All Azimuth

Tianxia (All-Under-Heaven): An Alternative System or a Rose by another Name?

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Abstract

Tianxia is considered as an alternative institutionalization to govern the international system. It refers to world governance that is regulated by a world institution. Accordingly, a world institution plays the harmonizer role under this system. States, on the other hand, choose their economic models and the leader organizes the relations among different units. This paper thus argues that Tianxia is an alternative framework to Western-oriented IR theories. In that sense, this article aims to explore the similarities between the philosophical idea of Tianxia and Western-oriented IR Theory. More specifically, the article explores the issue from the international system perspective. The epistemological gaps and ontological similarities between the two frameworks will be demonstrated.

1. Introduction

China is considered as the most important rising power. The rise of China is not only a subject matter of economic growth and development of a state but also an inquiry of global power redistribution in International Relations (IR) and International Political Economy (IPE) studies. Due to its rapidly growing economy, China has become one of the major powers in International Political Economy. Accordingly, one significant change that has led to the raising of a significant new question in IPE is China's huge amount of products, which have transformed the country into a manufacturing center and made it a major player in international trade and finance.[1] For that reason, China is now one of the main subject matters of both IR and IPE in the early 21st century.

Mirroring this rise, debate has emerged between mainstream IR and historical sociologists, regarding China's role in international politics. According to realists, the rise of a new big power unavoidably leads to conflict and war, and China will not be an exception to this rule. From this point of view, the American dominated realists emphasize the competitive rise of China. As an illustration, the offensive realist, Mearsheimer, takes a pessimistic position, claiming that China will seek power maximization in East Asia and eventually will dominate Asia, as the United States does in the Western Hemisphere.[2] Even moderate realists, like Kirshner, who believes that the USA can accommodate China's rise, also draw attention to

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[1]   Robert O. Keohane, "The Old IPE and the New," *Review of International Political Economy* 16, no. 1 (2009): 41.
[2]   John J. Mearsheimer, "China's Unpeaceful Rise," *Current History* 105, no. 690 (2006): 162.

the uncertainty of a rising power problem.[3] From the American perspective, the concern is not only realists' subject matter but also liberals', who highlight China's rise as a potential threat to the functioning of the liberal world order,[4] with a rising China eventually even ending the US-led liberal global order.[5] Accordingly, China's rise will lead to power competition both economically and militarily, which will result in tension between the USA and China.

Chinese politicians, on the other hand, emphasize the cultural heritage of Chinese history. Referring to historical context, they highlight the term *Peaceful Rise*. This term is conceptualized by Zheng Bijian, a longtime advisor to the Chinese leadership. The idea was later renamed *Peaceful Development* by Hu Jintao, to eliminate the negative perception of the term "rise". Accordingly, while emerging powers in modern history have traditionally pursued colonization, war, and other aggressive policies, China is argued to be using peaceful means such as capital and technology.[6] Thus, China should not be considered as a Hobbesian state that will inevitably seek power maximization to survive. Instead, it has its own historical and philosophical legacy, which encourages China to act differently from Westphalian state behavior. Different schools of IR support this claim, pointing to China's past. According to Arrighi, the Americans are expecting an Armageddon because of the lack of knowledge about Chinese history.[7] He claims that China's history suggests peaceful coexistence with neighbors unlike the rise of the West, which featured territorial and overseas expansion as well as conflict and war. In contrast to this, the Peaceful Rise does not contain territorial expansion. In that sense, he argues, China's rise may falsify the American School of IR in that it may create an interdependent and respectful global order.[8] Similarly, Kang highlights the historical differences between Europe and Asia, underscoring the need for alternative paradigms beyond realism, liberalism and, constructivism to understand China and its role in Asia.[9] Finally, a prominent scholar of the English School of IR, Buzan, predicts that a Peaceful Rise is possible if China aims to construct a regional level international society.[10]

This potential raises the question of how such a peaceful rise/development is anchored in Chinese political thought. What is the background of the political framework of the Chinese Way? How does China conceptualize its *sui generis* characteristic? Is there a political theory with Chinese characteristics, which is different from Western political thought, Hobbesian fear or Westphalian understanding? What is the philosophical background of Peaceful Development? Such questions have been posed for more than a decade. Obviously, as a rising power, China needs knowledge power along with material capacities. With regard to this, one of the main components of political theory with Chinese characteristics is the ancient thought of *Tianxia* (All-under-Heaven) framework. Accordingly, every entity around the world (family, clan, nation-state) is an integral part of the same world system. This system should be governed in accordance with moral obligations by a world institution beyond the

[3]   Jonathan Kirshner, "The Tragedy of Offensive Realism: Classical Realism and the Rise of China," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 1 (2012): 53–75.
[4]   John M. Owen, "Ikenberry, International Relations Theory, and the Rise of China," *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 21, no. 1 (2019): 55–62.
[5]   Yongjin Zhang, "'China Anxiety': Discourse and Intellectual Challenges," *Development and Change* 44, no. 6 (2013): 1421.
[6]   Zheng Bijian, "China's "Peaceful Rise" to Great-Power Status," *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 5 (2005).
[7]   Giovanni Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the twenty-first century* (London: Verso, 2007), 307.
[8]   Arrighi estimates that this is a possible result of peaceful ascent among other possibilities, which are a North-South Alliance and an Asian-oriented war. For more details see, Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, 379.
[9]   David C. Kang, "Getting Asia Wrong: The Need for New Analytical Frameworks," *International Security* 27, no. 4 (2003): 83.
[10]   Barry Buzan, "China in International Society: Is 'Peaceful Rise' Possible?," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 3, no. 1 (2010): 34–5.

United Nations. This raises the idea of Tianxia, because it suggests an international institution that is based on ancient Chinese moral principles. On the one hand, China names itself as a "responsible great power,"[11] therefore, the establishment of an international institution for keeping stability in the world order is China's moral purpose. On the other hand, the Tianxia idea raises concerns against China due to the hegemonic[12] content of the idea.

This article will explore the Tianxia concept with regard to political theory. It seeks to understand exactly what the components of Tianxia are and what its relation is with existing IR Theory literature. Is it an alternative IR Theory to the Western School, or is it an old wine in a new bottle, with Chinese characteristics? More specifically, *how does Tianxia differ from the Western school of thought in terms of the international system*? It is going to be argued that Tianxia is, in fact, an eclectic approach to Western political thought in terms of international system and hegemony. Tianxia's critique for mainstream Anglo-American IR Theory is based on epistemological inconsistency between the Chinese and Western schools of thoughts.

It is worthy to note that this article will inquire neither into the applicability of Tianxia to the real world nor whether China's policies are consistent with it or not. This is because Tianxia is suggested as a utopia rather than a narrative of real-world events. That is to say, Tianxia exists mostly at the theoretical level in the modern era. Thus, there is little empirical evidence to prove or disprove such an experience in world government. Moreover, both supportive and unsupportive implications of China's policies regarding Tianxia have already been discussed in the literature, particularly by Callahan[13], Chang[14], Dreyer[15], and Carlson[16]. Moreover, China does not officially claim to institutionalize Tianxia as a foreign policy aim. Nor is it identified as a foreign policy goal by Chinese authorities despite some narratives such as Xi Jinping's "the community of common destiny of mankind," which could be considered as an implication of Tianxia. Tianxia remains therefore a concept of political idea rather than an evaluation of real-world events, despite its critiques of the United Nations (UN), which is, in fact, one of its shortcomings. For these reasons, this article attaches importance to comparing Tianxia with IR theories rather than looking at its implications for Chinese foreign policy.

Accordingly, the second section of this article will elaborate on the rise of China and the need for a framework of rising powers. The third section will put forward the characteristics of Tianxia. Having demonstrated Tianxia's shortcomings, the fourth section will compare the similarities between Tianxia and IR theories, which will be followed by the conclusion.

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[11]   Xia Liping, "China: A Responsible Great Power," *Journal of Contemporary China* 10, no. 26 (2001): 17–25.

[12]   Zhao insistently claims that Tianxia is not based on a hegemonic logic. He asserts that since the European theoretical framework is based on state-centrism, the 'hegemon' is associated with empire by Europeans, which is not the case for Tianxia [Tingyang Zhao, *Redefining a Philosophy for World Governance* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 65]. The fourth section of this article will demonstrate the reason why it can be considered as a hegemonic idea.

[13]   William A. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-Hegemonic or a New Hegemony?," *International Studies Review* 10, no. 4 (2008): 749–61.

[14]   Chishen Chang, "Tianxia System on a Snail's Horns," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (2011): 28–42.

[15]   June T. Dreyer, "The 'Tianxia Trope': Will China Change the International System?," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 96 (2015): 1015–31 .

[16]   Allen Carlson, "Moving Beyond Sovereignty? A Brief Consideration of Recent Changes in China's Approach to International Order and the Emergence of the Tianxia Concept," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20, no. 68 (2010): 89–102.

2. The Rise of China and the Need for a Framework

China's rapid industrialization in the post-Mao era not only presents the growth of a country but also a shift in the global production network. "The decision of the Chinese government under Deng Xiaoping to enter into an alliance with the diaspora aimed at the double objective of upgrading the economy of the PRC through its reintegration in regional and global markets and of promoting national reunification with Hong Kong, Macau and it may end up with re-centering of Chinese tribute system and, eventually, Taiwan in accordance with the 'One Nation, Two Systems' model."[17] Thus, in the post-Mao era, the Chinese elite reorganized the state in accordance with becoming a global production center that imports primary goods from neighboring countries and developing countries. These products are either reassembled or developed as high technology commodities and exported to international markets as finished goods. Owing to the Chinese diaspora in East Asian countries, China was able to transfer high technology to the mainland. More importantly, technology and managerial skills were also transferred from Western businesses in exchange for the cheap labor force in China. Throughout the 1990s, a Sino-centered global production network was established in technological goods. As a result, China became the center of the assembling industry and the country's political economy was transformed from isolationism to an active great power.

This process, for several reasons, led China to construct a political theory. First and foremost, every economic system and political structure evolves in cooperation. As Susan Strange accurately pointed out, the decision-makers have disproportionately high resources and knowledge, which enables them to promote certain politico-economic modus operandi over others.[18] In this regard, a newly emerging political economy legitimizes its position by knowledge production. In the end, economic activities and international political systems are not separable from each other. On the contrary, the "international political system provides the necessary framework for economic activities."[19] From that point of view, China is not an exception. Chinese politicians and philosophers have been specifying the "Chinese characteristics" of their political frameworks since the Mao era. China's economic rise boosted this desire. According to Chinese authorities, becoming an economic power should be accompanied by knowledge production.[20] As a result, Chinese academics and politicians have sought to construct a political framework with Chinese characteristics.

Secondly, China seeks to maximize not only its material power but also political power. It is obvious that China's spectacular economic growth corresponded with an increase in its political power. Since ancient times, Chinese political thought has emphasized political power. Accordingly, "Economic and military factors are all important, but political capability is the foundation that integrates comprehensive state power."[21] Thus, economic power alone does not necessarily transform a state into a great power. For this reason, the idea of Peaceful Development is coherent with political power rather than military power. Political power could be accomplished with an alternative political framework. Thus, China would have a

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[17]   Giovanni Arrighi, "Reading Hobbes in Beijing: Great Power Politics and the Challenge of the Peaceful Ascent," in *Routledge Handbook of International Political Economy,* ed. Mark Blyth (London: Routledge, 2009), 178.

[18]   Susan Strange, *States and Markets*, 2. ed. (London: Continuum, 2004), 121.

[19]   Robert Gilpin, "The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism," *International Organization* 38, no. 2 (1984): 295.

[20]   Thuy T. Do, "China's Rise and the 'Chinese Dream' in International Relations Theory," *Global Change, Peace & Security* 27, no. 1 (2015): 23.

[21]   Yan Xuetong, "A Comparative Study of Pre-Qin Interstate Political Philosophy," in *Ancient Chinese thought, modern Chinese power*, ed. Xuetong Yan et al., The Princeton-China series (Princeton, N.J., Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2011), 53.

greater ability to use structural power, namely shaping the policies and directions of political and economic relations.[22]

Last but not least, China seeks to create an alternative international political economic system to the Bretton Woods institutions and US-supremacy, particularly in East Asia. China sees the Asia-Pacific region as the "most dynamic economic region with the greatest development potential in the world."[23] This has led China to establish a regional order in East Asia. Although China is considered as a status quo power[24] because of the benefits of the current international system, it has started to challenge both the mechanisms and influence of Bretton Woods institutions. The main expression of this policy is the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB). The AIIB is founded on those principles that China has criticized in the Bretton Woods institutions, namely the veto power of the US and conditional credits. China feels that existing international organizations serve Western interests by referring to its experience of the 'Century of Humiliation'. The Bretton Woods institutions are not exceptions of this historical legacy. They are seen as having created asymmetrical growth between the Global South and the Global North due to a lack of morality. For that reason, China seeks to revise the international institutions and norms in favor of itself and Third World countries. Unlike the Bretton Woods institutions, AIIB promises to provide unconditional credits for Third World development, and argues that China's veto power in the bank is a temporary situation.

It is not only China's growing economy but also the Asian financial crisis that has encouraged Chinese authorities to embrace this policy. The Asian financial crisis disfavored the IMF and Western economic system in East Asia. Although China did not raise the obstacles of the international financial system at that time, its development model served as an inspiration for the developing economies in the region. Moreover, the neighboring economies use the Chinese market as the most significant engine of growth for themselves. [25] This encouraged China to highlight alternative approaches after the 2009 global financial crisis. "The outbreak of the global financial crisis simply provided Beijing with an opportunity to publicize the proposals and, because of the crisis, it has drawn much attention from around the world."[26] As a result, unlike the Bretton Woods institutions, Chinese aid and no-strings-attached loans help third world countries to develop without sacrificing their sovereignty. Thus, it diminishes the systemic influences of the IMF and the World Bank,[27] thereby leaving a gap that demands replacement by an alternative approach.

These changes create a need for a new framework to construct Sino-centric international order. The ancient concept of Tianxia has been proposed by Zhao Tingyang, a political philosopher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and has been supported by several scholars. Although Tianxia has not been institutionalized among the Chinese political elites, it is being widely discussed in academia. As a principle, it both criticizes Western political

[22] Marc Lanteigne, *Chinese Foreign Policy: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009), 57.

[23] Bates Gill, "China's Evolving Regional Security Strategy," in *Power Shift: China and Asia's new dynamics*, ed. David L. Shambaugh (Berkeley, Calif., University of California Press, 2005), 251.

[24] Christopher Layne, "China's Challenge to US Hegemony," *Current History* 107, no. 705 (2008) and Evan S. Medeiros, "Is Beijing Ready for Global Leadership?," *Current History* 108, no. 719 (2009).

[25] John Wong, "A China-Centric Economic Order in East Asia," *Asia Pacific Business Review* 19, no. 2 (2013): 288.

[26] Ren Xiao, "A Reform-Minded Status Quo Power? China, the G20, and Reform of the International Financial System," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 11 (2015): 2030.

[27] Gregory Chin, "China's Rising Institutional Influence," in *Rising States, Rising Institutions: Challenges For Global Governance*, ed. Alan S. Alexandroff and Andrew F. Cooper (Waterloo, Ont.: Centre for International Governance Innovation; Washington, 2010), 93.

thought with respect to the international system and suggests a Chinese perspective on world issues. The following section will demonstrate the principles of Tianxia regarding the levels of analysis of international relations and the international system.

3. The International System of Tianxia

Tianxia is proposed by Chinese philosophers as an alternative framework to Western-oriented theories on international government. It is argued that while Western theories take international relations from a state-centric perspective, Tianxia emphasizes the world itself as the level of analysis. From that point of view, "the most important political problem today is not the so-called 'failed states' but the failed world."[28] Accordingly, it is the selfishness of the nation-states that results in global imbalance, conflicts, and wars. In order to cope with this, it is not the so-called failed states that need to gussy up but the world as a whole. There is a need for a holistic approach rather than unit level solutions, and the international system needs to go beyond state-centric perspectives and solutions. Moreover, the world needs an institutionalized system that promotes universal values rather than the interests of dominant powers,[29] rather than the Westphalian nation-state system, which is seen as the fundamental reason for international chaos. International relations must instead be governed by a higher and moral authority in order to overcome the selfishness of nation-states. In sum, the anarchical structure of the system should be replaced by a hierarchical order.

In this regard, a supranational institution for world governance is a necessity for permanent peace. Accordingly, world governance should be ensured by an empire, which acts more like a world institution rather than a conventional empire.[30] Such a world institution would be obliged to arrange regimes and rules, and should constitute an alternative to the United Nations, as the UN is viewed as a reflection of the incomplete Western system. Zhao makes the analogy that:

> Underlying the UN model are ideals of international democracy and rational communication; roughly speaking, a continuation of the great Greek tradition of agora. However, it is a pity that the UN is only an agora without a polis. It has therefore become a serious problem. Unless it is institutionally well-organized, an agora can become chaotic and confused.[31]

Therefore, anarchy is inevitable without an organizer, and anarchy unavoidably brings chaos. The states are unable to order their domestic politics due to the lack of an external organizer.[32] International governance *can* be executed however, via a world institution. Since such a world institution is lacking in the Western political system, the latter is considered philosophically incomplete.[33] In the case of the Westphalian system, the UN is not a hierarchical institution over the nation-states but a bargaining market among them. For that reason, the lack of such a supreme political authority over nation-states is the primary reason for international conflicts.[34] In order therefore to achieve permanent peace and establish a harmonious world order, the Westphalian system of anarchy has to be replaced,

Tianxia comes into play at this point. In contrast to the Westphalian system, states are not

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[28]   Tingyang Zhao, "Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept 'All-under-Heaven' (Tian-xia)," *Social Identities* 12, no. 1 (2006): 34.
[29]   Tingyang Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy in terms of All-under-heaven (Tian-xia)," *Diogenes* 56, no. 1 (2009): 8.
[30]   Zhao, "Rethinking Empire," 30.
[31]   Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy," 16.
[32]   Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy," 10.
[33]   Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy," 11.
[34]   Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy," 12.

viewed as independent entities but as sub-states of the world government under Tianxia.[35] In order to create a harmonious system, all sub-states should be essentially homogenous or homological and must be ordered by the highest world institution.[36] Thus, there is a top-down political path to construct a peaceful environment. Therefore, Tianxia suggests an international system that is featured by hierarchy in the world government. The nation-states are not separate units, but only a part of the political realm,[37] which prevents them from competing for their interests only. Instead, they should cooperate harmoniously owing to the moral governance of a world institution. Owing to this world institution, nation-states will abandon their selfish interests, and global problems will be solved through negotiations by the sub-entities. In that sense, the most important pillar of the harmonious world order is the autonomy of the sub-entities. States will have autonomy in choosing their own way to sustain the world. Tianxia discredits interference into sovereign states unless a sub-state declares war on others.[38] Instead, "Tianxia advocates the resolution of global issues by having each country act according to its own conditions."[39] All political entities are included in the international system. Thus, world politics will feature negotiations by nation-states rather than conflicting interests among them. These negotiations must be discussed openly and governed by a moral authority instead of bilateral bargaining.

In this regard, Tianxia can be considered an inclusionary system, in contrast to Western political thought. It is asserted that since the Westphalian system is based on power maximization and self-interests, it is an exclusive system in nature, emphasizing "self" and "other". Tianxia on the other hand, is a system in which nobody would be excluded; in which there would be no "foreign or pagan."[40] Instead, "in the process of globalization, one or several nation-states may transform themselves into new empires."[41] Rather than being forced in through imperial means, other states are expected to join the system voluntarily because of Tianxia's appeal as a benign and cosmopolitan system. As a result, neither hegemonic wars nor territorial conquests and violence will take place unless a sub-state violates the sovereignty rule. Therefore, all entities will cooperate with each other instead of conflict.

This leads us to conclude that the main criticisms of Tianxia against the Western political theory are grouped into three categories. Firstly, Tianxia is an inclusionary system, whereas Western thought is exclusionary. Secondly, the Western perspective is state-centric, which is the source of the international conflicts and wars due to the Westphalian conceptualization of nation-states, which encourages and rationalizes their selfishness. Finally, the international order needs an authority to govern the relations among sub-units. This leads us to elaborate on the validity of these arguments.

4. All-Under-"Hegemonic Stability"

Having put forward the pillars of Tianxia, the shortcomings, as well as its similarities between the Western frameworks, will be demonstrated. Zhao's analysis of the comparison of Tianxia

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[35]   Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy," 8.
[36]   Zhao, "Rethinking Empire," 33.
[37]   Henry W.-C. Yeung, "The Rise of East Asia: An Emerging Challenge to the Study of International Political Economy," in Blyth, *Routledge Handbook of International Political Economy (IPE)*, 205.
[38]   Zhao, "Rethinking Empire," 34.
[39]   Chih-Yu Shih and Chiung-Chiu Huang, "Preaching Self-Responsibility: The Chinese style of global governance," *Journal of Contemporary China* 22, no. 80 (2013): 359.
[40]   Zhao, "A Political World Philosophy," 8.
[41]   Dreyer, "The 'Tianxia Trope'," 1022.

and the Western framework has two theoretical shortcomings. Firstly, Zhao criticizes Western political theory as if there is a unique and homogenous political theory. More specifically, Zhao's criticisms mostly focus on realist and liberal concepts in IR Theory. However, when we are talking about Western political and international relations theory, it implies a range of competing ideas including Marxism, critical theory, constructivism, the English School and even post-structuralism. The variety of schools is reasoned by epistemological and ontological differences, which have resulted in competing and contrasting perspectives. Therefore, the main subject matter of the aforementioned Western-oriented theories differs from each other, from the identity politics of constructivism to the class conflict of Marxism. Zhao's criticism of Western political theory, however, concentrates on national interests as if it is the only concept in the West. Thus, he disregards numerous concepts that take place both in the West and China, which leads to confusion. As an illustration, Zhao asserts that "in western political theory, the biggest political unit is found to be a country or nation/state, while in Chinese theory it is the framework of world/society."[42] Yet since the 1970s the English School's main contribution has been "to articulate the international society perspective on world politics."[43] Moreover, the English School discusses socially acceptable ways of a hegemonic contribution to international order.[44] In this sense, the English School does not perceive the great power hierarchy and international society as mutually exclusive. Western political theory is clearly composed not only of state-centric approaches but also of the global level of analysis, namely Wallerstein's World Systems analysis, which takes the globe as the unit.[45]

The second shortcoming of Tianxia is Zhao's "double standard" approach.[46] There is an epistemological inconsistency between Tianxia and Western political theory. That is to say, while the Western-oriented mainstream IR theories seek to analyze state *behavior*, Tianxia is concerned with how to perfectly *organize* the behaviors In that respect, Tianxia and Western political theory are different domains in fact. However, Zhao does not make this factual/normative distinction. Nor does he seek to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Rather, Zhao makes a comparison between the Chinese *utopia*, which is the normative side, and Western *practice*, which are the factual outcomes of politics. On the one hand, Tianxia is considered an "ideal of a perfect empire" and "a utopia of the world-as-one-family."[47] He also fails to utilize the historical record of modern China, yet he criticizes Western practices by overemphasizing alliances or unions of nation-states[48] with reference to the historical record as well as the incomplete bodies of the United Nations. Thus, Zhao highlights the actual politics of the Westphalian system rather than Western ideas such as Kant's *The Perpetual Peace* or Wilsonian idealism.

Shifting our attention to the comparable concepts of Tianxia and Western political theory, we may start with the fundamental assumption of political theories that refer to human nature. It is argued that while the Westphalian system is exclusionary in nature, Tianxia is

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[42] Zhao, "Rethinking Empire" 30–1.
[43] Andrew Linklater and Hidemi Suganami, *The English School of International Relations: A Contemporary Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 15.
[44] Ian Clark, *Hegemony in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 50.
[45] It is worth to note that both Tianxia and World-systems do not cover the entire planet by the globe. The historical Tianxia implies the known world of the Zhou dynasty as the world. Similarly, the World-systems refers to the capitalist world-economy, which can be considered as the entire world only after the 20th century.
[46] Shuguang Zhang, "Theory of Tianxia and World Institution: Learning from Mr. Zhao Tingyang by asking Questions on Tianxia System," *China Book Review* 5 (2006) and Chang, "Tianxia System on a Snail's Horns," 28.
[47] Zhao, "Rethinking Empire," 30.
[48] Zhao, "Rethinking Empire," 31.

based on the principle of "inclusion of all". Thus, it is asserted that Chinese political theory fundamentally differs from its Western counterpart. Indeed, realism highlights the conflictual nature of humankind. Zhao also does not deny the selfishness of human nature.[49] However, as it is already mentioned that Western political theory does not consist of a homogenous framework, it is critical to note that, in contrast to realism, the liberal school of thought emphasizes humanity's cooperative nature. According to liberal philosophy, although humans are selfish in nature, they are unable to survive without cooperation, which results in the promotion of good.[50] Thus, human reason lifts society into cooperation and common life awareness. Similarly, the English School presupposes that humanity has been arranging a social life to promote certain values.[51] From that point of view, both liberalism and the English School seek to promote the coexistence of states and international society. Zhao suggests the same, in the sense that establishing a system based on shared interests rather than sabotaging it would be beneficial for all parties.[52] Furthermore, from the English School perspective, a *raison de systéme* is a necessity to manage the pressures of the international system and to create a working society.[53] Bull suggests that international law should promote the interests of international society rather than individual states.[54] In this regard, while Bull legitimizes the use of force only for the purposes of international society, Zhou also suggests that intervention is intolerable in Tianxia unless a sub-state declares war on others. This means that both Tianxia and the English School consecrate state autonomy by putting a reserve on aggression. Similarly, liberal internationalism asserts that even though the dominance of a great power declines, the international regime and rules are maintained for the sake of cooperation.[55] Therefore, both the English School and liberalism presuppose the cooperative nature of humankind, which is presupposed also by Tianxia by emphasizing a harmonious world as well as the inclusion of all.

The criticism of the state-centric approach brings the level of analysis debate forward. It is asserted that while Western politics deal with state-centric conflicts, Tianxia promotes the perspective on the global level. It is worth reminding that the level of analysis in IR is concerned with state behavior rather than how to organize them. In this regard, it is not easy to understand whether the global perspective of Tianxia is a level of analysis question or a normative approach to the international system. Regardless of the purpose, Tianxia does not radically differ from Western political theory in that point of view. If we consider it as a level of analysis, that does not contradict with IR theory. When David Singer coined the level of analysis problem in IR literature, he stressed that apart from systemic and sub-systemic analysis, many other levels are available for researchers.[56] Indeed, the level of analysis question has expanded from the individual level of liberalism or constructivism to the global level of world-systems approach. Among these, world-systems analysis raises the exact same criticism with Tianxia by arguing that state-centric approaches are ahistorical, whereas

[49]   Zhao, *Redefining a Philosophy for World Governance*, 13.
[50]   Edwin van de Haar, *Classical Liberalism And International Relations Theory: Hume, Smith, Mises, and Hayek*, 1st ed., The Palgrave Macmillan History of International Thought Series (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 20–2.
[51]   Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order In World Politics*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 3–4.
[52]   Zhao, *Redefining a Philosophy For World Governance*, 14.
[53]   Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), 322.
[54]   Bull, *The Anarchical Society*, 230.
[55]   Robert O. Keohane, *After hegemony: Cooperation and discord in the world political economy* (Princeton: Guildford Princeton University Press, 1984).
[56]   David J. Singer, "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations," *World Politics* 14, no. 1 (1961): 90.

the world-systems orientation to understand the globe is more substantive.[57] Thus, it is too deductive to claim that Western theory as a whole is stuck in state-centric approaches. If we take the global perspective of Tianxia as normative analysis, still the West is not deficient, as there has been a growing literature for more than two decades on normative IR Theories beyond state-centric approaches, namely Feminist IR Theory or Green Theory. In that sense, it is hard to claim that the global level of analysis is the reflection of Chinese characteristics of world perspective. Instead, the global level of analysis of Tianxia shows parallels with the critical approaches of Western-oriented theories.

When Zhao claims that the Western political system is incomplete due to the lack of higher authority over nation-states, he actually supports the basic realist assumption which is "anarchy is the permissive cause of war."[58] According to realism, since the structure of the international system is anarchy, states seek to maximize their power to survive. In this regard, an effective control over the states or removal of the imperfect states would put an end to international conflict.[59] This means that permanent order could be settled by the replacement of the anarchical international system with a hierarchical one. Since the world is not governed by a higher authority however, each state seeks power maximization for their self-interests. Thus, both Western realism and Chinese philosophy perceive the global order in the same way. In that sense, Tianxia does not suggest an alternative framework to the Westphalian nation-state system. It acknowledges the anarchical structure of the international system and its conflictual outcome. At this point, the difference between Tianxia and realism lies in the factual/normative distinction. Realist IR theory seeks to explain the cause of war by referring to factual events, whereas Tianxia proposes a solution by addressing the same assumptions. Therefore, Tianxia and realism are not competing ideas in terms of their perspectives on the structure of the international system. International anarchy leads to perpetual conflicts, which can be ended only by a hierarchical structure.

This raises the authority problematic of Tianxia. More specifically, who governs the hegemonic order or whose rule will be established under Tianxia? Although Tianxia promises a world government, in the end the principles of the world government also need to be based on shared values, otherwise, it would operate with the rules and regime of a dominant power. Nonetheless, Chinese values are proposed as the only alternative for this obligation instead of shared values. In this respect, Zhang claims that all under heaven must be designed on three principles: "promotion of ethical world order as the moral purpose, serving the great by the small in exchange for security and emulating Chinese standards of appropriateness in relational conduct, submit to Chinese authority, and transform themselves along the lines of Chinese culture and custom."[60] Therefore, it is suggested that the international order would be provided by China's leadership, with China playing the harmonizer role. China's harmonizer role provides the guarantee for self-determination to states in the system, in which states choose their own economic models and the leading state, namely China in this case, organizes the relations among different units. This self-determination legitimizes China's leadership position by noninterfering in domestic issues. From that point of view, a

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[57] Ladd W. Hollist and James N. Rosenau, "World System Debates," *International Studies Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1981): 5–17.
[58] Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Man, the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2001), 232.
[59] Waltz, *Man, The State and War*, 182.
[60] Feng Zhang, *Chinese Hegemony: Grand Strategy and International Institutions in East Asian History* (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2015), 157–60.

big nation-state is taking responsibility in exchange for its supremacy accepted rather than that of an international institution.

In that sense, the idea coincides with the hegemonic leadership proposal of realist terminology, basically the 'Hegemonic Stability Theory', which suggests that "the hierarchy of power among the states gives order and stability to the international system"[61]. Gilpin argues that the creation of an interdependent market is the precondition for being a hegemonic power,[62] which is one of the main principles of the Tianxia system[63]—a hegemonic power is the main agent for order. Accordingly, this hegemonic power establishes the rules and regimes and provides both security and public goods for smaller states. The lesser states follow the rules and regimes due to the legitimacy and utility of the existing order.[64] In that sense, hegemony is a concept beyond dominance. Instead, the hegemon must be settled down by consent among smaller states and the great power. Smaller states should accept the leadership of the great power in exchange for security and arrangement of rules. Tianxia, which will be based on shared interests, is also expected to be accepted by all states and people rather than sabotaged by it.[65] From that point of view, the main principles of Tianxia and Hegemonic Stability Theory do not contradict but overlap. Both frameworks claim that order must be maintained by a hegemon/Chinese values under hegemonic stability theory/Tianxia. Thus, in case Chinese values are accepted as the international norms, then it could not only be called Tianxia but also the establishment of stability under Chinese hegemony.

This leads us to conclude that peaceful development is far from promising an alternative international system. The main reason for this is the theoretical framework of the possible Sino-centric world order. The theoretical framework of the Tianxia system is based on Western-oriented IR theories, including the hegemonic stability of realism. Since the theoretical background is similar to Western-oriented approaches, the political implications of the system do not promise an alternative outcome. Rather, the Sino-centric order suggests a hegemonic order with Chinese characteristics. In other words, if China follows Confucian principles to govern the international system, it would be no more than a new hegemonic order. Replacement of the liberal values by moral authority or Bretton Woods institutions with the AIIB-like institutions[66] thus, would change only the dominant power of the international system. At this juncture, China's moral authority may have some legitimacy among the countries that have previously suffered from IMF policies, but it is still doubtful in the liberal world. Thus it is not easy to claim that there would be a consensus on the Tianxia system.

To sum up, Tianxia and Western-oriented IR theories show outstanding similarities in three aspects. Firstly, Tianxia recognizes both positive and negative elements regarding human nature. That is to say, it accepts the selfishness of human nature, as does realism. It also presents similarities with liberalism as well as the English school by pointing out the cooperative nature of humanity. Secondly, Western-oriented IR theories present a wide range of level of analysis from the micro unit to global level. The Western political framework does not only contain state-centric approaches but also world level ones, unlike what is argued

[61]   Robert Gilpin, "The Theory of Hegemonic War," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4 (1988): 613.
[62]   Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 129.
[63]   Zhao, *Redefining a Philosophy for World Governance*, 7.
[64]   Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 30.
[65]   Zhao, *Redefining a Philosophy for World Governance*, 14.
[66]   As a matter of fact, China considers AIIB as a supplementary institution to the Bretton Woods regime despite some revisions regarding the voting process. In this regard, it acts as a status quo power under the current Westphalian system.

in Tianxia. In that sense, Tianxia's level of analysis does not present a real alternative to Western IR, just with Chinese characteristics. Finally, both IR theories and Tianxia argue that since there is no authority in the international system, international politics is characterized by wars and conflicts rather than order. Although Zhao claims that this is reasoned by the failure of the Western political theories, none of the Western theories in fact embraces the anarchical structure of the international system. Western academics recognize the inefficiency of the UN as well. What Western academia and political theory try to do is to understand the dynamics of the conflicts, whereas Tianxia proposes a utopia. Therefore, Tianxia and Western political theory, including realism, are not competing ideas in the sense that both recognize the anarchical structure of the international system and its conflictual outcome. Furthermore, Tianxia resembles Western hegemonic stability theory by referring to the leadership of the superior power. In this regard, it may be perceived as the theorization and legitimization of Chinese hegemony.

5. Conclusion

The rise of China sparks both political and academic debates on the redistribution of power in the international system. This provokes not only inquiry regarding the rise of China's material capability but also its intellectual capabilities. In that respect, this article sought to understand the ancient Chinese thought of Tianxia, which has been revived by Chinese scholars in the 21st century. Although Tianxia is a hotly debated concept at the philosophical level, it presents a political theory perspective of Chinese academics. Thus, it is worth examining in order to understand Chinese perceptions of the international system.

It must be noted that this paper does not argue that the Sino-centric tribute state is being pursued along with Tianxia. It is obvious that, as the Chinese economy grows and as it becomes the economic center of East Asia, a tendency to compose its political economy arises in order to maintain the interdependent market in the region. Therefore, in any case, China will seek to establish its political economy to maintain the Sino-centric order. Although Tianxia could not be considered as the political framework of a Sino-centric tribute system, still it sorts out the Chinese perception on international affairs and political economy, and gives some clues about Chinese critiques of Western politics.

The most prominent pillar of Tianxia is its approach to the international system. Accordingly, the anarchical structure of the international system should be replaced by a hierarchical order, in which an international organization regulates the harmony of interests among all political entities. The UN is not seen as serving for this purpose, because it is the reflection of Western politics, which is based on the selfishness of nation-states and the dominance of great powers. Therefore, the main deficit of the Westphalian system, according to Tianxia, is a state-centric approach to global problems. Since the Westphalian system is state-centric, it is exclusionary in nature.

However, this approach has both theoretical and analytical shortcomings as have been discussed. It is demonstrated that Tianxia itself bears some stamp of Western-oriented political thought. It exhibits liberal and English School characteristics in its understanding of human nature. Its level of analysis is similar to the world-systems approach, and its perception of the international system shows parallelism with mainstream IR theory, although it argues exactly the opposite. The reason why Tianxia claims it differs from the IR theory is the lack of normative/factual distinction between the two approaches. Finally, it can be safely asserted

that Tianxia's 'all-under-heaven' is in fact hegemonic stability with Chinese characteristics. With sub-entities expected to accept the supremacy of Chinese values, and in general the supremacy of China and Chinese values to be accepted in consent, the reference is to Chinese hegemony, in Western conceptualization.

From this point of view, Tianxia seems like an eclectic approach to international relations rather than IR with Chinese characteristics. It is worth noting that it is not asserted that Tianxia has drawn from IR theories. Instead, there is a dialogue of the deaf between Chinese and Western political thought. Both academies have composed more or less the same framework with different conceptualizations. As has been demonstrated, Tianxia shows parallelism with not only mainstream IR theories but critical as well as Marxist approaches, namely world systems, as well. In this regard, Tianxia seems more like a rose by any other name. Tianxia does not seem an alternative framework to Western political thought. Instead, it redefines the concepts in Chinese characteristics and theorizes the political economy of a Sino-centric world order. In other words, despite China seeking for knowledge production as the challenger of the current international system, the result is actually hegemonic stability with Chinese characteristics.

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