Tianxia: The Threefold Connotation, Vehicle of Language, and Journey to Reestablishment

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Abstract

Tianxia 天下 has recently become a buzzword in Chinese academia. The word's three-fold connotation in relation to geographical, political, and international systems needs to be analyzed to illustrate its different meanings. These three meanings were centered around China in the self-sufficient traditional Chinese civilization; however, they all need reinterpretation in the current age of globalization. Reinterpreting *tianxia* requires an appropriate vehicle of language: weak and regressive language, early modern language that has undergone transformation, and pretentious usage cannot effectively reinterpret *tianxia*. A non-literati, nonpolitical approach to linguistic expression is necessary to avoid the corruption of language and reinterpret the word from a universal perspective. The principal matter to be addressed in reinterpreting *tianxia* is its notion in relationship to nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Merely reinterpreting the best intentions of *tianxia* is insufficiently convincing for the concept in the age of globalization. How *tianxia* is elucidated through the lens of the individual, state, and international world determines the reliability and credibility of the interpretation.

Keywords

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* Note: The term *tianxia* is notoriously difficult to translate into Western languages. Its literal meaning is simply "under heaven." To emphasize the term's universal inclusiveness, it is more frequently translated as "all under heaven." Depending on the context it can also be rendered as "all of China" or even "the whole world." Different discussions call for different understandings of this important term. For the sake of ease in this article we will not force a single translation, but rather use the standard romanization *tianxia*, and let the readers digest it in their own way.

Chinese and western civilizations have been clashing since 1840. This kind of clash has not only failed to more clearly distinguish the superior from the inferior, but has tragically resulted in a rigid confrontation between Chinese and Western civilizations, as well as ancient and modern territory and space. This is not the outcome we desire for the contact between civilizations. However, history cannot be repeated. Chinese civilization's journey from 1840 to today means it is finally able to rationally plan and prepare for its future, reigniting the quintessence of Chinese culture that can serve humankind.

A weak civilization and nation that is passive and under attack often struggles to stand its ground amid suffering in its own pain, which makes it unable to rationally plan and prepare for its future or tap into the positive elements of its own traditional civilization that benefit humankind. When China finally emerged from its position as the passive underdog, it entered the world stage in terms of material power, and therefore had the conditions to properly consider exactly what its long-standing civilization will do for the entire human race. In particular, when Chinese people talk of the Chinese dream, the party in power has pointed out the essential consistency between the Chinese and American dream. The way in which this shared dream of humankind is highlighted and how Chinese civilization can offer an optimal solution and pioneering thought regarding this have become key questions. This is precisely the practical driving force for discussing the *tianxia* 天下 sentiment of Chinese culture.

1   The Threefold Connotation of *Tianxia*

Before the *tianxia* worldview of Chinese culture returned to its current scene, past encounters between Chinese and Western civilizations were not aggressive clashes; these are a tragic result of regional civilizations and cultural opposition between Chinese and Western cultures. The "modern world-system"[1] embodied by the West since 1500 and the "ancient *tianxia* system"[2] developed by the long-term development of Chinese civilization are in a state of opposition regarding the overall vision of human society. The significance of

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[1] Immanuel Wallerstein states that "The capitalist world economy is the origin of the modern world-system and where the modern world-system historically developed. The modern world-system is a historical system that originated in parts of Europe and later expanded to include other parts of the world until it spread to the entire world." Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, trans. You Laiyin 尤來寅 et al. (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), 1.

[2] Li Yangfan 李揚帆, ed., *Bei wudu de tianxia zhixu* 被誤讀的天下秩序 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2016), 3–18.

clarifying the true connotations of the two systems therefore becomes apparent. For example, discussing this *tianxia* worldview of Chinese culture within the proposition of "reigniting Chinese civilization" necessitates the clarification of the threefold connotation of the "*tianxia* system."

Firstly, *tianxia* is a geographical concept of understanding the world for Chinese people. In the current taxonomy of academic disciplines, it belongs to the field of geographical investigation. This geographical scope has evidently changed with the expansion of the Chinese regime. It seems impossible to overlook this implication when currently discussing *tianxia* – it depends on physical objects in the world. The emphasis on the Chinese understanding and fondness of *tianxia* generally pertains to the highest realms of spirituality or value. On a more mundane level, *tianxia* mainly refers to the correlation between the Chinese and surrounding ethnic groups, which is related to the *tianxia* systematic structure established by the ancient Chinese. In the traditional cultural system, it is the "kindred level system" (*wufu zhidu* 五服制度) of the Zhou dynasty and later the "tributary system" (*chaogong tixi* 朝貢體系), which were an inter-state mechanism established by a series of regimes. In the current landscape of equal nation-states, it would be inconceivable to attempt to rebuild a world in which Chinese people are absolutely dominant, to include other cultures and nations in China's *tianxia* ideology and for them to identify with this worldview that Chinese civilization has created since ancient times. However, this *tianxia* sentiment has a certain transcendental value.

In our modern day, whether from the perspective of global issues or governance, there are not many countries that maintain the worldview of a "one family world, one person China" (*tianxia yijia, zhongguo yiren* 天下一家, 中國一人)[3] due to the long-term domination of foreign thought. We must of course acknowledge some Western countries which have retained this worldview. However, in recent times, Europeans who express this sentiment have been challenged by Middle Eastern immigrants, who supposedly hinder the progress of Europe. Moreover, in the United States, former President Donald Trump subscribes to a conservative tradition with close-minded characteristics. Nevertheless, there is still an unquestionable element of idealism and a predilection for inclusion in American culture. U.S. history is markedly short. If we elongate the lens through which we view history, then this collective

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3   "Liyun" 禮運, in *Liji* 禮記 states, "So saints can make the whole world like one family, like the whole nation like one person, not through subjective imagination, but realising human relationships, knowing justice, understanding people's interests, and being familiar with human suffering. Only then can it be achieved." See Zhu Bin 朱彬, *Liji xunzuan* 禮記訓纂 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1996), 1: 344.

tianxia consciousness of Chinese civilization is the most longstanding and worthy of rebooting.

There are three factors that prompt the reestablishment of Chinese civilization's *tianxia* worldview. One is that global problems and governance have become key issues. It has become increasingly important to look beyond national horizons and establish a global perspective. Another factor is that having overcome the tragic fate it experienced in modern times, China has a new understanding of the clash between Chinese and Western culture and knows it must overcome the value conflicts and regional confrontations between the two cultures. China's modern civilization has reached a critical point where it is right in front of the threshold of human civilization, and can either advance or retreat. Thirdly, Chinese civilization is at a crossroads in terms of determining its future development, and has reached a key moment of needing to re-examine its cultural legacy.

Chinese civilization once had a complete system of *tianxia* founded on geography, and safeguarded by the kindred level and tributary systems. In comparison, the system has both inherited and surpassed the regional construct of the "*tianxia*" concept. It is evident that the *tianxia* system established in ancient China has made great breakthroughs in terms of geography. Ancestors often believed that China was the Central Plains (*zhongyuan* 中原), the *tianxia* of the Han people. Historically, on the notion of China's frontier, people long believed that the areas surrounding the Central Plains were all inhabited by barbarians, named the Four Barbarians (*man, yi, rong*, and *di* 蠻、夷、戎、狄), and that only the Han people could be considered ethnically Chinese. This is the reason for the "Sino-barbarian dichotomy" (*yan yixia zhifang* 嚴夷夏之防)[4] rhetoric. This geographical concept gradually expanded, and, following China's significant influence on East Asia and even Southeast and parts of central Asia, the concept of *tianxia* in the geographical sense has developed connotations that are vastly different from its original geographical meaning. However, the real structural breakthrough was triggered by the modern event of China beginning to "open its eyes to the world" in 1840: *tianxia* gradually became the modern "world" and today's "global village".

Chinese *tianxia* is a geographically expansive concept. However, it has often been turned into a laughingstock throughout its development in modern times. Even those enlightened in the early days of modern China, not just the

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4 Mencius clearly emphasizes in "Tengwengong shang" 滕文公上 in *Mengzi* 孟子 that "I've heard of using the civilization of the Central Plains to change barbarians (*man yi* 蠻夷), but never heard of being changed by barbarians." See Zhu Xi 朱熹, *Sishu zhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 260.

conservatives, once made fools of themselves when opening their eyes to the world. In the second half of the 19th century, Chinese pioneers and trailblazers of modern culture, during this opening up to the world, assumed that westerners and even Chinese people who were close to westerners were monsters. Wei Yuan 魏源 (1794–1857), the editor of *Haiguo tuzhi* 海國圖志 was one such pioneer. Wei's writing described Christians in bizarre language: A nonbeliever walks into a church, takes a pill, and kneels, as if they are possessed, in front of a statue of God to worship, completely not recognizing their parents, relatives, uncles, and cousins …[5] He viewed Christianity entirely as a cult when it is actually a highly established modern, orthodox religion. The geographical expansion of the concept of *tianxia* has undergone abrupt change with the Age of Discovery in modern times, and it is no wonder that Chinese people became such a laughingstock at the time due to their ignorance. More than two hundred years have passed since Wei Yuan's time, and we will not be seeing too much of such ignorance about the world that was beyond *tianxia* at the time.

Rebooting the *tianxia* worldview of Chinese civilization does not necessarily mean reestablishing a systematic structure that was formerly supported by the kindred level and tributary systems. There is a saying that the rise of China must be reflected in the decline of the United States, or that the rise of the East must hinge on the decline of the West. In other words, the contemporary "self-centered" Chinese worldview and its corresponding institutional system are the subject of reflection for the *tianxia* establishment. Is it possible for this modern version of the *tianxia* system that is founded on Chinese history to reintegrate the historical justice-tempered-with-mercy, moral reform, and political arrangement in the present? It is hard to say. From a historical perspective, the geographical vision of the traditional kindred level system was rich, but the construction of the tributary system that developed from the kindred level system relied not on a singular but two aspects. The first was its conversion of foreign nationals to voluntarily accept Chinese culture, and the other was its powerful driving force provided by military conquest. Only focusing on upholding the former aspect and regarding it as the spiritual pillar for the reestablishment of the *tianxia* system is unfortunately inconsistent with historical reality, yet it is also at present difficult to assert the latter aspect of strength.

We can revisit the work of the renowned historian Chen Xujing's 陳序經 (1903–1967) *Xiongnu shigao* 匈奴史稿 and from that learn that the Han dynasty

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5   For such legends, refer to Wei Yuan 魏源, *Wei Yuan quanji* 魏源全集 (Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 2004), 27.805–06.

(202 BCE–220 CE) fought and defeated the Xiongnu, who migrated to Europe, inducing fear in Europeans regarding the power of Asians.[6] Although this is not directly related the *tianxia* upheld by China and its surrounding areas, the enormous repercussions of the war between the Han andXiongnu showed that military force in the construction of the *tianxia* system definitely played no less of a role than that of moral reform and cultural identity. However, with the world currently being in a multipolar structural state, attempting to rely on force to reestablish *tianxia* would be impossible.

The tributary system was not what current Chinese people surmise it to be – neighboring countries genuinely and sincerely submitting to China's rule. When neighboring countries came to China to pay tribute, China often possessed the narcissism that came from unilaterally believing it to be respect from outsiders, when in fact the tributes rarely had this reverence. The remark "measure and give China's material resources to appease big powers"[7] was by no means just the politicized diplomatic mentality of China supporting itself as a less powerful state, but the core of the foreign policy system in Chinese civilization, but it was embodied in two aspects. In ancient times, any country that came to pay tribute meant it submitted to the Chinese regime and in turn could receive great material gifts. This was a kind of sentimental influence regime in the tributary system; in modern times, with China having weaker national power, it adopted a mentality of not losing face, and therefore would rather cede benefits to outsiders to maintain its dominance. This was a kind of political competitiveness of the tributary system, and does not mean that imperial China had the hard and soft powers to subjugate countries paying tribute. Moreover, the tributary system cultivated imperial China's political habit of being passive in diplomatic relations, which was evidently not conducive to active diplomacy for imperial China, and this introversion is also obvious.[8]

Contemporary relations between countries are more concerned with equal exchange and reciprocal interests, which is certainly not a modern reestablishment of the tributary system. In comparison, out of the three connotations of the traditional *tianxia* system, the contemporary value of the geographical and systematic aspects is no longer apparent. What is conducive to paving a bright future for humankind is its spiritual notion, namely a fondness for *tianxia*.

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6 Chen Xujing 陳序經, *Xiongnu shigao* 匈奴史稿 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), 514–48.

7 Qing (1616–1911) court edict from the Guangxu Emperor 光緒 (r. 1875–1908) on February 14th 1901, under the invasion of the Eight-Nation Alliance and the defeat of the Qing government.

8 Li Yunquan 李云泉, *Wanbang laichao: chaogong zhidu shilun* 萬邦來朝：朝貢制度史論 (Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 2014), 256–62.

China pays attention to the entire world and attaches importance to the consistency of human values, and the "one family world, one person China" saying is truly the most valuable concept in today's noisy world. Viewing the world as one family and China as one person does not mean that everyone in the world belongs to the imperial family and submits to the emperor alone. On the contrary, its essence is that like attracts like (*tongqi xiangqiu* 同氣相求) – all humans are brothers and sisters, and all creatures are companions (*minbao wuyu* 民胞物與).⁹ It is founded on people's uniform dignity, intercommunity development, and equality, thereby equipping it with a universal inspirational energy. Based on this, China's *tianxia* worldview is not limited to a national lens, but undoubtedly a global vision. In other words, this fondness or predilection is not only of practical significance to the Chinese people themselves, but universally pertinent to global governance; it is not merely about pursuing cultural uniqueness, but rather comprehensively widening our horizons so that all citizens across the globe can unite and share in our personhood. This therefore allows the possibility to transcend the oppositional world system constructed by heterogeneous nation-states.

In this particular sense, rebooting the *tianxia* worldview of Chinese civilization is to mainly tap into the valuable essence of the nation that is capable of rectifying the conflict mechanisms in the modern world system. At the same time, we need to curb the non-inclusive notions of megalomania and dominance embodied in the deific complex (*wanbang laichao* 萬邦來朝) of the ancient Chinese *tianxia* system. Only in this way can Chinese people truly shoulder the responsibility for our bright and prosperous future.

2   A Language Vehicle for the *Tianxia* Worldview

Language is an important vehicle for the development of civilization and culture. Renowned philosopher Martin Heidegger emphasized that "Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell."¹⁰ To reboot *tianxia*, we must select an appropriate linguistic vehicle. Due to the major changes that ancient and modern Chinese have undergone, it is in a sense very difficult to understand the fundamental principles expressed in "ancient Chinese" in

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9   "All people are siblings of mine, and all things are fundamentally connected to me."
      民吾同胞；物吾與也。Zhang Zai 張載, *Zhangzai ji* 張載集, coll. Zhang Xichen
      章錫琛 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1978), 62.
10   Martin Heidegger, "Letter on 'Humanism,'" in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge:
      Cambridge University Press, 1998), 239.

traditional China from a perspective consistent with ancient and modern language, such as the meaning of concepts like home, nation, and *tianxia*, and the cultural environment depicted in them. There would be a considerable gap in understanding these in contemporary China. Due to the change in the country's power in modern times, understanding the historical, cultural, and political connotations of the traditional home, nation, and *tianxia* through incorrect assumptions may cause greater misunderstandings. Therefore, determining a modern expression for the traditional *tianxia* worldview may be a precondition for rationally conveying a "modern" *tianxia* worldview.

With the collapse of the ancient *tianxia* system in modern times, the Chinese language has evidently regressed or even degenerated in the broad sense of intellectual prowess. Firstly, the vigor in the language that was symbolic of Han through Tang dynasties' atmosphere has vanished. That kind of discourse was a language form that demonstrated the majesty of Chinese civilization. It possessed an exemplary element for neighboring countries. Broadly speaking, tō-on (Tang sound, *tang yin* 唐音) was once considered to be an extremely developed language in Chinese civilization. However, through history repeating itself, the decline of civilization, and being conquered by ethnic minorities twice, the language incorporated the vernacular of outsiders. Although this renewed the dynamics of the Chinese language, it also drastically changed the structure of Chinese phonetics and ideograms. Some have pointed out that Mandarin today is a "post-slavery language".[11] It is a Chinese system of communication based on the Manchu (*manzu* 滿族) language. Even though Mandarin is not directly equivalent to Manchu, the tone and intonation of Manchu significantly affects its pronunciation. As such, even if Mandarin is not a "slave language", it is at least a "colonial language". Putting aside the element of extremism in this kind of rhetoric, it does reflect the historical rise and fall of Chinese civilization's language.

This kind of language system, after the intrusion of western culture and the exertion of western forces on the east (*xili dongjian* 西力東漸) coupled with the eastward spread of western thought (*xixue dongjian* 西學東漸), has made Chinese traditional culture both difficult to understand in depth and facing problems conveying "modern" expression if it does not embed western rhetoric and modes of expression. Especially following Japan's "secondhand" translation of western culture, modern Chinese has been loaded with a duality of social information. One is the messaging of being a loser – the language of the

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11   Nangfang wang 南方網, "Putonghua shi wuhu luanhua de nuhua chanwu" 普通話是
        五胡亂華的奴化產物, Sohu, July 15, 2010, http://star.news.sohu.com/20100715/n2735
        18353.shtml.

Han through Tang dynasties has been made obsolete and become a powerless language. What was entrusted to the Chinese language was not the substantive power of its civilization and culture, but voices of the disenfranchised calling for justice that were rooted in the language. Chinese has many expressions for this. The crux of it, however, is that it is a victim narrative: because I am the vulnerable, you cannot bully me, and because I am vulnerable and you once bullied me, the bully is never right so I am forever morally superior. The formulaic expression for the country's situation that "a nation will be bullied if it is weak" reflects a certain modern personality of the Chinese language. Strictly speaking, this kind of expression requires a comprehensive rethinking. If this kind of weak and moralizing language does not undergo fundamental change, the long-suppressed concept of *tianxia* will not only be difficult to comprehend, but it will also cause people to believe China has fallen into a state of vanity. It would be challenging for *tianxia* to rebuild a normal or strong language in such a linguistic environment.

Second, due to the Western world system showing its dominance toward the traditional Chinese *tianxia* ideology in modern times, China often uses the behavior patterns of westerners to construct language, exhibiting a linguistic style considerably characterized by social Darwinism. This was succinctly and clearly conveyed by Yan Fu 嚴復 (1854–1921): "The inferior races therefore perished so that the superior races could survive. The surviving superior races continue to compete with each other, with the fittest remaining, continuously outcompeting other races. As the outcompeted increase in number, those surviving evolved day by day, thus giving rise to humankind. Human beings are the fittest of today's organisms, but what will happen in the future is unknown. Darwin's theory of natural selection, the leading theory in academia and politics, is one that is immutable."[12] This philosophy is bound to turn language into a tool for competition. The sense of home that people place in language would disappear without a trace. This results in a distorted use of language: when facing the current balance of interests between countries or in the effort to resolve conflicts between them, language is wielded as a moral instrument for self-defense rather than a means of expressing the actual situation and as a bargaining tool. Further, language is also taken as a means of expressing attitude rather than a tool for rational articulation, and polarized rhetoric is prevalent. In this regard, Chinese must undergo reform before it can truly assume a linguistic role that bears the future of humankind.

Of course, when looking at the modern evolution of Chinese civilization through language, there is still the issue of how to deal with "the language of the

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12   *Yanfu ji* 嚴復集, ed. Wang Shi 王栻 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), 186.

May Fourth" and "cultural heritage". I have a firmly defensive attitude toward the spirit of enlightenment of the May Fourth Movement, unequivocally rejecting all the so-called classical arguments that deviate from the standpoint of modern values, and the views that reject what is modern from a postmodern perspective. This is because, while the language of the May Fourth was extreme, it pointed out that China must pursue modern knowledge (science), and achieve the political goal of limiting power (democracy). This is still the goal for the modern transformation that Chinese people should endeavor to accomplish in contemporary China. However, the May Fourth Movement also had its shortcomings. On the one hand, because the movement was a modern revolution in traditional language and writing, it contributed tremendously to bringing Chinese into the world of modern language, from a purely linguistic perspective. On the other hand, though, it regarded ordinary language too highly, and even made it populist, resulting in the total loss of China's elite language. Elite language is not simply a form of language that embodies the consciousness of elite groups, but a means of expression with abundant personality for the Chinese language. Because the movement single-handedly promoted written vernacular Chinese and rejected Classical Chinese, the individuality of linguistic expression was wiped away, most of the elite language vanished, and the usage of inelegant language became prevalent. This is quite a pity. In comparison, the traditional Chinese elite language (Classical Chinese and its vernacular) contains the essence of classical Chinese culture, and maintained a refined quality in expression. If it were turned into a modern Chinese elite language, it would distinctly help people to accept rational modern language culture. Written vernacular Chinese plays a major role in popularizing culture, and through prosaic expression, it allows for easy communication in contexts that foster ease of comprehension and is suitable for all ages. However, simplification as the only pursued aesthetic form for written vernacular Chinese has greatly hurt the character of the elite language, and the generic and lack of diverse expression makes it very difficult for modern Chinese to exemplify the respective wonders displayed through even two linguistic forms of the elite and ordinary language.[13]

There are not many literary language forms at present that sound both attractive and feel good, but maintain an air of obscurity. The reason is that such linguistic expressions are somewhat out of touch with the current prevalent system of communication. The May Fourth Movement intercepted elite

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13   Shang Wei 商偉, "Yanwen fenli yu xiandai minzu guojia – 'baihuawen' de lishi wuhui ji qi yiyi" 言文分離與現代民族國家—"白話文"的歷史誤會及其意義, *Dushu* 讀書, no. 11 (2016): 11.

language, and personalized language expressions decreased while generic and political language increased. Therefore, the politicized or moral language with which people today are familiar naturally logically dominates. It is a communication system in which grandiose statements obscure enriched thinking. According to economist Zhang Weiying 張維迎, this is a kind of "language corruption": "What is meant by language corruption? Simply put, it is when people form vocabulary for political or ideological purposes, and attach some different or even completely antonymous connotations. They can then fool the audience and achieve their agenda."[14] This kind of phenomenon has not yet been taken seriously by people – everyone uses this type of language, so we are all accustomed to it and unsurprised by it. People never seem to think of using their own distinctive language to realize the purpose of mutual communication more thoroughly, so that language can truly become the spiritual home of the nation and the people.

China's attempt to reboot *tianxia* and modernize its expression requires another linguistic revolution. Of course, that would no longer be a linguistic revolution in the style of the May Fourth Movement's new cultural movement. This is not merely because we lack the appeal that people such as Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881–1936), Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967), Li Dazhao 李大釗 (1889–1927), and Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) had, but also because a personalized method of linguistic expression is what is needed post-revolution, not pursuing a uniform system of expression. Only under the premise of opening up a market for the ideology of *tianxia* and manifesting its discourse and phenomenal majesty can it reenter the theoretical stage of the modern world. In other words, *tianxia* needs to be placed into the ideology market to convey its multifaceted expressions, in order to highlight its rich connotations and modern vigor in competitive and personalized expressions. This would bring *tianxia* into the inner world of contemporary China, not only enabling it to be expressed in a deeply systematic and creative way, but to break into mainstream thought on a wider scale and become an ideological resource for sparking modern society's envisioned world system.

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14   Zhang Weiying 張維迎, "Yuyan fubai daozhi daode duoluo" 語言腐敗導致道德墮落, on Fenghuang wang 鳳凰網, accessed April 22, 2022, https://finance.ifeng.com/news /special/beiyoucai3_1/index.shtml.

3 Nationalism and Reestablishing the *Tianxia* Worldview

There is the question of whether the *tianxia* sentiment and ideology can reach a field of theoretical research that is comparable or equal to nationalism in terms of theoretical connotation. This is a question that requires careful analysis. In a sense, because nation-states are the norm in today's world, people will habitually view national issues and international relations from a nationalist point of view. However, this is not an ideal situation. Breaking away from the confines of nationalism and embarking on an attempt to adopt thought that transcends antagonistic and divisive nationalism is an important driving force that encourages people to imagine a new world order.

From a historical point of view, nationalism has been the predominant political school of thought since the signing of the Peace of Westphalia, and is one of the most critical political doctrines for the establishment of a modern nation-state. However, what is well acknowledged in the academia of politics is that nationalism has not been well articulated in theory. On the one hand, this is reflected in the long history of nationalism and its absence from recognized classic academic disciplines, but it is also due to the fact that nationalism is always in a state of pursuing the own self interests of the nation and its correspondingly constructed state,[15] lacking the virtue of "above all nations is humanity". The elucidation of cosmopolitanism in Western academia far exceeds its elucidation of nationalism theory. From a theoretical perspective, nationalism roughly comes from empirical description or generalization of the status quo.

Whether it is *tianxia* or cosmopolitanism, what is their relationship with nationalism? A conflicting one, of course. Nationalism is concerned with the smaller communities in the global village, including the ideologies, cultural traditions, and identities of each nation. Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925) once said that "nationalism is a treasure for countries seeking development and races seeking survival."[16] Why is nationalism a treasure? Because in the era of the nation-state, each nation relies on nationalism to strengthen national identity and sustain its own centripetal operation. Whether in cultural, political, or other identities, this kind of group identity is tantamount to building a wall that protects one from others. In order to establish a modern nation-state, people have consolidated traditional boundaries and barriers of nationalities

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15   Zhao Tingyang 趙汀陽, *Tianxia tixi: shijie zhidu zhexue daolun* 天下體系：世界制度哲學導論 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2011), 1–10.

16   Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 [Sun Yat-sen], *Sun Zhongshan xuanji* 孫中山選集 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981), 2: 644.

and races, and almost without exception have experienced the tragedy of racial discrimination, ethnic cleansing, and even genocide. This hints of national-ism's downhill trajectory.[17]

The evolution of nationalism has also had a positive effect. Its evolution-ary journey has prompted modern nation-states to overcome three thresholds. The first is the establishment of a corresponding state based on the majority nationality of their central inhabited area. This is the modern state structure of the nation-state with which people are familiar. The second is that when underdeveloped nations strive to establish a state, they naturally imitate advanced nations in the sense of a predecessor. At the same time, depending on the circumstances of the underdeveloped nation, a strong moral impulse emerges – a sense of justice, which stems from powerful countries and simulta-neously projects onto weak ones, to help the disadvantaged and impoverished. For example, we realize that there are other nations like us in the world that are bullied by Western powers and need to establish statehood, so we are will-ing to support their state-building enterprise, and the slogan "people need liberation, nations need independence" reflects this concept of statehood. This kind of solidarity transcends the narrow boundaries between nations. Thirdly, driven by the political psychology of transcending national boundaries, a kind of internationalist sentiment based on "we all share the same humanity"[18] spontaneously arises. However, the corresponding vision for such a system and its realization are still rather void.

Nationalism has been heavily criticized, and needs to be reflected upon in political theory. The reason is that nationalism itself is structurally contra-dictory: on the one hand, it appeals to the aspirations of small communities relative to the global "big family", while on the other, it must ultimately tran-scend national boundaries and tend toward a one-family world. This inevitably means conflicting ethical and political desires, which require the gradual development of political ability and conceptual skill to rationally manage these conundrums by nations all over the world.

Nationalism is not a notion of absolute mutual exclusion among nations. Therefore, it is not necessarily entirely antagonistic to or in conflict with *tianxia* and cosmopolitanism. In this sense, there is an assertion that polity structure is linked with international relations – nations that have become democratic, such as the French and Yamato people, established democracies without war

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17   Michael Mann, "The Argument," in *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1–11.

18   *Mao Zedong shici jianshang daquan* 毛澤東詩詞鑒賞大全, comp. Ji Shichang 季世昌 (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 1994), 169.

between them. International conflict between non-democratic countries, on the other hand, often resort to war. Generally speaking, the homogeneous pursuit of peace is first achieved among democracies. Independent democracies have subdued the uncivilized elements of nationalism in their shared pursuit of democracy, and therefore are able to live in mutual peace and deal with conflicts through peaceful approaches. The most recent example is Scottish independence, which the United Kingdom did not resolve through force, but decided through a referendum. In this regard, the paths forward for nationalism and cosmopolitanism converge.

Political theories that attempt to surpass nationalism take two different approaches – "*neo-tianxia* ideology"[19] and "neo-cosmopolitanism".[20] *Neo-tianxia* ideology emphasizes the equal relationship between nation-states; this equality, however, is not from the cosmopolitanism constructed by modern Western nations, but from the ancient Chinese concept of *tianxia*. This concept is just no longer founded on Sinocentrism, but rather stands among equal nation-states. At the same time, the ideology overcomes the small-minded pursuit of interest of nation-states, fostering a kind of political sentiment that approximates the one-family world. This *tianxia* ideology is referred to as *neo-tianxia* ideology because it not only subverts the ancient Chinese Sinocentric *tianxia* establishment, but also addresses the inequality between nation-states that has long been dictated by Western countries. However, *neo-tianxia* ideology attempts to reintroduce the classical Chinese concept of *tianxia*, and places the ancient and modern aspects of dealing with diplomatic relations in the modern day above the Chinese-Western aspects. This attempts to change the issues of the ancient-modern relationship highlighted by the structural transformation of Chinese tradition, issues of Chinese-Western relations hastened by Western pressures on China, into the issue of China reestablishing its tradition to solve modern day challenges. It would be a blessing for humanity if *neo-tianxia* ideology promoted a way on an institutional level. More importantly, it would be a blessing brought to the whole world by the Chinese people. However, this idealistic conception of international order is essentially no different from the idealized "world" order constructed by Western countries. Thus, neither of the relevant theoretical underpinnings that have presently attracted attention,

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19   Xu Jilin 許紀霖, Liu Qing 劉擎, and Bai Tongdong 白彤東, "Xin tianxia zhuyi: dang zhongguo zaoyu shijie" 新天下主義：當中國遭遇世界, Sohu, March 17, 2018, https://www.sohu.com/a/225767793_215308.

20   Li Yongjing 李永晶, "Xin shijie zhuyi: pojie minzu jingshen de shidai kunjing" 新世界主義：破解民族精神的時代困境, Sohu, August 24, 2017, https://www.sohu.com/a/166952528_120776.

namely "*neo-tianxia* ideology" and "neo-cosmopolitanism", have been able to demonstrate the fundamental differences they each claim.

Generally speaking, the *tianxia* system emphasizes the systematic level, and not that of individual behavior. What will be the relationship between the two? If political theory only talks of the system and not the individual, is the relevant institutional design simply not feasible?

There is indeed some kind of disconcerting disconnect between the two. The first is the logical disconnect of modern political theory, which aims to address issues regarding individual behavior, and only guarantees a state of government or order in certain nation-states. That is, protecting individual freedom and social order through the limitation of power. As soon as it reaches an international level, this theoretical logic is lost. What is the reason for this? It is due to the international community still being in a state of anarchy as a whole. This makes international politics vastly different from politics in China, which seeks to address the legitimacy of individual, organizational, and political acts within the sovereignty of the state. It is powerless once beyond this scope. This is an issue that the international community has been unable to manage properly to date. The agents of political behavior within a state are individual citizens, whereas the behavioral agents of international politics are states as a whole, and people are unable to observe and comprehend political activity within and among states with the same logic when there is a sudden leap from individual behavior to behavior among huge-scale political groups, namely states. It is worth noting that in international political theory, there is no political construction that takes the individual as a behavioral entity, only the cognitive individualism approach.

Secondly, in the theoretical establishment of *tianxia* ideology, people try to adopt the approach of "self-cultivation, family regulation, state governance, and bringing peace to all" (*xiu qi zhi ping* 修齊治平),[21] climbing their way up in order to solve all problems from self-cultivation to *tianxia* governance. I am under the belief that this is a dead end, because this mentality can neither adapt to the needs of modern society nor access the respectively separate realms of human action. The conceptualization of *neo-tianxia* ideology does not pay a high degree of attention to the individual. Whether this propagation is sufficiently felt is a matter of little concern to advocates. However, even if the degree of personal moral integrity is strong enough to have international influence, whether the corresponding feedback of the people is absolutely

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21   "First cultivate the mind on a personal level, then you can manage your family well; only when family is taken care of can you govern the country, and only when the country is governed well can the world be united." Zhu Xi, *Sishu zhangju jizhu*, 3.

unanimous is certainly questionable. In this sense, modern political theory can by no means implement a consistent smooth governance from the individual all the way to *tianxia*, as some suggest. In addition, "pay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God" results in a significant disconnect between secular and sacred affairs. Internal affairs are handled by their sovereign state, international affairs are handled through diplomatic negotiation or resort to war, and the familiar tactics of addressing political issues in one country cannot be applied to resolving international issues. Therefore, it becomes evident why realism and neorealism are at the forefront and mainstream in schools of thought on international politics, while the liberalism movement in international politics does not exert as great an influence as it does in internal politics. One of the reasons for this is that the thinking of liberalism theory in international politics cannot directly be mapped from the internal to the international scope, and properly manage all issues with consistency.

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