive global development project known as The World Economic Development Program. The economic development project, together with the prosperous free trade area of the federation would also effectively lure non-member states to joining the union.[454]

Another central difference to omnipotent world states is the right of the member states to their own military forces (including nuclear weapons). The long term objective, however, would be similar to other cosmopolitan models, dissolution of the national armies and the establishment of a global military force – the Union Security Force. According to Yunker:

> If the world government develops as hoped, member nations would gradually feel more and more secure, and would correspondingly — and voluntarily — reduce their military spending and their arms stockpiles.[455]

Yunker sees the establishment of the federal union as an evolutionary project, which also requires patient development of 'supernational patriotism' towards the union. Psychological and symbolic aspects are therefore as important as the

[452] Tanssjö 2008, 92–110.
[453] For a short but detailed introduction of the Federal Union of Democratic Nations, see Yunker 2014, 83–106.
[454] Ibid.
[455] Yunker 2014, 11.

cold and dry institutional structures. Yunker suggests, for example, that the capital of the federation should be an attractive and awe-inspiring place:

> In addition to the usual imposing public buildings, the capital city should contain numerous superior tourist attractions: museums, theaters, a botanical garden, a zoo, and perhaps a major amusement park along the lines of Disneyworld.[456]

The essential structural differences between Tannsjö's and Yunker's world states have to do with the level of sovereignty of the member states: Tanssjö's state is like the United States enlarged to a global level, whereas Yunker's model is more like a global version of European Union, with the ability to leave and continue as an independent, sovereign state. Notwithstanding their differences, both models have obvious similarities with the tianxia. Both include a strong central institution with 'world sovereignty' over any other smaller entities. Yunker's Federation, just like Zhao's tianxia, is an open union, which can be joined and left at will, but which attempts to attract the states to join it with the ultimate aim of the whole world unified under its benign rule.

Both Tanssjö and Yunker also explain the evolutionary steps, through which their world states could be achieved within the bounds of the current climate of international politics – something that the tianxiaists almost never attempt to do. As with the democratic cosmopolitan model, democracy as a method of projecting the will of the cosmopolitans forms the major point of conflict between tianxiaism and both Tanssjö's and Yunkers world states.

Taken together, the cosmopolitan models reviewed above bear many interesting similarities with the tianxia system. For further comparisons, a short revision of the central principles of the tianxia as described by Zhao Tingyang is in order. Within the tianxia system:

1. The world has to become a political unit.

2. The world needs a world institution.

3. If the world has different levels of power, the world institution must hold the highest authority.

4. Institutions at different levels of power should resemble each other and the political processes should follow similar principles.

5. The legitimacy of the order is based on the will of the population.[457]

Defined through these principles, the tianxia seems almost identical with both cosmopolitan models, especially with the cosmopolitan world government models described above. Both systems have a central, world level institution, taking care of global issues, while smaller, regional institutions guide policies at their own level.

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456 Yunker 2014, 85.
457 Zhao 2011, 111.

The cosmopolitan models (both the decentralized and world government variants) and the tianxia have to be legitimate in face of the world's population. The only important difference to note here is that the cosmopolitan models acquire this legitimacy through democratic processes, whereas the tianxia interprets and obeys the 'people's will' (民心, *minxin*) through an unknown method. But the difference between obeying the people's will and organizing elections is only a difference in the *technique* being used, since both systems, essentially, are designed to channel the sentiments of the population into agendas of world governance. The democratic process itself does not have to involve any ideological content and there are no restrictions on the ranges of governments the cosmopolitan polities could establish: they could become communist, libertarian or even tianxiaist for that matter. Seen as a mere technique, democracy holds as much ideological content as the 'people's will' does, and upholding the democratic process by itself does not say anything about the ideological nature of the cosmopolitan world system.

In addition, Zhao's criticisms of the democratic process are shallow and weak. He uses the concept of democracy rather loosely, suggesting as if there was only one democratic model and as if there was no room for its improvement. Democracy, however, is not a static model and has materialized in various forms from its ancient Greek origins to the various, 'two-party' and 'multiparty' systems uses all around the world. Even if it is accepted that the democratic process in all of its current and past forms is flawed, as Zhao seems to claim, it could still be improved and even combined with other systems of governance. A new-Confucian philosopher, Jiang Qing, for example, has proposed a compromise between parliamentary democracy and Confucian meritocracy, which would incorporate elements from democracy while maintaining the long term vision of the Confucian elites.[458] Zhao, however, does not discuss such hybrid forms.

In short, Zhao dismisses the idea of global democracy as impossible, but does not attempt to develop the idea further. In this he mistakes 'not possible' with 'not having been tried yet'. The European Union, the United States and India are functioning examples of how democracy has been established to bring ethnically, culturally and ideologically different populations together under a single government. Enlarging this process to a global scale, as Held, Archibugi, Tannsjö and Yunker propose, is not easy, but not theoretically impossible either and should not be straightforwardly dismissed. Zhao's dismissal of democracy altogether might thus be because a democratic tianxia would not differ from the cosmopolitan models, or maybe he just wants to uphold the civilizational dichotomies between the West and China.

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[458]   See Jiang 2012, chapters 1, 2 and 3.

4.4 Conclusion: Tianxiaist hegemony, constitutional tianxia or a tianxiaist cosmopolis?

The new tianxia order, as described by Zhao Tingyang, is an open-ended, hierarchic world order, which has a strong if vaguely defined *central institution* ruling over smaller *regional units* (i.e. *vassal states*). The order is not governed through any single ideology and it confers considerable autonomy for the regional units in organizing their domestic politics. The main concepts and elements of the tianxia order are represented below in Figure 1.

Tianxia-system

World institution

- "World sovereign". Morally superior, yet also backed by the strongest military.
- Manages only global level issues and takes care of the system as a whole.
- **Method of governance**: authoritarianism, soft power, loyalty through trust. Observes and obeys "people's will"

| Regional unit 1 | Regional unit 2 | Regional unit n. |

- Autonomous, state like units.
- Submit voluntarily under the World institution.
- No independent foreign policy.
- Conflicts between units arbitrated by World institution.

Lower level regional unit n.

- Autonomous, city or county-level units.

FIGURE 1   Tianxia order and its main elements

Described using these terms, the tianxia holds plain similarities with many established theoretical traditions, which focus on the grand issue of world governance. For a conclusion of the chapter, the central concepts of tianxiaism are once again compared to the theories described above, with a focus on the definitions of the core concepts of the *central institution* and the *secondary units* in both.
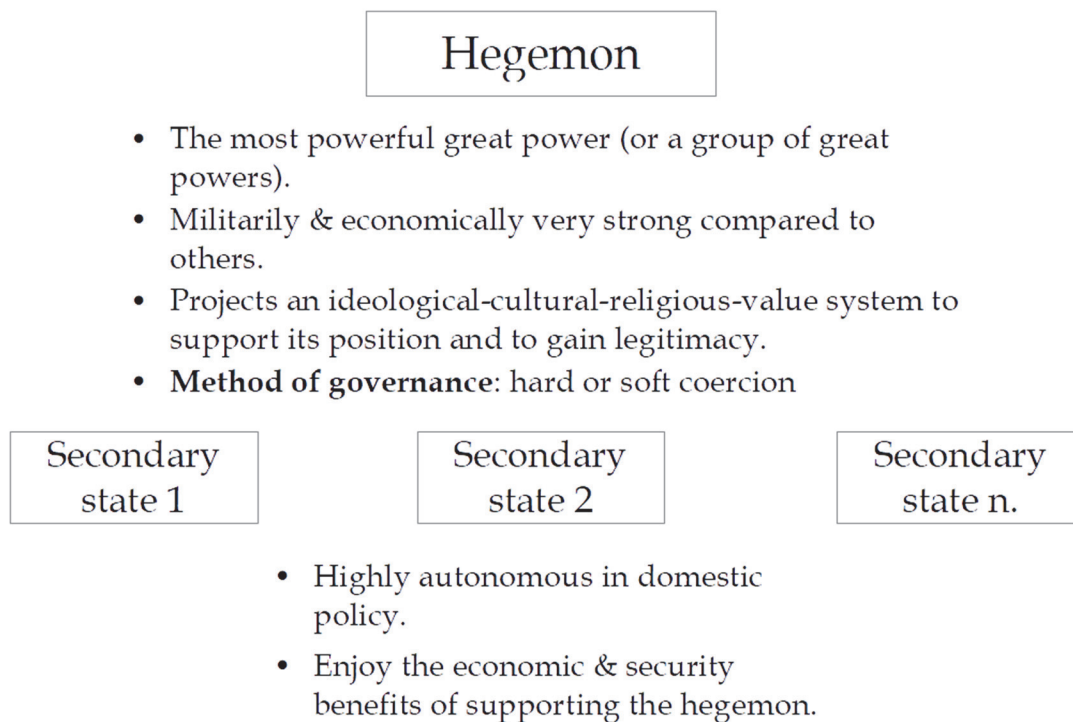
Hegemonic order (Hegemonic stability theory)

Hegemon

- The most powerful great power (or a group of great powers).
- Militarily & economically very strong compared to others.
- Projects an ideological-cultural-religious-value system to support its position and to gain legitimacy.
- **Method of governance**: hard or soft coercion

Secondary state 1	Secondary state 2	Secondary state n.

- Highly autonomous in domestic policy.
- Enjoy the economic & security benefits of supporting the hegemon.

FIGURE 2   Hegemonic order according to hegemonic stability theories.

The words hegemon, hegemony, and hegemonism are often used by the tianxiaists to describe the West but instinctively avoided when describing the tianxia and its central institution. Zhao especially keeps repeating that tianxia's world institution is not a hegemony. But as seen above, the concept of the 'hegemon' as described by the hegemonic stability theorists is rather neutral in content. It merely means the strongest state or a group of states within the international order, which is overseeing the stability and functioning of the order through a combination of hard and soft power elements (see Figure 2). Hegemonic orders can differ considerably by their form and they can include also Kindlebergian, benevolent variants. A hegemon does not have to be merely focusing on its own interests, and according to Cox, hegemons actually rarely do so. On a base rule, he hegemon should attempt to defend the interest of the system as a whole, which, according to tianxiaist lexicon would mean following 'relational rationality' instead of 'individualist rationality'. A *hegemon*, overall, can be seen as the conceptual equivalent of the '*world institution*' of tianxia.

Autonomous, voluntary members of the hegemonic order, the *secondary states*, are also conceptually similar to the *regional units* or *vassal states* of the tianxia. They are not necessarily suffering under the exploiting yoke of the hegemon, but, according to hegemonic stability theories, often join the order

due to the economic and political benefits, which can be gained, and due to the ideologically or culturally attractive nature of the hegemony. The secondary states therefore often support the existence of the hegemony due to a shared cultural value system. Tianxia claims not to have any value systems, but its 'no ideology, only diversity' -model, expanded upon the world is a value system in itself. All in all, tianxia can be defined applying the concepts of the HST and vice versa, and William Callahan, among others, although not comparing tianxia to hegemonic theories, has claimed that "Tianxia is not a post-hegemonic ideal, so much as a proposal for a new hegemon."[459]

Liberal constitutional order

Leading state

- Like hegemon, the strongest state of the order.
- Consults and negotiates with the seondary states. Creates rule-based institutions.
- Open, transparent and predictable.
- <u>Method of governance</u>: institutionalized, rule based.

Secondary state 1	Secondary state 2	Secondary state n

- Sovereign, yet join the institutions of the order voluntarily.
- Submit voluntarily under the leading state as long as it remains committed to the order

FIGURE 3   Liberal constitutional order according to John Ikenberry.

The 'constitutional order' developed by John Ikenberry (Figure 3) is also quite similar to the tianxia order described by Zhao. Zhao has even mentioned that tianxia order means the establishment of a 'world constitution' (世界宪法, *shijie xianfa*). [460] The *leading state*(s) of the constitutional order is a conceptual equivalent of the *world institution,* since both hold legitimate authority over the whole system and both could be described as 'liberal hegemons'. Neither the

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459   Callahan 2008, 758.
460   Zhao 2018.

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world institution, nor the leading state are dominating the world because of their own interests but understand that the healthiness of the system as a whole brings benefits to both the leader and the subservient units. *Secondary states* of the constitutional order are similar to *regional units* of tianxia: both retain their autonomy and even their right to resign from the order, but both still choose to join it as the order provides more benefits and interests than remaining outside of it. Zhao calls this *attractiveness* (诱惑力, *youhuoli*), liberal thinkers define it as *soft power*, while the concept behind the words remains the same. Taken together, the differences between the tianxia and the constitutional order remain superficial and unimportant.

Cosmopolitan democracy
World parliament

- Elected by world citizens directly.
- Decides on "framework setting" global policies only.
- Controls the global military force.
- <u>Method of governance</u>: democratic consultation

Regional parliament 1	Regional parliament 2	Regional parliament n.

- Like European Union, discusses regionally important issues.
- Sovereignty on regional policies.

State parliament 1	State parliament 2	State parliament n.

- Sovereignty on state level policies.
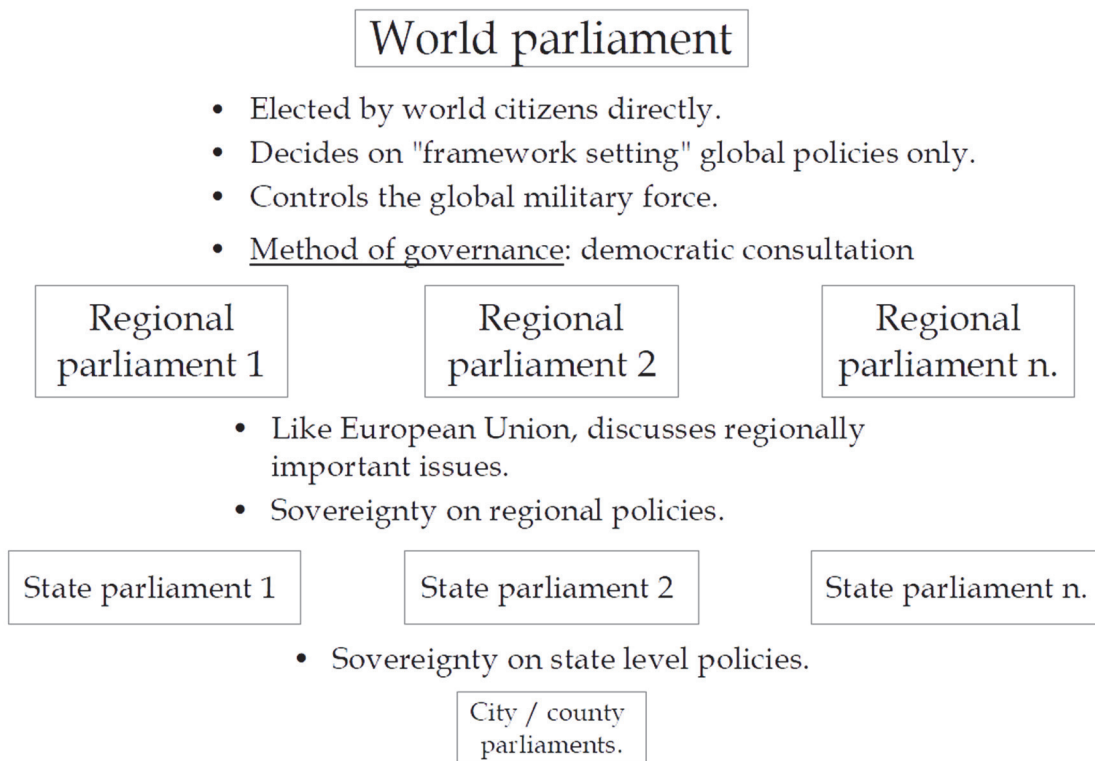
City / county parliaments.

FIGURE 4   Cosmopolitan democracy according to Held & Archibugi.

Compared with cosmopolitan theories, the only important difference concerns the process and method of democracy that cannot be used in tianxia. If the functions of the central units are compared, however, then the *world parliament* of cosmopolitan democrats is conceptually similar with the *world institution*. It is not perhaps as powerful as the world institution of the tianxia, but it would focus only the issues of global level and provide considerable sovereignty for institutions at the lower level: *regional* and *state level parliaments* – conceptually similar to *regional units* of tianxia. In other words, the democratic cosmopolis (Figure 4) could be described as a liberalized variant of the tianxia order.

Federal Union of Democratic Nations

> **World Government and world parliament**
>
> - Elected directly by world citizens (states might also have their representatives)
> - Technically "world sovereign", but decides on "framework setting" global policies only.
> - Controls the global military forces
> - <u>Method of governance</u>: Democratic elections

Member state 1	Member state 2	Member state n.

- Highly autonomous in domestic policies.
- In the initial phase possesses own military forces
- Allowed to leave from the federation.
- Enjoy the economic & security benefits the federation.

FIGURE 5   Federal Union of Democratic Nations.

The cosmopolitan world government models, analyzed in this chapter through the examples of Torbjörn Tanssjö and James Yunker, offer a more powerful variant of the cosmopolitan system, which has even more in common with the tianxia (see Figure 5). Their *world governments*, supported and monitored by their world parliaments, constitute very clear conceptual equivalents with the 'world institution' of tianxia. Autonomous *states*, which have a high degree of autonomy also do not differ meaningfully from the concept of *regional unit* of tianxia. In both systems, the world institution/government would hold sovereignty over the whole system, and would stabilize and arbitrate all conflicts existing between the regional units/states. Although the Yunker/Tanssjö -type of world government could perhaps be weaker than the tianxiaist world institutions – due to intra-governmental disputes and vetoing rights – it would still be legitimate in the eyes of the world population, and would pursue 'the people's will' in its own, limited fashion.

Conversely, tianxia could be seen as a version of cosmopolitanism, which could be defined as cosmopolitan authoritarianism. In cosmopolitan authoritarianism, the sentiments of the autonomous member states will be analyzed by the meritocratic elite of the world institution, and the member states will have to hope that the central institution's beneficence remains unchanged and that the people's sentiments are being correctly read. In contrast

to its democratic variants with their parliaments and elections, tianxia does not have any institutions for controlling or moderating the conduct of the world institution, yet, if it turns into a tyrant, the world institution can be overthrown by the member states using unspecified means.

To summarize the comparisons above, the tianxia system, instead of being completely unique invention finds many similarities with theories as different as the hegemonic stability theory and a theory of cosmopolitan world state. The similarity, it is argued, is not due to the similarity of the established traditions, but due to the fact that the tianxia and its concepts remain underdeveloped and ambiguously defined. In essence, so little is known of the world institution and of its institutional structures that it could be any of the above: either a cosmopolitan world parliament or a group of culturally and politically influential states. For tianxiaism to survive in such comparisons with the established theories, it should discuss with the established theories and not attempt to hide behind obscure claims of Chineseness or uniqueness.

As mentioned above, the three theoretical traditions chosen for study and comparison were examined quite shallowly with only certain representative thinkers and frameworks brought into the discussion. Comparison between tianxiaism and the established tradition of international thought therefore, should not end here and there are various other theories and political philosophies, which could prove interesting comparative analyses. The English school of international relations, for example, agreeing to the socially constructed nature of international politics has long held a normative debate on how to develop a peaceful and stable international society. Within the school, the so called 'solidarist' theorists – such as Richard Linklater – argue that the current international society of states will have to move beyond the sovereignty principle towards a 'world society' among individuals.[461] Functionalist and neo-functionalist theories, represented by such thinkers as David Mitrany and Ernst Haas, would also offer rich and developed models on how to establish international cooperation through institutional binding, and finally, a natural and obvious comparison would involve Marxism and especially Maoism, which both envisioned the world transformed into a borderless communist whole.

Beyond abstract theories, interesting comparison could be also developed by comparing tianxia to certain actually existing international orders, both historical and currently existent, such as the European Union, the socialist international led by the Soviet Union or the liberal international order itself. The European Union, for example, could be seen as a regional mini-tianxia. Its 'world institution' (Parliament and the Commission) only attests to system wide issues while leaving the 'regional units' (member states) highly autonomous in their domestic policies. The world institution, however, limits the foreign policies of the regional units and pulls 'barbarian' units into its orbit by its attractive nature. It is also (probably) possible to leave the European tianxia as the Brexit-process attests.

[461]   See Buzan 2014, 113–162. See also chapters 11, 12 and 13 in Bull 1977.

Socialist internationalism under the leadership of the Soviet Union, on the other hand, established a socialist tianxia. Its world institution was the leadership of the Soviet Union in Kremlin, and the regional units the socialist states all the way from Cuba to North-Korea, and temporarily even some African states, such as Angola or Ethiopia. The world institution coordinated for example trade and technology transfer and economically aided the development of the backward states with few strings attached. Although it remained only a regional project, its ultimate aim was to establish a fully global socialist tianxia, in which the states themselves would eventually wither away.[462]

In the end, the current world order could be seen as a failed tianxia. David Held has pointed out that the liberal international order actually accepts most of the principles of cosmopolitanism.[463] It is thus an essentially cosmopolitan order, which only fails to live up to its commitments. This is not due to "Western inability to think in worldly terms" but due to the regrettable fact that international politics and global governance is a complicated business, and that the establishment of a functioning cosmopolis is easier to theorize than to do.

To conclude, the practical ideology of tianxiaism can be seen as shallow and ambiguously defined; so ambiguously defined that its concepts seem to be shadows of many concepts found with many established frameworks. Notwithstanding, a fuzzily described program does not mean that tianxiaism does not have influence, however. It is well known, for example, that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were quite obscure on the nature of the actual communist society, yet their philosophy motivated massive, worldwide political movements and ultimately states, which claimed that their economic policies were exactly based on Marx's writings.

The central claim of Chinese uniqueness as well as its utopian vision surely inspires Chinese academic circles, and it also offers many important ideas and concepts for the Chinese government as it is developing its own story of China. A comparison of the tianxiaist core ideas and China's official foreign policy is the focus of the next chapter.

[462]   Rofel 2017, 214–223.
[463]   Held 2010.

5 TIANXIAISM IN CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

全球治理体制变革离不开理念的引领，全球治理规则体现更加公正合理的要求离不开对人类各种优秀文明成果的吸收。要推动全球治理理念创新发展，积极发掘中华文化中积极的处世之道和治理理念同当今时代的共鸣点，继续丰富打造人类命运共同体等主张，弘扬共商共建共享的全球治理理念。要加强能力建设和战略投入，加强对全球治理的理论研究，高度重视全球治理方面的人才培养.

The reform of global governance cannot be lead without ideas, and a more just and rational global governance system requires the assimilation of all of the outstanding cultural products of mankind. We need to advance the innovation of new global governance ideas, and to energetically excavate the methods and governing ideas of the Chinese cultural tradition, which resonate with current times.

– Xi Jinping in a speech at the 27th Collective study session of the Politburo of the Communist Party of China. 13.10.2015.

中华民族历来讲求"天下一家",主张民胞物与、协和万邦、天下大同,憧憬"大道之行,天下为公"的美好世界.

Since ancient times, we Chinese have always held these beliefs dear: "All people under the heaven are of one family", "all the people are my brothers and I share the life of all creatures" and "all nations should live in harmony". We have always aspired to create a better world in which "a just cause is pursued for the common good".

Xi Jinping in a keynote speech at the CPC in Dialogue With World Political Parties High-Level Meeting, 1.12.2017.

The analysis in chapters three and four has suggested that tianxiaism, at least at its current level of development, is perhaps better seen as a rhetorical device, delegitimizing the current international order and the 'hegemonic worldview' of the West, which supports it. Its actual suggestions (both hard and soft variants) offer little if any practical use for actually reforming the order. Devices such as tianxiaism are still useful for China's leadership as it is attempting to develop Chinese great power identity *vis a vis* the established great powers, and as it is trying to build up its 'discourse power' in international politics by disseminating its own ideas.

After studying the conceptual structure of tianxiaism, the fifth chapter shifts the focus into the official foreign policy rhetoric of the Chinese government, and particularly on the central policy concept of the Xi Jinping administration, the 'Community of shared future for mankind' (CSFM). The chapter first introduces some important characteristics of Chinese foreign policy by examining China's relationship with the international order. It also examines the place of foreign policy concepts within Chinese politics and political rhetoric. The concept of CSFM, with its definitions of current challenges in world politics as well as the means it suggests for correcting them, are then compared to the core concepts and central ideas of tianxiaism. Fragments of this chapter have been published previously in Puranen 2019c.

5.1 China and the international order

The liberal international order is in transformation, and its master narrative as well as its legitimacy are being challenged by various actors both within and outside of the order's Western liberal core. The challenging, alternative foreign policy vision and the master narrative of the Chinese government is centered around the concept of 'Community of shared future for mankind' (人类命运共同体, *Renlei mingyun gongtongti*, CSFM), which has become the main foreign policy concept of the Xi Jinping administration. The concept is interesting for comparisons with tianxiaism, since it is similarly envisioning a somewhat cosmopolitan world order, in which the endemic struggles between nation states would be pacified and in which the mankind would establish a harmonious, tianxia-like cooperative community. Through such inspiring ideas, the CSFM concept offers its own arguably Chinese framework for reforming the liberal international order.

5.1.1 China's hate-love -relationship with the international order

China has had a rather complex relationship with the Western led international order ever since it was forced to join the order during the 19th century (see subsection 2.1.3.) The People's Republic of China, established in 1949, inherited these challenges, and its foreign policy has been fixated on the question of how to develop a working and mutually respectful relationship with the order. Throughout its historical development, the foreign policy of the People's Republic has held certain persistent continuities, yet there have also emerged occasional detours and even complete strategic turnarounds, during which China has taken an outright hostile stance towards the established order. For understanding China's relationship with the international order of today as well as the meaning of the concept of CSFM within the foreign policy of Xi Jinping, it is useful to first go through the key parts of the evolution of China's foreign policy and of its conceptual system.

Very soon after the civil war and the establishment of the PRC, Chinese foreign policy leadership was basically ready to establish foreign relations with all interested parties – even with the capitalist United States. Due to increasing tensions around its neighboring regions, most importantly the Korean War (1950–1953) and the unresolved conflict with Taiwan, China however decided to 'lean on one side' (一边倒, *yibian dao*) i.e. to emphasize its relations with the Soviet Union. China thus joined the newly emerging group of Socialist countries, led by the Soviet Union, which put it in an opposing position in contrast to the liberal international order, which was being established simultaneously by the Western European states and the United States.[464]

'Leaning' did not mean a complete vassalage under the leadership of Moscow.[465] Even as China was firmly positioned within the Soviet led 'socialist international', it was making independent maneuvers within the newly emerging third world, presenting itself as an independent power outside the Cold War camps. For example the concept of 'five principles of peaceful co-existence' (和平共处五项原则, *heping gongchu wu xiang yuanze*) introduced by premier Zhou Enlai in the Bandung conference of Non-Aligned Countries in 1955, was used for demonstrating that China would not try to use the developing countries for its own foreign policy needs.[466]

This first phase lasted less than a decade, since the Soviet Union and China ended up breaking their diplomatic relations already in the early 1960's. Mao Zedong was unable to accept the Soviet Union's new foreign policy principle of 'peaceful coexistence', according to which the socialist camp should compete with the capitalist world peacefully, and that the cause of socialism also could be advanced through, for example, parliamentary elections. After the breakup, moderate elements of foreign policy, championed by persons such as premier Zhou, were pushed to the background and radical Maoists took the lead.[467] Under a radical Maoist foreign policy, intensified by domestic unrest caused by the Cultural revolution, China basically isolated itself from the Western liberal world as well as from most of the socialist international during the late 1960's and the early 1970's. Under these conditions, China emerged as an independent 'pariah state', which was promoting its revolutionary Maoist interpretation of Marxism, and which was supporting both anti-Western and anti-Soviet movements throughout the developing world with all the resources it could spare.[468]

Although Maoist foreign policy and its rhetoric of global class struggle remained officially intact throughout the reign of Mao Zedong, small steps were taken at the same time for integrating China into the international order. One of the most important of such steps was taken in 1971, when, after a vote in the United Nations General Assembly, the People's Republic of China took the place of the Republic of China (Taiwan) as the official representative of China at

[464]   Zhang, B. 2014.
[465]   Ibid.
[466]   Siika 2015.
[467]   On the 'Cold war between Communist countries' see Lüthi 2008.
[468]   See Hodzi 2019, 67–82; Zhao S. 2018, 645–646.

the United Nations. At the same time, rapprochement with the United States was initiated when President Richard Nixon visited China in 1972 and the two parties launched talks with an ultimate aim of opening *de jure* diplomatic relations between the countries. [469] Although still waging war against the international order in its pronouncements, China was slowly gravitating towards it.

These policies gained a boost after Mao Zedong died in 1976, and as his successor Deng Xiaoping launched his groundbreaking reform policies. With the reforms, Maoist doctrine was swiftly played down in both domestic and foreign affairs, and market-oriented reforms were initiated. China's foreign policy took a similar pragmatic turn as China focused on its economic development and instead of spreading its socialist ideology within the developing world, it decided instead to cooperate with all states, irrespective of their ideological stances, but perhaps particularly with the developed capitalist countries.[470]

Under Deng's leadership, the current state of affairs in world politics was evaluated to be favorable for China's economic development, and the prospect of a major global conflict, for example, was estimated to be small. This new outlook was included in the official foreign policy concept of 'China's Independent Foreign Policy of Peace' (独立自主的和平外交, *duli zizhu de heping waijiao*), which emphasized cooperation, peace, equality and sovereignty. The 'Five principles', which languished during the heyday of Maoist foreign policy, fit with this concept perfectly and made a return to the core of the foreign policy doctrine.[471] Later, the policy line was named unofficially as the 'low profile' approach (in Chinese often phrased as 韬光养晦, *taoguang yanghui*).

The change in the line of foreign policy was demonstrated already in 1978 in a speech given by Deng Xiaoping, in which he declared that

我们现在还很穷，在无产阶级国际主义义务方面，还不可能做得很多，贡献还很小。到实现了四个现代化，国民经济发展了，我们对人类特别是对第三世界的贡献可能会多一点.

we [China] are still a relatively poor nation. It is impossible for us to undertake many international proletarian obligations, so our contributions remain small. However, once we have accomplished the four modernizations and the national economy has expanded, our contributions to mankind, and especially to the Third World, will be greater.[472]

The launch of the reform initiated another cycle of engagement with the Western international order. China opened up for diplomatic ties with basically all foreign countries, regardless of their ideological stances. At the same time China started to join the institutions and treaties of the international order one

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[469] On the rapprochement between the United States and China, see for example Chen 2001, 238–277; Warner 2007.

[470] Naturally the only restraint was the question of Taiwan: the PRC required that all parties cease all official relations with Taiwan, as it still does.

[471] Shao 2014.

[472] Deng 1978.

by one, beginning with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1980. [473] China also signed the most important security treaties including the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1992, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996, and joined the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) in 2004.[474]

During this period of engagement China grew to become an important member and even supporter of the liberal international order. Its support has, however, been selective in its nature. According to Michael Mazarr, Timothy Heath and Astrid Cevallos the liberal order should not be understood as a monolithic whole, but as consisting of various 'suborders'. It has for example economic orders (trade, financial and monetary orders), security suborders (the UN Charter–based nonaggression order and the U.S.-led system of alliances) and a global liberal values order based on human rights conventions. Any member state of the order can thus emphasize some of these suborders, but resist others.[475] In a similar vein, Alastair Iain Johnston has proposed that the liberal international order consists of at least eight different orders (constitutive-, military-, political & social development-, trade-, financial & monetary-, environment-, information orders), with which states – and other governmental and non-governmental actors – can have varying levels of interactions. For Johnston, China is thus interacting with the liberal order through a multitude of different channels, institutions and organizations.[476]

Both Mazarr et al. and Johnston roughly agree that throughout the process of its integration, China has supported the economic order and the security order based on the UN Charter, but it has strictly opposed the U.S.-led alliance system and the order based on liberal values. Put otherwise, China has questioned the dominance of the Western great powers and their ideas within the international order, but supports its fundamental structure. This partial support has been clearly noticeable in Chinese foreign policy statements, in which China is generally always claiming to 'unswervingly' support the order, but at the same time, opposing any hegemonic acts or views imposed upon other states and promoting the democratization of the order.[477] Zhao Suisheng has aptly described China as a 'revisionist stakeholder' within the order: it is "dissatisfied not with the principles but its status in the hierarchy of the order."[478] For Johnston: "there is no single international order that defines whether a state is a challenger/revisionist or not" and the supporter-revisionist framework often applied in the debates on China is a simplification of a much more complex reality.[479]

The concept of 'Community of shared future for mankind' and its definitions reflect this complex relationship quite well. According to the CSFM the liberal international order is, indeed, essentially advantageous, but certain

473   Zhao S. 2018, 645–646.
474   Sutter 2012, 122–124.
475   Mazarr & Heath & Cevallos 2018, 8.
476   Johnston 2019.
477   Mazarr & Heath & Cevallos 2018, 8.
478   Zhao S. 2018, 644.
479   Johnston 2019, 25.

aspects of it would need to be balanced for the order to truly flourish. In this the concept is building on its predecessors (such as the 'five principles'), and before moving into the actual analysis, the historical development of the CSFM and its position within the larger structures of Communist party ideology are reviewed.

5.1.2   Concepts and language in Chinese argumentation

When analyzing the official foreign policy of China through texts, various sets of sources can be applied. Speeches and writings of the party leadership, and editorials in official party newspapers, especially the *People's Daily* (人民日报, *Renmin ribao*) or the theoretical journal *Qiushi* (求实) constitute one important set of sources. Besides them, Chinese government has published various official 'white papers' and strategy documents on China's foreign relations, and the People's Liberation Army (人民解放军, *renmin jiefangjun*) began publishing official military strategy documents in 2015.[480] An actual national security strategy document, akin to similar documents published in the United States or Russia has not yet been published in China, but might be provided in the future.[481] All these sets of sources illuminate different aspects and viewpoints of China's foreign policy thinking. This chapter has chosen to focus on the speeches of President Xi Jinping since they represent – particularly during the current climate of Chinese politics – the ultimate, top-level grand design and strategic thinking of the Chinese party-state.

All these sets of sources are unified by their ideological content and by their use of official concepts, designed at the top level of the Communist Party of China. Foreign policy concepts, such as the 'five principles', 'new security concept' or the 'Community of shared future for mankind' have been used throughout the history of the PRC for outlining China's standpoint towards the world. While sometimes seen as primarily empty rhetorical devices, central ideological concepts, such as CSFM are actually very carefully drafted and developed, and when presented and described by top-level leaders such as Xi Jinping, they represent the actual strategic planning of the party leadership. In other words, when CSFM is being studied, China's official political cosmology and strategic outlook is being studied.

Throughout its existence, The Communist Party of China has purported to follow a form of Marxist-Leninist ideology, which is based on *scientific* theoretical principles of Marxism. Scientific principles cannot be wrong, and therefore the party has claimed that it always possesses the correct analysis on the current conditions within China and within the world at large. By following the principles of its 'guiding ideology' (指导思想, *zhidao xixiang*), which has

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[480]   The newest one, published in 2019 is titled *China's National Defense in the New Era (*新时代的中国国防, *Xinshidai de Zhongguo guofang*) and can be accessed here http://www.mod.gov.cn/regulatory/2019-07/24/content_4846424.htm, visited 19.5.2020.

[481]   Kallio 2018b.

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been drafted based on this scientific analysis, it possesses the best tools for guiding China to success.[482]

The claim that the party holds the scientifically valid truths of Marxism has been applied for establishing legitimacy for the party to be able to serve as the vanguard of the country. Since it holds the best ideological tools for guiding China as well as an 'always correct' analysis of the state of affairs within the world, the party asserts, it should lead the Chinese people and awake them from false consciousness.[483] If the party did not possess such secret wisdom, any other political actor could take its place or even outperform it. The claim of being in possession of a superior ideology is therefore used to assert that the Communist party is not only the best, but also the only choice for the so called 'national conditions' of China.

During the reform era it has seemed that the role of ideology is withering as an overall pragmatism has been guiding China's policies. On the surface the party appears to be experimenting flexibly with capitalist practices and its legitimacy to rule seems to be grounded more on its performance in delivering economic growth and smoothly increasing living standards (i.e. 'performance legitimacy') than on any superior ideology. This is however an illusion. Kerry Brown and Aleksandra Berzina-Cerenkova claim that ideology in China

> has become more concealed, more nuanced, and in some spaces more flexible, but it has lost none of its importance to the Party and its mission to stay in power.[484]

According to Timothy Heath and Emilian Kavalski, the Communist party, since the Hu administration has actually *intensified* its efforts in developing a modernized socialist ideology, which would be stripped of its utopian and conflictual elements, but which would effectively and practically guide the implementation of the policies of the central government.[485]

Language is in an important role in this 'thought work' (思想工作, *sixiang gongzuo*), as it is the medium through which the party coordinates its policies and through which it maintains its inner coherence. 'Scientifically correct' formal language and official 'formulations' (提法, *tifa*) have served this function throughout the existence of the PRC. Michael Schoenhals argues that the roots of the phenomenon go even further in history, since already the imperial dynasties believed in the Confucian notion of 'rectification of names' (正名, *zhengming*) and upheld lists of correct and banned words.[486] For the Communist party and its dynastic predecessors, language seems almost like a sacred medium, which has to be carefully controlled by the rulers both for the good of the realm but also for saving it from destruction.

[482]   Heath & Kavalski 2014.
[483]   Ibid.
[484]   Brown & Berzina-Cerenkova 2018.
[485]   Heath & Kavalski 2014, 59–74.
[486]   Schoenhals 1992, 1–29. On the practical nature of the Chinese propaganda apparatus controlling 'thought work', see Brady 2008; Shambaugh 2007.

During the era of President Xi Jinping, ideology has gained a much more prominent and visible role in Chinese politics. Chinese economic growth is slowing down as the country is becoming demographically old and as the labor-intensive, export-oriented growth model is losing steam. Hedging against the mounting challenges of the future, the emphasis of the party leadership is shifting away from relying solely on 'performance legitimacy', and new sources of legitimacy are sought. Xi Jinping seems to believe that the reinvigoration of ideology provides such a source, but it will also bring the party itself in order. A recurring theme of ideological propaganda during the era of Xi Jinping has been *confidence* (自信, *zixin*) in China's socialist system and its guiding theories, particularly against the 'Western values' and ideologies that are seen as a major threat for the cause of Chinese socialism.[487]

This ideological rejuvenation reached a peak during the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, in November 2017. During the congress, China's guiding ideology was re-branded as 'Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era ' (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想, *Xi Jinping xinshidai zhongguotese shehuizhuyi sixiang*). According to this concept a 'new era' had begun in Chinese politics. Though new, the era was still represented as a continuation of the socialist past since it sees both Mao's and Deng's eras as important steps towards reaching the Chinese dream: during Mao's era, China stood up, during Deng's era China became rich and now, during the 'new era', China is finally becoming strong. With his 'new era' thought system Xi has clearly presented his own political agenda and his own ideological concepts in all realms of politics. Xi's position within the party, meanwhile, has been strengthening rapidly as the traditional model of 'collective leadership' has been pushed away and Xi has been concentrating power to himself.[488]

To summarize, Xi Jinping has established himself in an undisputed position and his speeches should be be understood as providing the ultimate definitions of China's domestic and foreign policies. Indeed, whenever Xi gives a speech or introduces a new concept, it is understood as a sign (or an implicit order) for the policymakers, journalists and political scientist to scramble to analyze the nuances and implicit notions between the lines. Xi's speeches on the 'Community of shared future for mankind', though remaining quite vaguely described, provide ultimate definitions on China's foreign policy and especially China's standing towards the international order.

5.1.3 Development of the Community rhetoric

As mentioned, CSFM is not an entirely new concept within Chinese foreign policy rhetoric. The concept itself was used occasionally by Hu Jintao – usually in reference to Taiwan – and the main components of the concept were

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[487] Brown & Berzina-Cerenkova 2018; Shi-Kupfer et. al. 2017. For an official scholarly position on the 'four self-confidences theory", see Jin 2020.
[488] On Xi's concentration of power, see for example Wu 2018.

developed long before the era of Xi Jinping.[489] What is new however, is the assertive use of the concept, as well as the intensifying attempts by Chinese politicians and diplomats to include he concept into every possible bilateral or international treaty or declaration through diplomatic means.[490]

Throughout the first decades of the reform period China's foreign policy argumentation – 'China's Independent Foreign Policy of Peace' – emphasized China's status as a modest developing country. According to this emphasis, China was in no position to take major responsibility in international politics and that under no circumstances would China intervene in the affairs of other states.[491] China's confidence in offering its own concepts for reforming the international order, however, has increased steadily following China's economic rise, and during the administration of Jiang Zemin (1989–2002), China launched its first set of new foreign policy concepts, intended to project its critical viewpoints and suggestions.

First, the Jiang administration started to promote the 'new security concept' (新安全观, *xin anquanguan*), according to which military alliances (particularly the security treaty between the United States and Japan) represented old-fashioned, Cold War mentality. All alliances should be, in the long term disbanded and the concept of security as a whole should be re-imagined following principles of 'win-win cooperation'. Second, the Jiang administration also brought forth the concepts of 'diversity of civilizations' (各国文明的多样性, *ge guo wenming de duoyangxing*) and 'democratization of international relations' (国际关系的民主化, *guoji guanxi de minzhuhua*), which both propose an international order wherein the Western dominance would be diminished and the developing countries would have a more prominent role.[492]

The era of Hu Jintao (2002–2012) continued along these tendencies. Hu's era saw the introduction of the concept of 'China's peaceful development' (中国的和平发展, *Zhongguo de heping fazhan*), which suggested that although China was without question becoming a global great power, and although it had some reservations concerning the international order, its rise would be peaceful and China would never claim the status of a hegemon within the order.[493] The Hu administration also offered a first, ambiguously described vision of the international order reformed according to Chinese principles with its foreign policy concept of the 'harmonious world' (和谐世界, *hexie shijie*). The harmonious world combined Jiang's ideas on new security thinking and democratization of international relations with new, culturally oriented overtones, which were gaining momentum in China at the time. Within the

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[489] See Zhang 2018.
[490] Tobin 2018. See also Taskinen 2020.
[491] On the evolution of the 'non-intervention policy' see Nojonen & Mattlin & Elmer 2015.
[492] See Keith 2012, 235–252. Also Gill 2010, 4–7.
[493] See the white paper "中国的和平发展道路" (China's peaceful development road) issued in 2005 by the State Council Information Office. The concept was originally named 'China's peaceful rise' (中国的和平崛起, *Zhongguo de heping jueqi*) but it was later modified as the word 'rise' was seen to carry menacing connotations. See Glaser & Medeiros 2007.

harmonious world, the concept claimed, different civilizations, political ideologies and economic systems would thrive and coexist peacefully, and instead of clashing – as in Huntingtonian scenarios – the civilizations would complement and learn from each other. No single state, no matter how great, would dominate the harmonious world, and there would accordingly be no hegemonic ideologies imposed on the weaker parties.[494]

After the rise in power of Xi Jinping in 2012, China's foreign policy argumentation has gained more confident and some would argue, more assertive overtones, yet continued building on the ideas of the predecessors. The use of the concept of the 'harmonious world' declined soon after Xi's term began and Xi has referred to the concept only occasionally. Xi apparently wished to develop his own central foreign policy concepts, and soon after his rise in power, he offered the ideas on 'new type of great power relations' (新型 大国关系, *xinxing daguoguanxi*), 'Chinese type of great power diplomacy' (中国 特色大国外交, *Zhongguo tese daguowaijiao*) and the 'Belt and the road initiative' (initially known as 'Silk road economic belt'), which came to use widely after 2013.[495]

The 'Community of shared future for mankind' has been established as a major, overarching concept, which summarizes the elements of lesser concepts, such as the 'new type of great power relations' and 'Chinese type of great power 'diplomacy'. The 'new type of international relations' or the BRI can be seen as tactical guideline concepts, which help to conduct more concrete day-to-day activities, while the CSFM is the ultimate, strategic goal, which China wants to achieve. Indeed, Xi Jinping himself has claimed that the ultimate purpose of China's foreign policy is the promotion of the CSFM.[496]

The central ideas of the CSFM were first proposed during Xi's visit in Moscow in 2013, though the exact wording at the time was 'Community of destiny between us' (你中有我, 我中有你的命运共同体, *ni zhong you wo, wo zhong you ni de mingyungongtongti*).[497] The next major event was the speech given by Xi Jinping during the 70th anniversary celebrations of the United Nations in 2015, which was titled *Working Together to Forge a New Partnership of Win-win Cooperation and Create a Community of Shared Future for Mankind*. In the speech, Xi introduced the concept and its central principles for the global audience for the first time.[498] After the United Nations speech, CSFM has been used continuously in all of Xi's major speeches, which deal with foreign relations. In addition to its ample use in speeches, the concept has been added both to the Constitution of the Communist party of China as well as to the Constitution of the People's Republic, making "promoting the building of a Community with a

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[494] Hu 2005. See also Keith 2012, 235–252. Callahan 2013, 46–52.
[495] Wang 2019; Hu 2019.
[496] See Hu 2019, 3.
[497] See Xi 2013b.
[498] Xi 2015. The concept would be more accurately translated into English as the Community of common destiny, since the exact word is *mingyun* (命运), but it is always officially translated as 'shared future'.

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shared future for mankind " officially a central objective of China's foreign policy.[499]

The CSFM aims to project the international vision of the Chinese government to the international audience, and to present China as a peaceful, responsible and active stakeholder of the international order. Ever since the launch of the concept in 2013 Chinese academia has been filled with commentary and analysis on the concept, on its significance as well as on its ideological roots. Officially or semi-officially sanctioned Chinese scholarship, which interprets the meaning of the CSFM usually confirms the concept of tianxia or China's tianxia cosmology as one of the concept's essential elements. For example, a recent book *Building a community of shared future for mankind*, whose publication has been overseen by Renmin University Communist Party General Secretary Jin Nuo, argues that the philosophical sources of the CSFM can be traced to, firstly, the traditional Chinese tianxia worldview; secondly, to the ideology of socialism with Chinese characteristics; and thirdly, to modern Chinese experiences in diplomacy. The book states rather poetically that "when the great way prevails, all things under heaven are shared equally and justly" and that this "traditional ideal communicates the Chinese sense of responsibility that goes beyond national boundaries".[500]

An article written by Jiang Shihong, a Professor of Law at Peking University, offers another interesting example of a semi-officially sanctioned scholarship on China's foreign policy. In his article, Jiang interprets the speech given by Xi Jinping at the Nineteenth Party Congress held in Beijing, in which Xi described China's new ideology of "socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era". Jiang argues that while the foreign policy components of China's new ideology are mostly drawn from Marxism, they are also influenced by China's historical tradition, especially the *tianxia* cosmology. He goes even further by claiming that the communism that the party is striving to build is actually the age old Confucian ideal of the "great unity under heaven" (天下大同, *tianxia datong*).[501] Marxism and *tianxiaism* thus seem to coexist peacefully in the ideology and foreign policy of China's "new era".

5.1.4   Community and tianxia

For the remainder of this chapter, the central elements and adjacent concepts of the CSFM rhetoric are analyzed as they are described by Xi Jinping in his public speeches between the years 2013 and 2018. The focus is on speeches by Xi

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[499]   See: Constitution of the Communist party of China (中国共产党章程, *Zhongguo gongchandang zhangcheng*) in http://www.12371.cn/2017/10/28/ARTI1509191507150883.shtml, visited 21.5.2020. Constitution of the People's Republic of China (中华人民共和国宪法, *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo xianfa*) http://www.gov.cn/guoqing/2018-03/22/content_5276318.htm, visited 21.5.2020.

[500]   Chen & Pu 2017, 20–27. See also Mokry 2018; Tatlow 2018.

[501]   Jiang 2018. According to the introduction of the translation, by Timothy Cheek and David Ownby, Jiang's article "aims to be an authoritative statement of the new political orthodoxy under Xi Jinping".

instead of other representatives of the regime, since, as argued, they represent the utmost authority within the contemporary context of Chinese politics.

A public speech has its own rhetorical style, which has to be taken into consideration in the analysis. Moreover, Xi's speeches under examination in this chapter have a rhetorical style of their own, which differs considerably from other forms of Chinese foreign policy rhetoric. Their tone is rather conciliatory and cordial, and they do not build on stark contradictions like the tianxiaist academic arguments presented above. Xi does not point directly to China's main antagonists (the United States or 'the West') and defines problematic aspects of world politics in a carefully drafted and calm manner. This is in contrast to the rhetorical style at the level immediately below President Xi within the hierarchy of Chinese foreign policy making: in the speeches of the director of the Office of Foreign Affairs of the CCP, Yang Jiechi, for example, the concept of the 'West' is already widely applied in antagonist sense as China's major adversary.[502] Xi's speeches, meanwhile, define the CSFM on a level of high abstraction while Xi himself is carefully distanced from any polemical and unpleasant overtones.

The speeches under examination are given to various audiences: some are uttered at the podium of the General Assembly of the United Nations for the whole world[503] while others are given for a rather closed circle of officials of the Communist party.[504] In different situations and contexts, different aspects and perspectives are emphasized in the speeches. However, although there are slight variances in themes, the general description and narrative remains consistent and follows a repeating pattern in the analyzed speeches. First, the current situation of the world is described; its general prospects and megatrends as well as its multiple challenges. The speeches then move forward to offer China's suggestions on how the situation should be corrected through four central reform initiatives: the establishment of a 'new security framework', increased and balanced globalization, diversity of civilizations, and the promotion of an ecologically sustainable world. This basic structure appears consistently throughout all the speeches and it makes it rather easy to recognize and identify main elements and core concepts of the CSFM.

Just as tianxiaism, the CSFM has recognizable pure and practical ideological components. The pure ideology component describes the current state of affairs in the world, while the practical component offers guidelines for reconstructing the international order according to Chinese ideals. The CSFM, similar to tianxiaism, can also be seen as consisting of Freedenian core concepts, which are defined similarly through the speeches, and which form the ideological backbone of the CSFM rhetoric. Methodologically the chapter thus continues to identify the definitions of the core concepts of the CSFM. The

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[502]   See i.e. Yang 2017. For another similar definition of the CSFM by a highly respected diplomat and foreign policy influencer Fu Ying, see Fu 2017. As a base rule, the lower one goes down the hierarchy of the Chinese foreign policy mechanism, the more aggressive and polemical overtones one will find.

[503]   Xi 2015, Xi 2017b

[504]   Xi 2015b

analysis in the chapter begins from the worldview of the CSFM and then moves to the suggestions on reform, which are provided in the speeches. The the chapter also surveys the 'peaceful' and 'harmonious' great power identity that the CSFM rhetoric is constructing for China, which is a central element permeating through all of the speeches.

After the central elements and the core concepts of the CSFM have been introduced, they are compared to the core elements of (mostly hard) tianxiaism in the concluding section (5.3.) In the end, the chapter argues that although not initially apparent, the CSFM is quite compatible with the tianxiaist vision. Finally a short notice on language and translation. Xi's speeches have been given in Chinese, but if a speech, such as the ones delivered at the United Nations, has an official translation, it has been used in this interpretation. Otherwise the translations of the speeches are by the author of this study.

5.2 Community of shared future for mankind

5.2.1 Worldview of the CSFM

At the core of the CSFM worldview is a deterministic belief in certain historical laws, which are guiding the evolution of world politics. The international order, according to the concept, is in a slow but inevitable transformation from old fashioned 'zero-sum' geopolitics and 'cold war mindsets' into a new, interdependent and globalized world community. Using a manner typical to CSFM rhetoric, Xi Jinping declared in his speech at the United Nations' 70th anniversary that:

> 世界多极化进一步发展，新兴市场国家和发展中国家崛起已经成为不可阻挡的历史潮流.

> The movement toward a multi-polar world, and the rise of emerging markets and developing countries have become an irresistible trend of history.[505]

The worldview is deterministic in the sense that world politics is seen as developing into a certain direction according to 'historical laws' (历史规则, *lishi guize*) and 'world tides' (世界潮流, *shijie chaoliu*), which, like the actual tides, cannot be opposed even by the greatest of powers.[506] Fortunately, the world trends are evolving into a favorable direction as the general outlook of the world situation according to CSFM is rather positive. In his speech at the United Nations in 2017, Xi summarized the most important world trends:

> 人类正处在大发展大变革大调整时期。世界多极化、经济全球化深入发展，社会信息化、文化多样化持续推进，新一轮科技革命和产业革命正在孕育成长，各国相互联系、

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[505]   Xi 2015.
[506]   Xi 2013.

相互依存，全球命运与共、休戚相关，和平力量的上升远远超过战争因素的增长，和平、发展、合作、共赢的时代潮流更加强劲.

The trend toward multi-polarity and economic globalization is surging. IT application in social development and cultural diversity are making continued progress. A new round of scientific and industrial revolution is in the making. Interconnection and interdependence between countries are crucial for human survival. The forces for peace far outweigh factors causing war, and the trend of our times toward peace, development, cooperation and win-win outcomes has gained stronger momentum.[507]

The favorable world situation in Xi's speeches is categorized under three minor world trends. First is the trend of *peace and development*, since according to CSFM rhetoric, a major great power conflict is seen as rather unlikely. Xi Jinping elaborated the point at the United Nations in 2015:

和平、发展、进步的阳光足以穿透战争、贫穷、落后的阴霾。世界多极化进一步发展，新兴市场国家和发展中国家崛起已经成为不可阻挡的历史潮流.

The sunshine of peace; development and progress will be powerful enough to penetrate the clouds of war, poverty and backwardness. The movement toward a multi-polar world, and the rise of emerging markets and developing countries have become an irresistible trend of history.[508]

Second, there is the trend of *interdependence*. The world, according to Xi is developing towards a situation, in which "countries are becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent" (各国相互联系和依存日益加深, *geguo xianghu lianxi he cunzai riyi jiashen*). This is causing cooperation to become almost natural and making isolation both impossible and short-sighted. 'Win-win cooperation' (合作共赢, *hezuo gongying*) is becoming the new dominating practice of international politics.[509]

The third trend is the world trend of multipolarization, according to which former patterns of world politics are developing towards multipolarity as "relative international forces are becoming more balanced" (国际力量对比更趋平衡, *guoji liliang duibi geng qu pingheng*)[510] and as the 'colonialism' and 'supremacy of great powers' is becoming a thing of the past. At the same time, on the economic front, 'new centers of development' are emerging on the side of the traditional centers.[511] The trend of multipolarization is not only about the material balance of power between great powers since the CSFM rhetoric also lists 'cultural diversification' (文化多样化, *wenhua duoyanghua*) as an important and favorable aspect of the process.[512] Multipolarization, then, is a comprehensive force, which is shaping the world towards more diversity while undermining the hegemony of the established great powers.

All these three elements – peace and development, interdependence and multipolarity – are seen as deeply positive developments within the CSFM

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[507]   Xi 2017b.
[508]   Xi 2015.
[509]   Xi 2017c.
[510]   Xi 2017c.
[511]   Xi 2013b.
[512]   See for example Xi 2017c.

rhetoric. This central estimation of the world is a continuation of principles proposed already by the administration of Deng Xiaoping in the 1980's and by both Jiang and Hu administrations after Deng. Although the general situation is seen as beneficial for the establishment of the Community, the CSFM rhetoric still finds many challenges lying ahead. Xi provided a summary if these challenges in his speech at the United Nations convention in Geneva in 2017:

> 同时，人类也正处在一个挑战层出不穷、风险日益增多的时代。世界经济增长乏力，金融危机阴云不散，发展鸿沟日益突出，兵戎相见时有发生，冷战思维和强权政治阴魂不散，恐怖主义、难民危机、重大传染性疾病、气候变化等非传统安全威胁持续蔓延.

> On the other hand, mankind is also in an era of numerous challenges and increasing risks. Global growth is sluggish, the impact of the financial crisis lingers on and the development gap is widening. Armed conflicts occur from time to time, Cold War mentality and power politics still exist and non-conventional security threats, particularly terrorism, refugee crisis, major communicable diseases and climate change, are spreading.[513]

In his speeches, Xi typically mentions two types of challenges: *economic* and *security related*. Economic challenges include sluggish growth and unbalanced development, in which some regions acquire wealth faster than the others. On security challenges Xi mentions both traditional and non-traditional challenges. Traditional challenges consist of 'power politics', 'interventionism' and 'hegemonism', which are still influential although multipolarization is progressing rapidly. Non-traditional threats include cyber threats, terrorists, refugee crises and global pandemics. The global challenges of the CSFM are not limited within the territories of any single country, neither are they something that any country can handle on its own, and therefore "require a concerted cooperation of all the countries."[514] Taken together the CSFM rhetoric frames the current state of world politics in a considerably positive and optimistic light. Though challenges remain, irreversible trends are pointing towards a globalized and peaceful future.

5.2.2   Establishment of the CSFM through four essential propositions

Since the current situation is overall favorable, the establishment of the Community of shared future for mankind does not mean overthrowing the liberal international order or replacing it with some new kind of an order. On many occasions, as in his speech for the United Nations in 2015, Xi Jinping emphasizes China's unwavering support for the currently existing order and for the United Nations charter behind it:

> 中国将始终做国际秩序的维护者，坚持走合作发展的道路。中国是第一个在联合国宪章上签字的国家，将继续维护以联合国宪章宗旨和原则为核心的国际秩序和国际体系.

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[513]   Xi 2017a.
[514]   "各国通力合作来应对", Xi 2015b.

China will continue to uphold the international order. We will stay committed to the path of development through cooperation. China was the first country to put its signature on the UN Charter. We will continue to uphold the international order and system underpinned by the purposes and principles of the UN Charter.[515]

According to Xi Jinping, the order has its flaws and weak points, but it is in essence worth supporting. The flaws, in other words, can be fixed and improved, and rather than overthrowing the order, its troublesome elements should be balanced and reformed.

The reform of the international order, according to the CSFM rhetoric, is a collective effort and not something that China wants, or even could do on its own. The CSFM, for example, is always described as an 'initiative' (倡议, *changyi*), and not as China's strategy or a policy. In most of his speeches, Xi calls for the mankind to 'join hands' (携手, *xieshou*) in building the Community together, and the collective nature of the effort is also often expressed through poetic metaphors, in which we (mankind) are enduring 'wind and rain in the same boat' (风雨同舟, *feng yu tong zhou*) and that 'lone trees cannot make a forest' (独木不成林, *du mu bu cheng lin*).[516]

Although China is the initiator of the Community, it always claims, at least rhetorically, that the CSFM should be established together by all:

构建人类命运共同体,需要世界各国人民普遍参与。我们应该凝聚不同民族、不同信仰、不同文化、不同地域人民的共识,共襄构建人类命运共同体的伟业.

The building of a community with a shared future for mankind requires the participation of people from all countries. We should pool the strength of all by building consensus among people of different nations, with different beliefs and cultures and from different regions to advance this great cause.[517]

China is therefore presented as being only *ideationally* central for the project as its designer and initiator. For making the point, the call for all countries to join together for building the CSFM is supported by a heavy emphasis on equality and sovereignty of all countries:

联合国宪章贯穿主权平等原则。世界的前途命运必须由各国共同掌握。世界各国一律平等，不能以大压小、以强凌弱、以富欺贫. 主权原则不仅体现在各国主权和领土完整不容侵犯、内政不容干涉.

The principle of sovereign equality underpins the UN Charter. The future of the world must be shaped by all countries. All countries are equals. The big, strong and rich should not bully the small, weak and poor. The principle of sovereignty not only means that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries are inviolable and their internal affairs are not subjected to interference.[518]

In his speech, given at the United Nations conference in Geneva in 2017, Xi even mentions the Westphalian peace accords as strong principles,

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[515] Xi 2015.
[516] Xi 2013. Xi 2013c.
[517] Xi 2017d.
[518] Xi 2015.

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which "should guide us in building a Community of shared future for mankind."[519]

How then, and following what kinds of guidelines should the Community be established? Xi's speeches typically mention four suggestions – new security model, balanced globalization, diversity of civilizations and the beautiful world – according to which the CSFM should function. The first and arguably most important suggestion of the CSFM, **the new security model** is founded on a new type of state-to-state relationships, described as *partnership* (伙伴, *huoban*). According to Xi, military alliances and traditional principles of power politics need to be replaced with a network of partnerships "based on dialogue, non-confrontation and non-alliance."[520] The partnerships emphasize 'win-win - cooperation' and mutual respect for each others' internal affairs. Under the partnership-framework, no state shall interfere in the affairs of the other in any way and the partnerships will also be established on the principle of equality so that:

> 大国对小国要平等相待，不搞唯我独尊、强买强卖的霸道. 任何国家都不能随意发动战争，不能破坏国际法治，不能打开潘多拉的盒子.

> big countries should treat smaller ones as equals instead of acting as a hegemon imposing their will on others. No country should open the Pandora's box by willfully waging wars or undermining the international rule of law.[521]

Echoing on the 'new security concept' proposed by Jiang Zemin, Xi claims that the security of all countries is interlinked and has impact on one another.[522] Security is thus something that states cannot possess alone, but which has to be constructed together. Within the new 'world of universal security' (普遍安全的世界, *pubian anquan de shijie*) of the CSFM, the antiquated Cold War era alliances will be replaced with 'partnerships' and the alliance systems as a whole will be dissolved.[523]

This new security community of partnerships would, according to Xi, prevent conflicts from emerging in the first place. But if and when conflicts do rise, they will always be handled by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and not unilaterally by any of the countries. Ideally the CSFM prefers consultation between the parties of conflict supported by the international community, but if the consultations fail, the UNSC can take "mandatory actions, so as to turn hostility into amity."[524] The 'mandatory actions' (强制性行动, *qiangzhixing xingdong*), which could also be translated as 'enforcing actions', are not explicated any further, but they hint that the strong sovereignty principle has at least some limits.

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[519]　"这些原则应该成为构建人类命运共同体的基本遵循", Xi 2017b.
[520]　Xi 2017b.
[521]　"国家之间要构建对话不对抗、结伴不结盟的伙伴关系", Xi 2017b.
[522]　Xi 2015.
[523]　Xi 2017c
[524]　"通过和平解决争端和强制性行动双轨并举，化干戈为玉帛", Xi 2015.

The second suggestion concerns **balancing globalization**. As seen, a highly positive evaluation on the effects of globalization makes up a central element of the CSFM argumentation. Xi Jinping has emphasized that globalization and economic liberalism are not at the root of the troubles of the international order, but to the contrary, one of China's central foreign policy objectives consists of "vigorously defending the open trading system of the world, and openly opposing trade and investment protectionism."[525] The world therefore, according to Xi, needs even more and even deeper levels globalization. The model of the globalization, however, has to be updated so that it would be more inclusive and balanced and that "its benefits are shared by all." This balancing will include deepening "trade and investment liberalization"[526] and a thorough reform of the established financial institutions, which Xi proposed in his speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in 2017:

> 全球治理体系只有适应国际经济格局新要求，才能为全球经济提供有力保障。 国家不分大小、强弱、贫富，都是国际社会平等成员，理应平等参与决策、享受权利、履行义务。[...]要坚持多边主义，维护多边体制权威性和有效性.

> Only when it adapts to new dynamics in the international economic architecture can the global governance system sustain global growth. Countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor, are all equal members of the international community. As such, they are entitled to participate in decision-making, enjoy rights and fulfill obligations on an equal basis. [...] We should adhere to multilateralism to uphold the authority and efficacy of multilateral institutions.[527]

Here again, in the context of globalization, CSFM argumentation emphasizes the equality of all members of the international community. The international order then, must be reformed in the manner that also gives the developing countries a say on how the global economic infrastructure functions. In a speech given in 2015, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are particularly mentioned as being in need of 'democratization' (民主化, *minzhuhua)* in favor of the developing nations.[528]

The third suggestion is **the diversity of civilizations.** The CSFM, just like the tianxia, would not have a universally shared, dominating ideologies or value systems. According to Xi:

> 文明没有高下、优劣之分，只有特色、地域之别。文明差异不应该成为世界冲突的根源，而应该成为人类文明进步的动力.

> there is no such thing as a superior or inferior civilization, and civilizations are different only in identity and location. Diversity of civilizations should not be a source of global conflict; rather, it should be an engine driving the advance of human civilizations.[529]

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[525] "积极维护开放性世界经济体制，旗帜鲜明反对贸易和投资保护主义", Xi 2015b.
[526] "要同舟共济，促进贸易和投资自由化便利化", Xi 2017c.
[527] Xi 2017.
[528] Xi 2015b.
[529] Xi 2017b

Within the CSFM, all the civilizations should respect each other and learn from each others' differences. The diversity also means diversity of political ideologies since Xi has emphasized that "no country should view its own development path as the only viable one, still less should it impose its own development path on others."[530] Another concept Xi uses for this vision is an 'open and tolerant world' (开放包容的世界, *kaifang baorong de shijie*).[531] Such focus on cultural and political diversity is, again, indirectly criticizing the West: since as all civilizations are seen as equals, the Western powers should not have any privileges in international institutions either, nor should they hold the monopoly on defining the guiding values of the world.

The fourth and last suggestion of the CSFM is the building of a **clean and beautiful world** (清洁美丽的世界, *qingjie meli de shijie*) by pursuing green and low-carbon development. The suggestion is often described in the speeches in a rather elevated style:

> 我们应该坚持人与自然共生共存的理念,像对待生命一样对待生态环境,对自然心存敬畏,尊重自然、顺应自然、保护自然,共同保护不可替代的地球家园,共同医治生态环境的累累伤痕,共同营造和谐宜居的人类家园,让自然生态休养生息,让人人都享有绿水青山.

> We should ensure harmony between human and nature, and cherish the environment as dearly as we cherish our own lives. We should revere nature, respect it, follow its ways and protect it. We should protect the earth, our irreplaceable home, heal wounds inflicted on the ecosystem and environment, and build a harmonious and livable home for mankind. This will enable the natural ecosystem to recover and regenerate itself and everyone to live in a good environment with lucid waters and lush mountains.[532]

Actual detailed propositions on how the beautiful world is achieved, are rarely described at all, but by elevating ecologic aspects at the core of the CSFM, China articulates its environmental concerns, and portrays itself as a responsible power also on this crucial issue.

After the four suggestions for reforming the international order have been proposed an important question remains on what would make up the leading center of the Community? As already seen, the CSFM is framed as an essentially collective project. No single state, no matter how powerful, can have a hegemonic or central position within the CSFM, and the principles of equality and sovereignty are bluntly stated. While hegemony of any sort is not allowed, the CSFM does emphasize the United Nations, its security council and its charter. If there is an institutional center to the CSFM it would most likely consist of the United Nations. The United Nations and its mandate should, however, be greatly strengthened, and the institution as a whole should be profoundly reformed and democratized so that the developing countries would have equal say in it:

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530 "谁都不应该把自己的发展道路定为一尊，更不应该把自己的发展道路强加于人", Xi 2017
531 XI 2017c.
532 Xi 2017b.

中国秉持共商共建共享的全球治理观，倡导国际关系民主化，坚持国家不分大小、强弱、贫富一律平等，支持联合国发挥积极作用，支持扩大发展中国家在国际事务中的代表性和发言权.

China follows the principle of achieving shared growth through discussion and collaboration in engaging in global governance. China stands for democracy in international relations and the equality of all countries, big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor. China supports the United Nations in playing an active role in international affairs, and supports the efforts of other developing countries to increase their representation and strengthen their voice in international affairs.[533]

The CSFM rhetoric, therefore, rather straightforwardly argues that the CSFM will be an anti-hegemonic and multilateral world order in which China's status will not differ from other states, big or small, and in which the enforced and democratized United Nations would serve as an arbitrating center.

5.2.3 China as an actor in world politics

Besides offering glimpses of an ideal world order according to Chinese principles, the CSFM rhetoric is also applied to describe China's identity as an actor in world politics. As in tianxiaist writings, the CSFM rhetoric brings forth China's unique nature through historical examples and metaphors, and describes China as an essentially peaceful actor, which, just like its historical predecessors harbors no hegemonic plans towards the world. The modern People's Republic is then represented in the CSFM rhetoric as a successor of the imperial dynasties and of their '5000 years' of history:

回顾历史,支撑我们这个古老民族走到今天的,支撑 5000 多年中华文明延绵至今的,是植根于中华民族血脉深处的文化基因.

History shows that it is the cultural genes in our blood that have sustained the growth of this ancient nation to this day and the uninterrupted development of its civilization over 5,000 years.[534]

During Maoist times such cultural genes of the "ancient nation" were framed as feudalistic and backward elements to be extinguished, and China was instead envisioned as leaping towards its communist future. With the CSFM rhetoric, Xi Jinping however unites the PRC and its foreign policy with the historical continuum of the traditional Chinese empire, almost as if the PRC was the newest dynasty in this continuum. According to Xi, this historical, peaceful tradition proves that China's development is not a threat, and that China will not rise to rule the world:

中国发展不对任何国家构成威胁。中国无论发展到什么程度，永远不称霸，永远不搞扩张.

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533   Xi 2017c.
534   Xi 2017d.

China's development does not pose a threat to any other country. No matter what stage of development it reaches, China will never seek hegemony or engage in expansion.[535]

Avoiding hegemony is not only due to China's essentially peaceful nature, since Xi has also claimed that he history of international politics itself manifests, that "relying on military force for foreign invasion and expansion has always ended in defeat".[536] This not only implies that it is a rational choice for China to avoid such 'expansionism', but is also used as a subtle suggestion of the eventual result of Western hegemonic conduct.

The concept of tianxia and the assumed Chinese tianxiaist worldview is often used in the CSFM rhetoric when China's peaceful essence is explicated. This was expressed vividly, for example, during Xi's speech at the "Communist Party of China in dialogue with world political parties high-level meeting", organized in 2017:

中华民族历来讲求"天下一家",主张民胞物与、协和万邦、天下大同,憧憬"大道之行,天下为公"的美好世界.

Since ancient times, we Chinese have always held these beliefs dear: "All people under the heaven are of one family", "all the people are my brothers and I share the life of all creatures" and "all nations should live in harmony". We have always aspired to create a better world in which "a just cause is pursued for the common good".[537]

In his speech, Xi used many of the exact concepts, including 'harmonizing the myriad nations' (协和万邦, *xiehe wanbang*), 'all under heaven as a one family' (天下一家, *tianxia yi jia*), 'all under Heaven in great harmony' (天下大同, *tianxia datong*) used by tianxiaists to propose that China has always possessed a completely different political philosophy guiding its actions (see subsection 3.3.2.) The innate peacefulness of China also comes from the experiences that the country has faced during its modern history. In his speeches, Xi Jinping often claims to represent the views of the Chinese people (中国人民, *Zhongguo renmin*) or Chinese nation (中华民族, *Zhonghua minzu*), which is always presented as loving peace and disliking war.[538]

Although the CSFM narrative frames China as an overwhelmingly pacifist and defensive great power, its peaceful and harmonious conduct has some limitations. Xi often points to certain 'legitimate rights and interests' (正当权益, *zhengdang quanyi*), left without explicit definition, which are untouchable, and which China will always defend. Xi does not forget to refer to these interests in most of his speeches and for example argues that "no one should expect us to swallow anything that undermines our interests."[539] Such remarks are always at the margin of the speeches, however, hidden among the otherwise peaceful narrative.

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[535] Xi 2017c.
[536] "依靠武力对外侵略扩张最终都是要失败的", Xi 2013.
[537] Xi 2017d
[538] See for example Xi 2013.
[539] "任何人不要幻想让中国吞下损害自身利益的苦果", Xi 2017c.

5.3 Conclusion: A tianxiaist great power?

To summarize the essentials of Xi Jinping's speeches, the Community of shared future for mankind is not aiming to overthrow the liberal international order, but to reform and diversify its attributes. The Community would be a liberal international order without the dominance of the Western liberal ideology and its claimed 'universal values'. The Community would maintain the deepening of globalization and free trade as the major principles of international politics, but it would establish more control on how their benefits are shared through 'democratizing' multilateral institutions in favor of the less developed states. The Community, furthermore, preserves or even strengthens the security framework around the United Nations but, at the same time, reinforces the principles of sovereignty and equality of the states. It is a rather vague vision, never developing the exact details on how these reforms would be implemented, though this also is an aspect of political speeches in general.

The vision of the CSFM is very much a continuation on the official foreign policy rhetoric that has been developed in China throughout, at least, the reform era. It provides an official evaluation on the existing international order and communicates China's fundamental foreign policy objectives, especially the safeguarding of China's sovereignty. In this, the concept inherits the basic, favorable estimation of the world situation, expressed by Deng Xiaoping and also directly applies the concepts proposed by President Jiang Zemin, such as the 'diversity of civilizations' and the 'new security concept'. The CSFM, as a whole, is also very similar to the 'harmonious world', described by President Hu Jintao, differing from it mostly on the name. There are minor differences in rhetorical styles, since Xi applies more Confucian terminology than his predecessors, and perhaps most notably, tianxiaist concepts. The worldview of the CSFM as well as its suggestions for reforming the order are in many aspects similar to those of tianxiaism. The rest of the chapter compares these two visions and their core concepts together. The differences are perhaps most apparent in the worldview, though even there they are not completely irreconcilable.

First tianxiaism – especially hard tianxiaism – frames the current state of world politics as a 'warring states condition' or worse, a 'chaos', in which the common interest of the world is completely lost. The main source of the order's chaotic nature lies in the system of sovereign states, which causes the order to hang on the verge of a global conflict or even an all out nuclear war. Besides states system, tianxiaism also heavily stresses the hegemony of the Western ideology and its infamous ideas, such as 'nationalism' and 'individual rationality' (see section 3.2.)

But according to CSFM rhetoric, individual nation states and their sovereignty are not a major problem. The order itself is framed as, in principle functional, but the problems are caused by 'cold war mentality' and 'hegemonism' of certain states, which do not fully respect the principles of

equality and sovereignty. The 'warring states' condition, in the CSFM rhetoric, applies only to the old fashioned 'old great powers' (列强, *lieqiang*) and to their outdated thought patterns, while the majority of the world is already moving beyond this phase. Contrary to hanging on the verge of nuclear war, the CSFM frames the world as moving towards peace, development and win-win cooperation. Furthermore, not all tianxiaists see the current order as chaotic and dysfunctional. Most soft tianxiaists accept the sovereign state as a central unit of modern world politics and consider the liberal international order optimistically as a quite functional system, but in need of more 'worldly' understanding, tolerance and, in short, tianxiaism. It could be argued that the CSFM worldview exists in a middle position between the harder and softer variants of tianxiaism.

Second, contrary to tianxiaism, in which the tianxia-West binary forms the very essence of the cosmology, the CSFM rhetoric – at least in the speeches of Xi Jinping – does not divide the world into civilizations or in any other 'us-them' - dichotomies. The West or the Western powers as a collective are not explicitly mentioned within the arguments and the international order is not presented as an essentially Western creation – or at least its 'Westernity' is not the main problem.[540] To the contrary, China is even often presented as an important contributor in the order's creation after the Second World War.[541] The presence of the Western great powers can be implicitly felt in Xi's speeches through such concepts as 'colonialism', 'hegemonism' and 'old great powers' or when Xi frames "relative international forces becoming balanced" (i.e. the rise of the rest) as a positive development. But the CSFM narrative as a whole is not formed against a Western adversary, and the shadowy presence of the West in the background is not as an important component for the CSFM as it is for tianxiaism.

Third, both tianxiaism and the CSFM rhetoric hold a similar emphasis on 'world trends' and 'historical currents', which seem to have a life of their own. Zhao Tingyang, for example, also argues in a similar tone with the CSFM that the world is developing towards deeper interdependence and overall globalization:

> 历史难逆，正如覆水难收，而且代价难以承受，唯一符合"经济学"的出路是建立与全球化相配的新游戏规则.

> The direction of history is hard to overturn, as hard as gathering water that has spilled, and the price for returning to the past would be too much to bear. The only solution in accord with the theories of "economics" is to establish new rules of the game, which go hand in hand with the globalization.[542]

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[540] This applies only to the speeches of Xi Jinping, since 'the West', The United States and other adversaries are often mentioned by name in the speeches of other Chinese foreign policymakers. See Yang 2017; Fu 2017.

[541] See for example Xi 2015. This, even though it was the Republic of China, which was among the signatories of the United Nations charter – not the People's Republic.

[542] Zhao 2017.

Though the trajectory of history is hard to change, the situation in Zhao's writings is not necessarily as auspicious as the CSFM rhetoric emphasizes. While for Xi, technology is a benevolent harbinger of interdependence and globalization, for Zhao, new developments in high technology can also push the world towards a 'dictatorship of the technological system' (技术系统的全面专制, *jishu xitong de quanmian zuanzhi*).[543] Zhao argues that the emergence of the new tianxia, unlike the almost inevitable rise of the CSFM, is not an automated process, but the tianxia system and the 'new rules of the game' along with it are urgently needed for saving the world from itself. Tianxiaism does not have as strong an element of historical determinism as does the CSFM rhetoric.

5.3.1 Establishment of the Community

The CSFM agrees with both tianxiaisms that the international order needs to be thoroughly reformed and that the 'rules of the game' of world politics need to be updated from the 'cold war/hegemonism' (CSFM) or the 'warring states' (tianxiaism) rules to better reflect the reality of the globalized world. A change at the ideational level is necessary from 'cold war thinking' (tianxiaism's 'warring states' or 'international' mindsets) into 'win-win - thinking' (tianxiaism's 'worldly' thinking). In the speeches CSFM describes this reform and the framework of the Community through the core concepts of 'new security model', 'balanced globalization', 'diversity of civilizations' and the 'beautiful world'.

As seen, the 'new security model' of the CSFM establishes the sovereignty of all states in a rigid, Westphalian manner as its foundational principle. This point is easy to see as a contradiction with the hard tianxiaist ideas, in which the sovereignty of the 'regional units' is limited or even reduced to the level of mere autonomy by the central 'world institution'. The hierarchy between the 'world institution' and the 'regional units', indeed is an ineliminable core component of the hard tianxiaist vision (see subsection 4.2.2.) Although the CSFM does not propose the establishment of a new 'world institution' in line with the tianxiaist visions, it does suggest strengthening and democratizing the United Nations and other central multilateral institutions. Furthermore, although the sovereignty of the member states would be safeguarded within the CSFM, their foreign policies would also be limited to some degree. In conflict situations the United Nations – especially its Security Council – would serve as an arbitrating center, which would empower the principles of sovereignty and equality and thus dissolve the hegemonic power politics of the past. It would also take the 'mandatory actions' when needed. The UN framework then, would serve similar *functions* within the CSFM as the 'world institution' of tianxia. Seen through such functional similarity, the member states of the CSFM, just as the 'regional units' of tianxia, would have sovereignty in their domestic political structures, yet their foreign policies

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[543] See Zhao 2016, 265–269.

would be limited to some degree by the 'world institution' of the empowered UN.

How would the CSFM be ruled by the member states? The CSFM rhetoric holds a strong emphasis on *democracy* on how the multilateral institutions should be governed and on international relations. The word democracy is often used in Xi's speeches. Such emphasis seems to be in contrast to the relentless criticism of democracy by Zhao and on Zhao's proposition, that the world institution should be a benevolent authoritarian institution, which would act according to the people's will (民心, *minxin*.) Democracy is, however, used by Xi only in relation to the international situation, in which the West is in a dominating position compared to the developing countries. By democracy Xi appears to be only suggesting more equal treatment of the states in international organizations. The concept of 'democratization' therefore does not mean that the CSFM would endorse democracy as understood in the liberal countries, as an institution or process, at least at the level of citizens. In fact, Xi is almost completely silent on the how the Community would be governed according to his conception of democracy.

Xi's loose conception of democracy can also be observed in the concept of 'balanced development' which the CSFM endorses as a central method for dealing with the imbalances in both security and economic realms. In 'balanced globalization' the benefits of economic development will be shared more evenly among all the states.

> 各国和各国人民应该共同享受发展成果。每个国家在谋求自身发展的同时，要积极促进其他各国共同发展。世界长期发展不可能建立在一批国家越来越富裕而另一批国家却长期贫穷落后的基础之上. 只有各国共同发展了，世界才能更好发展。那种以邻为壑、转嫁危机、损人利己的做法既不道德，也难以持久。

> We stand for the sharing of the fruits of development by all countries and peoples in the world. Every country, while pursuing its own development, should actively facilitate the common development of all countries. There can not be an enduring development in the world when some countries are getting richer and richer while others languishing in prolonged poverty and backwardness. Only when all countries achieve common development can there be better development in the world. Such practices as beggaring-thy-neighbor, shifting crisis on others and feathering one's nest at the expense of others are both immoral and unsustainable.[544]

Although tianxiaism typically does not emphasize economic globalization or the development or the economic institutions, it actively endorses sharing material benefits together with the world. The idea is well expressed in Zhao's formulation of 'relational rationality' or in Sheng Hong's 'strong reciprocity', which both suggest that the tianxia should pursue the interests of the community instead of the interest of individual states. According to Zhao's 'relational rationality', Chinese civilization has always seen only such conduct as 'rational', which increases the interests of all instead of only interests of certain individuals (see subsection 3.3.2.) Both tianxia and the CSFM rhetoric

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[544]   Xi 2013b.

then share a common ambition in establishing some sort of a 'global new deal' and in developing the world towards an equally prosperous whole.

The similarities between the CSFM and tianxia are more striking in how both claim to cherish cultural and ideological diversity in the world. Neither propagate any ideology or value system to the member states, and instead, both allow, perhaps even endorse the member units to apply their own political and economic models according to their own national conditions. Neither tianxia, nor the CSFM seem to even have any central ideologies to propagate. Although Xi did mention in his UN speech of 2015 that "peace, development, justice, democracy and freedom are common values of all mankind", the phrase defines these concepts with terms favorable for the Chinese government: 'justice and democracy' means more say for developed countries in international forums, and 'freedom' merely the right to choose non-Western political and development models.[545]

Similar relativism applies to the definition of cultures, since both models define 'civilizations' as equally respectable: Xi emphasizes that "there is no such thing as a superior or inferior civilization"[546] and Zhao describes the tianxia as "approving the freedom of all types of cultures to exist and to naturally die".[547] The CSFM and tianxia, therefore, claim to lack any ideological or cultural 'others' and indeed, besides perhaps terrorists, Xi's speeches never mention any other adversaries or 'others', which would need to be civilized. This aspect is very much in line with tianxia, which, according to Zhao Tingyang, "only recognizes political consistency and the universality of humanity, and does not recognize any other principles, especially universality of any ideological or religious principles." Essentially the CSFM, just as tianxia, has 'no outside' (无外, *wuwai*). Being a diverse and non-ideological whole, the CSFM would be a practical community, in which the member states are allowed to act almost as they want in their domestic politics as long as they do not harm other states.[548] Only under unspecified extreme conditions would the Community take 'mandatory action'.

China's place within the Community, according to Xi's speeches, would be a member state among the others. Although China is framed as the initiator of and the major supporter of the Community, it will never rise above others as the Community cannot have a hegemonic center. The great power identity that is projected for China within the CSFM argumentation, is very similar to the tianxiaist definition: China as a peaceful great power that holds a 'worldly outlook', and that – to apply tianxiaist phrasing – follows 'relational rationality' in its policies. Both definitions of Chinese identity draw from Chinese *exceptionalism*, to argue that due to its unique historical development, China is

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[545] "和平、发展、公平、正义、民主、自由，是全人类的共同价值", Xi 2015.
[546] "文明没有高下、优劣之分", Xi 2017b.
[547] "各种文化的自由存在和自然存亡", Zhao 2011, 100.
[548] Interestingly however, China has, during the era of Xi, been more willing in promoting its 'Chinese model' as an "option for other countries and nations who want to speed up their development while preserving their independence.""给世界上那些既希望加快发展又希望保持自身独立性的国家和民族提供了全新选择", see Xi 2017c.

different from other traditional great powers: a peaceful, harmonious and responsible. It should not be expected to establish a hegemonic order, nor should it ever be feared.[549] To the contrary, because China has always had a unique, tianxiaist approach to world politics, it can offer a relevant alternative vision for the whole of mankind.

However, there is some ambiguity on the issues as Xi Jinping has hinted that China might also have aspirations beyond such modesty. In his speech for the 19th National Congress of the Communist party of China, Xi Jinping, for instance expressed that China will "tie a circle of friends, covering the globe, around it" (联结遍布全球的'朋友圈', *lianjie bianbu quanqiu de 'pengyouquan'*) and remarkably mentioned how China would "move increasingly into the center of the world stage" (走近世界舞台中央, *zoujin shijie wutai zhongyang*).[550] Furthermore, in a work conference of national security organized in February of 2017, Xi shortly brought forward the notion of 'two guides' (两个引导, *liang ge yindao*), according to which China wants to "guide the international society in creating together a more just and rational international order" and to "guide the international society in protecting international security together".[551] All the expressions are carefully and modestly crafted: the term 'to guide' (引导, *yindao*) is used instead of stronger verbs such as *lead*, and China is only *moving* towards the *center* of the world stage, not establishing a center by itself. Careful and modest as the notions are, they are still offering signals that China's position within the Community might, in the end, be more pivotal than the multilateral rhetoric implies.

5.3.2   A Community in the making?

To summarize the comparisons of the chapter, the Community of shared future for mankind, as presented in the speeches of President Xi Jinping, has numerous similarities with tianxiaism both at the levels of worldview as well as of their visions on the future shape of the international order. It can be concluded that the tianxiaist concepts provide considerable rhetorical support for the CSFM especially on its function in constructing a harmonious and peaceful great power identity for China. Also the more 'worldly' aspects of tianxiaism – particularly its alleged tolerance for ideological and cultural diversity – are heavily emphasized, while the hierarchic and hegemonic aspects are, quite understandably, left out.

Both CSFM and tianxiaism remain, in their practical implications, ambiguously and imprecisely defined. Although Chinese commentators describe Xi's vision as being on the innovative level of the Enlightenment or the works of Karl Marx, what can actually be gathered from the concept, in the words of Nadege Rolland, is a mere "list of what Beijing advocates for its own

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[549]   On 'Chinese exceptionalism' in Chinese foreign policy thought, see Zhang 2013.
[550]   Xi 2017c.
[551]   "要引导国际社会共同塑造更加公正合理的国际新秩序 […] 引导国际社会共同维护国际安全", Renmin Wang 20.2.2017.

needs, security, and position than an innovative contribution for the future of the world."[552] Such ambiguity, according to Rolland, might be because the Chinese leadership genuinely does not have an accurate blueprint of the reformed international order, and the CSFM provides a broad sketch, or a set of vague strategic guidelines, which can be pragmatically modified as the project continues.[553]

On the other hand, there might well exist a more detailed plan, which is not published for the wider audiences, and in which China's central and leading position within the CSFM is much more strongly designated. After all, it would be against the spirit of the CSFM and the whole larger project of framing China as an innately peacefully and anti-hegemonic great power to claim that China aims to take a leading position in the future order. But beyond Xi Jinping's lofty rhetoric of equality, multilateralism and anti-hegemonism, China's actual policy actions as well as some commentaries of Chinese scholars on the concept draw a darker, more comprehensive picture of what the CSFM might be all about. As pointed out by Rolland and others, on a closer look, various hints have emerged that China aims to have a more central position within its Community as is expounded in the public rhetoric.

According to Zhang Dehua, the 'harmonious' and 'non-hegemonic' rhetoric of the CSFM provides a cover under which China is building bilateral 'partnerships', deepening economic dependencies and expanding its "circle of friends across the world" – particularly within the developing world.[554] The Belt and the Road Initiative is the main institutional tool for the expansion, which is used for establishing the economic ties between China and its partners. The Belt and the Road is not a mere project for developing infrastructure: according to Rolland the infrastructure investment and other economic incentives serve only as "the hook", which, when "offered without immediate conditions or political demands, can be an appealing proposition."[555] But after the initial deals have been signed, Rolland argues, offers of deeper level of cooperation will follow in forms of

> free trade agreement negotiations; financial and currency-swap agreements; industrial standards expansion across transportation, energy, and digital networks; intensified security cooperation.[556]

Although the partnership structure is described as a being benevolently based on 'dialogue', 'non-confrontation' and 'win-win cooperation', deeper levels of economic interaction with China have been noticed to lead to economic coercion when the partner state fails to comply with China's 'core interests'.[557] Partnerships, therefore, can easily lead to the self-regulation and self-censorship of the smaller partners in which the smaller partner abide by the bigger

[552]   Rolland 2020, 38.
[553]   Rolland 2020.
[554]   Zhang 2018.
[555]   Rolland 2020, 41.
[556]   Ibid.
[557]   Tobin 2018.

partner's policy rules, while it secures its independence together with considerable economic benefits. Xu Jin and Guo Chu, researchers of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences have interpreted the CSFM and its partnership structure to have such effects. Nadege Rolland offers a summary of Xu's and Guo's ideas:

> countries will join [the CSFM] initially because they recognize the economic benefits that they can reap from their relationship to China. In time, they will become amenable to broadening and deepening political and security cooperation. Increased interactions will help shape the views of the members of the nascent community and foster a feeling of togetherness among them.[558]

Xu and Guo argue that as political, economic and security cooperation deepens, the member states of the Community will slowly become accustomed to the idea of China as a regional and global leader.[559]

Besides the analysis of the magnanimous rhetoric of Xi Jinping, a less benign interpretation of the Community is possible through analysis of China's actual foreign policy decisions. If developed, the resulting Community might resemble the hard tianxiaist vision of the world with a clear central 'world institution' in China and with the 'regional units' in the nation states, which are tied to the world institution through 'partnerships'. The states would enjoy high levels of autonomy, since China would not dictate their domestic policies or ideological systems in any important sense, but only as long as they would do not oppose China's interests. Under such a Community of shared future, the center would also harmonize all possible conflicts before they would emerge. Beyond Xi Jinping's rhetoric of anti-hegemonic multilateralism, the actual model in the making might resemble Zhao's hard tianxiaist utopia more than meets the eye, and live up to the more accurate translation of its name: *The community of common destiny for mankind.*

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[558]   Rolland 2020, 42.
[559]   Ibid.

6   ALL UNDER HEAVEN IN
       A COMMUNITY OF SHARED FUTURE?

This dissertation has studied tianxiaism (tianxia theory) as an argument in the ongoing debates on the nature of world politics. The tianxiaist argument has been studied in the context of the assumed legitimacy crisis of the liberal international order, in which the order, its grand narrative and its ideological base are being challenged by alternative visions. As pointed out in the introduction, the dissertation relies on the constructivist precepts proposed by Alexander Wendt, in which the essence of world politics is not determined by material factors or unchanging national interests, but instead, to a large degree socially constructed by the main actors of the order. Ideas – riding on the wings of material power – are the central force, which transform international orders.

Against this theoretical background the dissertation has analyzed tianxiaism as an argument in a 'Skinnerian debate' that is going on in a global scale. Instead of merely explaining the world, tianxiaism aims to *transform* the world by delegitimizing the existing international order and its institutions, and by criticizing its 'Western values'. At the same time tianxiaism is also challenging the established theoretical canon of world politics, which it claims to apply only within the 'warring states' conditions of the West. In the place of the chaotic Western 'non-world' (非世界, *fei shijie*), tianxiaism envisions a new utopian world order, which, it claims, would be more peaceful and just. The tianxiaist vision is important not only because it has already established its place in the global discussions of world politics, or at least is in their margins, but because the tianxiaist frame and tianxiaist cosmological concepts are used also by the Chinese government as it, in its turn, is attempting to reframe the essence of world politics according to its own terms. The following chapter will summarize the essentials of the dissertation and outline some ideas for further studies.

6.1 Tianxiaism and its elements

As argued throughout the dissertation, tianxiaism is best seen as a civilizational argument, which divides the world into competing major civilizations of the West and China. Just as the highly indeterminate concept of 'the West', the concept of tianxia is perfectly suited for such rhetorical uses since, being a concept with over 3000 years of history, its exact nature is not possible to grasp, and it is open for imaginative interpretations.

Chapter two presented the historiography, showing that the concept of tianxia has had various meanings throughout its development: sometimes the concept has meant a loose cultural sphere united by certain values and norms, and sometimes tianxia has delineated a political realm with strict outer borders. Sometimes tianxia has contained universalist connotations, according to which literally all under Heaven should be united and harmonized under a benign and humane leadership. Because the concept often has meant any combination of these aspects at any given point in time, it can be confusing.

Chapter three analyzed how this historical complexity has been transformed into a rather coherent tianxiaist grand narrative, in which the liberal international order and its values are framed as being creations of the Western civilization. The current order, according to tianxiaism, is therefore based on the hegemony of Western values, and as it expanded to the world it extinguished the Chinese tianxia order, which was more peaceful and harmonious. Tianxia, if resurrected, would provide a more peaceful and stable basis for an international order of the era of globalization.

Such construction of the West and tianxia, the chapter argued, constitute extreme forms of Occidentalism and Orientalism: The West is defined as a bellicose and individualist civilization, while the tianxia is described as harmonious, tolerant and peaceful place. Contrary to the aggressive West, the tianxia did not have any 'others' to conquer, and the proposed new version of the tianxia system would be similarly diverse and 'without outsides' (无外, *wuwai*). However, as argued in the chapter, tianxiaism is essentially based on the dichotomy of tianxia and the West, and the Western civilization and tianxia seemingly can never coexist. The West, in tianxiaism functions as an anti-tianxia concept, which is urgently needed for clarifying the unique and benevolent nature of the tianxia itself.

But through its relentless contradiction with the West, tianxiaism is actually *empowering* civilizational divisions instead of creating a new universality. In other words, tianxiaism is attempting to replace one ethnocentric metanarrative, that is the West-centric metanarrative, with another, sinocentric narrative. Such centrism is not new, but rather a universal and omnipresent phenomenon in all human societies; as Tuan Yi-fu has argued "the illusion of superiority and centrality is probably necessary to the sustenance of culture".[560] Jack Goody has pointed out in a similar manner that "a hidden

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[560]   Tuan 1991, 31. See also section 2.2.

ethnocentric risk is to be eurocentric about ethnocentricity, a trap post-colonialism and postmodernism frequently fall into".[561]

Chapter four focused on tianxiaisms actual propositions for the reform of the international order by comparing it to a chosen set of established theories of international politics. The chapter first proposed what the institutional structure of a new tianxia order could be based on the writings of Zhao Tingyang, and then compared this model with the theories of hegemonic stability, liberal institutionalism and cosmopolitanism. The chapter argued that tianxiaism does not offer any completely unique suggestions for a new world order. The essence of tianxiaism is captured – with a different wording – by the hegemonic stability theories (HST), which would describe tianxia simply as another kind of a hegemonic order – perhaps of a more lenient or 'kindlebergian' nature, but a hegemony all the same. From the point of view of the HST then, the concept of *hegemony* is very similar to the tianxiaist *world institution*, and the *secondary states* of HST correspond to tianxia's *regional units*.

The chapter further argued that tianxia also shares similarities with theories of liberal institutionalism. Out of a large variety of possible models to explore, the 'constitutional order' developed by John Ikenberry was chosen as a model of comparison. Ikenberry's constitutional order is governed by a 'liberal hegemon': a great power (or a group of powers) which upholds the stability and prosperity of the order while enjoying legitimacy in the eyes of the secondary states. The chapter argued that the *leading state* is the conceptual equivalent to the *world institution*, and the *secondary states* of the constitutional order to tianxia's *regional units*. The final subsections 4.3.4 and 4.3.5 further proposed that the modern renditions of cosmopolitanism – either the decentralized 'democratic' variant, but especially the world state-variant – are functionally similar to tianxia, with the main difference to be found only in the democratic process used in the former. *World parliament* and *world government* were argued to be conceptually close to the *world institution* of tianxia.

The chapter concluded that the tianxia theory does not provide very useful theoretical or analytical tools of global governance compared to the established theories, and thus offers mostly rhetorical value. Perhaps it remains at the 'pre-theoretical' phase as defined by Amitav Acharya and Barry Buzan, in which it is currently too underdeveloped for fulfilling the requirements of a 'real' theory, but holds the potential for becoming one later.[562] Still, more than providing a systematic and practical theory of world governance the whole project of tianxiaism seems to be motivated by a need to create something 'Chinese' and 'unique' by applying ancient concepts.

Chapter five argues that tianxiaism's beautifully described utopian visions have been useful for the Chinese leadership's soft power ambitions. Tianxia and the central foreign policy concept of the Xi Jinping administration, the 'Community of shared future for mankind' (人类命运共同体, *renlei mingyun gongtongti*) are surprisingly similar visions, although this might not be initially

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[561]   Goody 2006, 5.
[562]   Acharya & Buzan 2010.

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clear at the surface. Both tianxiaism and the CSFM argue that they represent a peaceful and prosperous world order, in which cultural diversity would flourish, and in which war and Machiavellian great power politics would become a thing of the past. Both also develop an exceptionalist narrative of China as an essentially peaceful and harmonious great power, which no-one should be afraid of. Although both tianxiaism and the CSFM are, from a practical standpoint, quite vague frameworks, the dissertation concludes that the rhetorical value of their narratives is considerable and should remain within the attention of scholars.

6.2   Directions of further research

Tianxiaism will likely remain a topic of discussion in the future and the concept has established its place in the global discussions of international politics. Studies on the concept and on its use should thus continue and there would be many directions such studies could take. **First**, and as mentioned in the third chapter, tianxiaist claims on the essence of the harmonious tianxia should be thoroughly challenged and criticized, as should the Occidental claims on the individualist and aggressive 'West'. Ideally this could involve a history of the concept of tianxia and its relationships to the changing political contexts around it. The Cambridge school approach to conceptual history as well as Alastair Johnston's study of Confucian discourses in relation to China's actual foreign policies could serve as an inspiration for such a study.[563]

    Second, since tianxiaism is primarily targeted for China's domestic discussions, another interesting research project, which was only hinted at within this dissertation (see subsection 4.2.2.) would consist of analyzing the use of the concept of tianxia within debates concerning China's domestic policy. Hard tianxiaists, such as Zhao Tingyang, could be analyzed as defenders of the current authoritarian and centralized government, while the soft tianxiaists and particularly 'new tianxiaists', such as Xu Jilin, could be seen as proponents of more liberal and loose political structure.[564]

    Finally the most ambitious project would involve the development of a *real* tianxia theory, which would attempt to solve the shared problems of mankind without relying on any civilizational attributes, and through a constructive dialogue with the established theoretical traditions. Although the dissertation has taken a critical stance towards tianxiaism the implication should not be that tianxia and other Chinese concepts and ideas should be discarded as useless rhetorical tools. To the contrary, and in a true tianxiaist spirit, studies on such concepts and discussions between proponents of tianxiaism and of other schools should continue, but without the attempts to

[563]   See Johnston 1995.
[564]   William Callahan has already hinted on such an interpretation. See Callahan 2008.

prove the supremacy of *any* civilization or by neglecting some ideas because they are Western, Chinese or Indian for that matter.

Inspiring possibilities of such research can be seen in Barry Buzan's and Zhang Yongjin's study of the 'tributary system' as an international society (see subsection 2.2.1.) as well as in Chen Yudan comparative study of the ancient conceptions of tianxia and stoic cosmpolitanism. Chen ends his comparison by claiming that for the tianxiaists

> It seems more like a passion to prove China's cultural superiority against the background of China's rise, than a serious and profound academic consideration. The study on Stoic and Confucian cosmopolitanisms, however, does not support such an arbitrary statement. […] Stoic cosmopolitanism may act as a bridge for contemporary Chinese to understand our ancestors' vision of Tianxia, which many of us have forgotten for too long a time.

The economist Zhang Shuguang – a critic of the hard tianxiaist theory – has also proposed a comprehensive diffusion of the Chinese and Western intellectual traditions in a conciliatory tone:

> 中西文化究竟是对立和冲突的，还是各有所长各有所短，因而是需要而且能够互补和融合的，各自长在何处，短在何地，如何互补，怎样融合？

> In the end, are the cultures of the West and China in opposition and conflict, or is it rather that both have their strengths and weaknesses, and therefore, that they should be able to complement each other's weak and strong points?[565]

It is statements such as these, free of civilizational or cultural attributes and building on a true dialogue between intellectual traditions, which should guide our adventures in searching to unify all under Heaven.

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[565]   Zhang 2006.

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