From "all under heaven" to critical cosmopolitanism: the transformation of China's world consciousness

Qing Liu

The phenomenal rise of China is not only changing the landscape of the world economy but also bringing increasing attention to studying Chinese cultural tradition and its relevance to the contemporary world. Would the trend of China's rise lead to a revival of Chinese civilization? What does "revival" mean exactly? Would it change Chinese global imagination, and if so, how? Would it help to transform the very structure of global domination into a new non-hegemonic world order or simply replace the existing dominant power with a new one? This paper will address these questions by critically examining the po-

tential of traditional Chinese thought, especially the idea of Tianxia ("all under heaven"), for forming a new global imagination that is orientated to cultivating shared values of peace, respect, democracy and justice among nations and cultures.

In the age of globalization and cultural pluralism, the complexity of forming shared values lies in competition and contestation of different values taking place not only *among* nations but *within* a nation as well. In contemporary China there are many ways of thinking when imagining the global and they may not be all in harmony. Chinese global imagination is partially reflected in public appeals and scholarly discussions on "the rise of the great nation" and "the revival of Tianxia". While these slogans may deeply impress international media, other lines of thinking are quietly emerging. In Chinese academia, a group of scholars is committed to developing a new cosmopolitan discourse.[1] The practical questions concerned are: what would be the global consequence of China's rise, and how could China contribute to a new world order characterised by shared values of peace, respect, democracy, and justice? Theoretically the conceived cosmo-

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1. The network of new cosmopolitan studies includes about two dozen scholars from political science, history, sociology, legal studies and other fields, most of them in their 30s or early 40s and all currently affiliated with three Centers for World Politics at ECNU in Shanghai, China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing, and Southwest University in Chongqing. They have been working on various projects of world politics for more than three years and recently started an initial stage of research on new cosmopolitanism.

politan approach is an attempt to critically inherit Chinese traditional thought and to draw from contemporary scholarship on cosmopolitanism as well.[2]

This paper, one from the early research of this group, will explore a possible formation of a new cosmopolitanism which attempts to overcome both Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism by reopening conversations and contestations among cultures, especially between the idea of *Tianxia* and post-Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. Beginning with a brief review of recent debate on Zhao Tingyang's work, I critically examine the contemporary relevance of the idea of Tianxia and argue that while the idea is intellectually inspiring and morally important for developing a new global thinking, it should be creatively transformed into a new world consciousness, a new cosmopolitanism, to achieve contemporary revival in a real sense. Inspired and informed largely by Gerald Delanty's scholarship on cosmopolitanism, and also drawing on Tong Shijun's article on universalism, the paper argues that a new world consciousness involves not merely "overlapping consensus" among existing values and norms of different cultures but mutually cultural penetrations in which both Chinese and Western ways of thinking would have to change in light of new experiences and imaginaries in the age of globalization and cultural pluralism. It concludes with a few remarks on the different prospects of China's rise in the future.

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2. This effort in a sense echoes what Lin Yusheng, a well-known Chinese intellectual historian, advocated: to achieve a "creative transformation of Chinese tradition".

I—"Heaven falls": the decline of Tianxia

The idea of Tianxia has attracted increasing attention among students of international politics as well as Chinese studies. This is attributed to the fact that China is emerging as a new global power and also to the effort made by Chinese scholars (notably, Zhao Tingyang) who enthusiastically promote the Chinese worldview exemplified in the idea of Tianxia. According to Zhao in his latest expression, a major problem of the existing world order lies in the fact that "People now live in globality, but still think in modernity", by which he means thinking in terms of nation and "inter-nations", but not of the world. And "that is the reason of making wrong choices". However, "China has an alternative concept of the political since its earliest days, which expects a peaceful ideal of a non-exclusive system of 'all-under-heaven'". If we can shift the paradigm of thinking, there would be hope for the world institution. "A change of mindset is absolutely necessary to make a world of perpetual peace on global conditions."[3]

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Zhao's effort of renewing the idea of Tianxia has provoked heated discussions and mixed responses. William Callahan criticizes Zhao's *The Tianxia system* for its serious theoretical problems and its practically questionable implication. Callahan convincingly shows that Zhao's philosophical reconstruction of Tianxia is based on "its cava-

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3. Zhao Tingyang, "Imagining a game on an unlimited chessboard", a paper for the conference on "Global justice: China's moral leadership role in the 21st century", Beijing, May 31-June 2, 2013.

lier reading of classical Chinese texts", and his arguments for Tianxia as the best alternative to current international order are involved in "universalizing its particular worldview at the considerable expense of other worldviews", the very same problem involved in Zhao's accusation of the West. The Tianxia system presented by Zhao, Callahan concludes, is "a proposal for a new hegemony" rather than "a post-hegemonic ideal".[4] On the other side, Tong Shijun's comments on the work is much more sympathetic, although implicitly critical as well. Instead of focusing on Zhao's presentation, Tong offers his own interpretation of Tianxia, with philosophical sophistication, as "ideal role-taking" and "this-worldly transcendental Utopia". Unlike Zhao's disdainful treatment of Western thought, Tong is enthusiastic to bring the traditional Chinese idea into touch with contemporary Western ideas and theories, especially Habermas's dialogical universalism.[5]

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However, is the idea of Tianxia the only Chinese way of thinking about the global? It is an advantage of a long civilization like China that one is always able to select out of history some great ideas, of which Tianxia is one, and make philosophically ideal interpretations. But a disadvantage is that others can always find counter-evidenc-

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4. William A. Callahan, "Chinese visions of world order: post-hegemonic or a new hegemony?", *International Studies Review*, 2008, n. 10, p. 749-61.

5. Tong Shijun, "Chinese thought and dialogical universalism", in Gerard Delanty, ed., *Europe and Asia beyond East and West*, Routledge, 2006, p. 305-15.

es against those ideal interpretations. While some re-gard Tianxia as a representative of Chinese world con-sciousness, others may view otherwise. For example, a few years ago *The Economist* published a special report on "China's place in the world" which began with the sto-ry of King Goujian, "Brushwood and gall":

> Goujian never forgot his humiliation. He slept on brushwood and hung a gall bladder in his room, licking it daily to feed his appetite for revenge. (…) China has been patient, but the day when it can once again start to impose its will is drawing near.[6]

This seems like another way that China thinks about the outside, which could easily be used to justify theories of "China's threat".

124 The Chinese civilization has a long and complex his-tory, as does its intellectual tradition, remarkable not only for the idea of Tianxia but also the story of King Goujian, which is equally aged and perhaps even more appealing to contemporary Chinese in their world imaginaries. Now we have a bright angel, Ms. Tianxia, and a dark fighter, King Goujian: which one could represent ways of Chi-nese thinking or be more authentically Chinese? (But do we have to choose between them?) It would be a philoso-pher's complacency to see the bright angel while neglect-ing the dark King. It is one thing to rescue the great idea of Tianxia as a philosophical inspiration, but quite anoth-er to regard it as living tradition still embodied in the so-

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6. Edward Carr, "Special report: China's place in the world", *The Econo-mist*, December 4, 2010, p. 52.

cial imaginary of contemporary China. To say this is by no means to discredit philosophical works. It is legitimate and even necessary to make a most desirable reconstruction of traditional ideas out of history. The point is rather that we cannot stop here. If what we are aiming to do is not merely philosophical work that interprets the world, but *political* theory (or "*political* political theory", to coin the title of Jeremy Waldron's recent lecture) that engages in changing the world for the better, we need to further explore the condition that allows possible revivals of Chinese traditional ideas. And to do so, a historical examination may help.

When many are fascinated by—and even fantasize about—the ideal of Tianxia as a better alternative to national and international thinking in imagining the global, we need to ask a primacy question before proceeding to conceive of the possibility of its revival as a remedy for the current world malaise: Why did the Tianxia order decline in the first place? A textbook answer to the question would be that the idea of Tianxia thrived until Qing imperial China was conquered by Western imperialism. It was brutal modern powers with material forces (gunboats) that destroyed the Chinese traditional way of life and undermined the idea of Tianxia, the Chinese imaginary of the world. While there is certainly some truth in this standard historical account, a puzzle remains.

The Western powers were neither the first nor the most powerful ones to enter into China in terms of territories conquered. China has frequently experienced

"barbarian" invaders in its long history and been notably overtaken and ruled by ethnical minorities, Mongolians and Manchurians, resulting in the Yuan and Qing dynasties respectively. But the idea of Tianxia would live as long as the Chinese civilization remained alive. It is deeply believed among Chinese scholars that a great strength of Chinese civilization lies in its capacity of inclusion, being particularly good at absorbing, incorporating and assimilating the outside (the other). China had been capable of relocating the outside into the Tianxia structure and maintaining the traditional order of "Hua-Yi differences" (华夷之辨) until what happened in the late Qing. But why did the invasion by modern Western powers have such a deep and far-reaching impact that was perceived at that time as "an upheaval unseen for three thousand years (三千年未有之变局)"?

In the view of some Confucian scholars, unlike previous invasions the Western power was a new outsider, not a "barbarian" but a different and equally civilized power, one that Tianxia failed to absorb. Guo Songtao was among those who held this view. As he put in his discovery of Europe written in 1877, "the kingdoms of Europe date back for some 2,000 years. Their governmental and educational systems are well-ordered, enlightened, and methodical (西洋立国二千年, 政教修明)." While earlier discourse of "self-strengthening" had portrayed China as possessing the "essence"(本): "the correct rituals, ethics, and political systems", the advantages the West possessed tended to

belong within the "periphery"(末), such as machines and technology", Guo argued that the Western nations had both the "essence and the peripheral (具有本末)"[7] He even went so far as to lament:

> Since the Han period, Chinese culture has been waning day by day; and all European countries have reached the stage that they are all in command of the height of politics, culture, customs, and manners. They see China in the way just as China at the Three Dynasties saw barbicans.[8]

As J. D. Frodsham comments, Guo's view had

> revolutionary implications, since it asserted the existence of a civilization morally equivalent to China, and thus undermined completely China's claim to superiority (...) to admire the ethical basis of Western civilization was to sound the death-knell of the Confucian world-order.[9]

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Tianxia means "All Under Heaven", that is, all-encompassing or all-inclusive, with "nothing beyond Tianxia" (天下无外). If there is an outsider that could possibly confront China at the level of not only power but also civilization, then "heaven falls" (天塌了). Unlike "barbaric"

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7. Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and empire: China and Japan's encounter with European international society*, London, Routledge, 2009, p. 94-5.

8. The original Chinese text reads: "三代以前，独中国有教化耳，故有要服、荒服之名，一皆远之于中国而名曰夷狄。自汉以来，中国教化日益微灭，而政教风俗，欧洲各国乃独擅其胜。其视中国，亦犹三代盛时之视夷狄也。中国士大夫知此义者尚无其人，伤哉。"《郭嵩焘日记》第3册（湖南人民出版社1982年版），第439页。

9. J. D. Frodsham, "Introduction", in *The first Chinese Embassy to the West*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974, p. xlii. Quoted from Shogo Suzuki, *Civilization and empire*, p. 95.

cultures at the periphery, the Western civilization China encountered could neither be kept out nor embraced by Tianxia. This was precisely what happened to "the Central Kingdom" during the late Qing period and why the impact was perceived as "an upheaval unseen for three thousand years". Since then China has entered a global order dominated by great Western powers and has been redefined in terms of nation-state. China was forced to wear the corset of nation-state and began to learn this modern dance, trying to become a powerful nation-state. And finally, impressing the whole world by the rapid rise in the last thirty years of creative learning, China is now among the global great powers, or to use Mao's phrase, "standing in the forest of world nations".

Lucian Pye once famously said, "China is not just another nation-state in the family of nations. China is a civilization pretending to be a state".[10] But having been pretending for one and half centuries, China may well end up a real one. China seems to have been transformed into a modern nation-state, forgetting that it was an all-inclusive civilization. Or, while still remembering, it has abandoned the premodern utopia of Tianxia in order to become a modern power. This trade-off resulted in a somewhat ironic reality: the more China rises, the farther it strays from the ideal of Tianxia and thus the less Chinese it becomes. Modern China, in its long struggle "using

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10. Lucian W. Pye, *The spirit of Chinese politics*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 235.

barbarous ways to subjugate the barbarian （以夷制夷）",
has been shaped by Western powers so profoundly that
the contemporary Chinese become more like their oppo-
nents rather than their ancestors. The global imagination
of most Chinese is very much occupied, no less than peo-
ple in the West, by the framework of nation-state and *re-
alpolitik*. Unless some fundamental transformation takes
place, the rise of China may well be able to change the
player of the old game but hardly the game itself.

However, the ironic picture is not the whole story of
China's modernization. The idea of Tianxia may not sim-
ply pass away but only retreat and transform. Joseph Lev-
enson probably had a better insight than any his contem-
poraries into the complex relations among Chinese imag-
inaries of the provincial, the national and the world dur-
ing the modern transformation. He explains how the old
cosmopolitan Confucian idea descended to the provincial
and was thus conceived as something to be overcome in
facing the challenge of modernity. But Levenson does not
simply see the decline of Confucianism as "its modern
fate". In an article published two years before his early
death, he concluded by suggesting:

> Early Chinese nationalists, late Ch'ing and Republican (...)
> scorned the self-sufficiency of literati-China, intellectually,
> as smothering and narrow. The Ch'ing's, the Empire's cosmo-
> politans, became the Republic's, the nation's provincials. (...)
> In sum (in part), modern Chinese history is this: a history of
> movement from the politics of Confucian factions to the poli-
> tics of a new world, an international politics conceived in terms
> of class. The province, the nation and the world, in sequence

and combination, have all entered the Chinese view—provincial, nationalist, cosmopolitan—of "China, *Erbe, und Aufgabe*", "China, its inheritance and task".[11]

In Levenson's eyes, under the impact of encountering the Western power, China formed its own unique consciousness of nationality in which the old cosmopolitan idea of Tianxia collapsed into a provincial one. This nationalism should be understood as a move not conceding to but overcoming provinciality. In replacing the idea of Tianxia as the dominant political imagination, the consciousness of nationality in its connection to "the politics of a new world" could be a transformative stage moving towards a new form of cosmopolitanism. In this sense, the Chinese civilization did not simply give up its cosmopolitan impulse or retreat into provinciality. Surely a new wave of nationalism appears to occupy the Chinese political mentality after the politics of world revolution ("the politics of a new world") fades away. But would the search of the nation's wealth and power be all about "China, its inheritance and task"?

II—From Tianxia to new cosmopolitanism

China began to recognize a wider world than previously imagined since the emperor in the Ming Dynasty saw the world map brought by Matteo Ricci in 1603. It was not

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11. Joseph R. Levenson, "The province, the nation, and the world: the problem of Chinese identity", in Joseph R. Levenson, ed., *Modern China: an interpretive anthology*, New York, Macmillan, 1971, p. 68.

until the late Qing period that China really encountered
the challenges of modernity from a different civilization
that could be neither conquered nor converted easily. The
historical lesson we learned from the eclipse of the Tian-
xia idea is similar to that of the decline of Western impe-
rialism, that is, self-superiority more often than not leads
to self-destruction. A hegemonic order based on a cultur-
al egocentric view or the self-superiority of a civilization,
whether Chinese or European, turns out to be self-destruc-
tive, not only because it cannot avoid endless challenges
from newly rising powers, but also because it would even-
tually undermine the most justifiable moral principles in
its own culture. This is a moral and intellectual legacy for
all nations left by the history of mankind.

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The refusal of cultural superiority is, however, not
meant to deny that cultures have their particular advan-
tages which are capable of making their own contributions
to the establishment of a better world for the future. Uni-
versalistic values and norms underlying the world order to
be established are neither preexistent nor defined by cer-
tain superior cultures but rather to be constructed and re-
constructed by all nations of the world in the process of
mutual learning and dialogue. It is in this perspective that
the theoretical potentials of cosmopolitanism become emi-
nently attractive. The word "cosmopolitanism" etymologi-
cally consists of two roots, "cosmos" and "polis", referring
respectively to the harmonious order of the whole universe
and local political order. Thus cosmopolitanism "is sug-

gested by the term itself: the interaction of the universal order of the *cosmos* and the human order of the *polis*".[12] It is possible to conceive of a new form of post-Enlightenment cosmopolitanism that presupposes no traditionally teleological or metaphysical assumptions and bases its universality on cultural constructions by universal imaginaries of peoples in various places. This universality is (in Chinese terms) "convergently made" (汇聚而成）in constant learning and dialogue among cultures, and also modified by local relativity.

We look forward to the revival of Tianxia as we believe that Chinese thought, if converging into such a learning and dialogue process, will contribute to the global imagination and world order of new cosmopolitanism. The idea of revival is critical to traditional Chinese ways of thinking, but its meaning often relates closely to reclarification (正本清源), self-reflection, and transformation rather than a simple return to the past. To revive the ideal of Tianxia in the contemporary world is certainly not to go back to the old Chinese imperial order, but to rescue its most worthy heritage from Sinocentrism. The old concept of Tianxia, in facing its modern fate, must transform itself to adapt to the new world shaped by cultural pluralism. A hope for its contemporary revival lies perhaps in its transformation toward a new cosmopolitanism. Chinese ways of thinking, especially those artic-

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12. Gerard Delanty, "The cosmopolitan imagination: critical cosmopolitanism and social theory", *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2006, v. 57, n. 1, p. 26.

ulated in the concept of relational self, dialectical understanding of "civil/barbaric distinction", the doctrines of "seeking the common while reserving differences" (求同存异), and "harmony without homogeneity" (和而不同) are indeed promising in the sense that through critical reflection and creative transformation they could engage in a constructive dialogue with thoughts of other cultures to jointly construct new cosmopolitan normativities.

In Chinese traditional thought, human beings are incompletely human unless understood in relational terms. As Tong once remarked,

> To be human in the full sense, according to Confucius, is to cultivate 'ren' in ourselves. "Ren" is the kernel concept of Confucianism, and it is composed of "people" (man) and "two". One becomes a human individual in the full sense only through interaction with other people.[13]

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This relational understanding of a human individual could be legitimately extended to a relational conception of culture. Cultures are not self-contained, closed-off and non-connecting. Relationality is an ontological fact of an individual human being as well as human culture. It is interrelated peoples, not atomized individuals, who live in the world. Likewise, it is mutually influenced cultures, rather than a single self-contained culture, that exist in the world. Neither the individual nor the community in isolation is able to constitute a rich meaning of the self, nor can they truly know themselves. The understanding of culture in relational terms can also be found in contempo-

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13. Tong Shijun, "Chinese thought and dialogical universalism", p. 312.

rary Western scholarship on cosmopolitanism, especially the perspective of cultural encounter developed by Gerald Delanty.[14] To view cultures (and civilizations) as ontologically relational means that the evolution of a culture and its difference from another is not isolated, but always situated in an inescapable condition of mutual encounter, or, as Delanty put it, "underlying the notion of cultural diversity is a deeper notion of a cultural encounter".[15] Only through encounters with outsiders, by finding similarities and differences with others, and through reflecting on these findings, could a culture begin to consciously understand itself and achieve self-identity.

The formation and evolution of Chinese culture result from constant encounters in history, internally integrating other regional cultures with the central plain culture and externally confronting foreign ones. China survives culturally after going through dramatic encounters with the outside. The recent rise of China is leading to a new round of intensive cultural encounters on the global level. It contains a variety of possible futures, among which a new cosmopolitan order is one possibility. However desirable, its prospect is not guaranteed. The question concerned here is how Chinese ways of thinking could contribute to the new cosmopolitan thought and, in doing so, what aspects of Chinese thinking need to be reformed and transformed.

14. Gerard Delanty, "Cultural diversity, democracy and the prospects of cosmopolitanism: a theory of cultural encounters", *The British Journal of Sociology*, 2011, v. 62, n. 4, p. 633-56.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 636.

The Confucian idea of "harmony without homogeneity" as an approach to the other is, in its best interpretation, to treat the other with openness and respect. But the old concept of Tianxia also implies a profound discrimination against those who are considered "culturally inferior" in its tendency of enlightening or converting the other. While it is inclusive, the old Tianxia order tends to include difference into the hierarchical structure of Sinocentrism. Here, the "Hua-Yi distinction" (华夷之辨) is a critical issue. In a response to his critics, Zhao Tingyang insisted that the Hua-Yi concept is morally wrong by conflicting with the idea of Tianxia, and that in fact "the idea of Tianxia is meant to oppose the Hua-Yi concept".[16] This sounds like a "surgical operation" to cut a good idea apart from a bad one. A different way to deal with the problem is to find a better interpretation among competing ones that really existed in history.

The concept of "Hua-Yi distinction" is subject to different interpretations. The distinction could be made based on geography and ethnicity but alternatively can also be understood in terms of culture or civilization. The latter suggests a way of dialectical thinking in distinguishing the civilized from the barbaric and in formulating a universalistic concept of civilization that transcends geographical and ethnical boundaries. In the beginning of the ninth century, Han Yu (韩愈) put forward a revolutionary reading

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16. Zhao Tingyang, "An introduction to all-under-heaven system" (in Chinese), *World Economics and Politics*, n. 10, 2008 [赵汀阳：《天下体系的一个简要表述》，《世界经济与政治》2008年第10期], p. 58.

of "Hua-Yi distinction" in that "Confucius said in *Spring & Autumn*, barbarians into China become the Chinese and the Chinese into barbarians become barbarians". This interpretation transformed the standard of civilization from ethnicity to culture. According to Zhu Weizheng, Confucian scholars with reformist minds in the Northern Song Dynasty were able to regard the barbarian Qidan more and more equally and "even recognized that the barbarian could surpass 'China' from politics to morality". Most historians since then tend to accept Han Yu's view that the "Hua-Yi distinction" lies in civilization but not ethnicity. It was also used by Manchu elites to justify their rulership in China and further promote the dialectic idea of a transformable line between Huaxia and Yidi (夷狄而华夏则华夏之，华夏而夷狄则夷狄之).[17] According to this interpretation, civilization lies beyond the boundaries of race and ethnicity. The civilization that the Chinese people once achieved can be carried forward and flourish through other peoples. The "Hua-Yi distinction", in this cultural sense, opens an intellectual space of self-transformation to overcome the Sinocentric view that "an outsider of my ethnicity must have a different heart" (非我族类其心必异) and thus is not in conflict with the moral ideal of Tianxia.

More importantly, this suggests a dialectical understanding of the relation between universality and particularity which is constructive to develop a new cosmopolitan

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17. Zhu Weizheng, "Three topics on the history of Chinese historiography", *Fudan Journal* (Social Sciences), n. 3, 2004 [朱维铮:《史学三题》,《复旦学报》(社会科学版)，2004年第3期, 11页], p.11.

thought. Any form of universalistic idea cannot come out of nowhere, it always stems from somewhere. It has roots in a particular place and peoples. This is one of the reasons why we need to defend and protect cultural particularity. But once created, as the idea has a significant effect on a wider range of human practice besides the process of cultural encounter, it has been developed and is no longer dependent on its original locality. It becomes a part of human civilization in the form of transcultural universalism, which is precisely the kind of universality required by new cosmopolitanism. In this regard, Zhao Tingyang's view is simultaneously radical and conservative. He is too radical when his advocating the worldview of Tianxia and the world institution demands a complete denial of local perspectives and requires a view from everywhere, but he is too conservative in that he ironically insists that the Chinese and only the Chinese have achieved this superior worldview, thus revealing that "the view from everywhere" indeed comes from "a view from somewhere", specifically, from China. In a new cosmopolitan perspective, however, a view not from somewhere is from nowhere. Some moral and political principles qualify transcultural universality not because they are views from everywhere but because they have been transformed from views rooted in somewhere and have transcended across cultures.

The idea of Tianxia requires not only thinking about the global but also thinking globally. This is an insight worthy of attention. But thinking globally does not necessarily mean to totally deny the legitimacy of thinking nationally and inter-

nationally. The existence of nation-states is a political reality of the world. To disregard nation and national interests is not a serious way of thinking to go beyond these interests. Attempting to abolish nation-state and national interests with a paradigmatic shift of thinking, however romantically brave, is a move of outdated idealistic philosophy that avoids rather than addresses the political and moral problems caused by the existing international system. Political and moral issues arise largely from conflicts between individuals (a person or nation). To reject any legitimate conception of the individual is to cancel out the very precondition of political and moral problems, hence it is pointless to discuss them.

A more dialectical treatment of relationships among different levels of communities can be found in both Chinese and Western thought. Lao-zi's teaching to "use the self to examine the self, use the family to examine the family, use the neighborhood to examine the neighborhood, use the state to examine the state, use Tianxia to examine Tianxia" (以身观身，以家观家，以乡观乡，以邦观邦，以天下观天下) is by no means to separate them from each other but rather to locate them in a same structure. It remarkably resembles Martha Nussbaum's "concentric circles" structure in which everyone simultaneously identifies with the self, immediate family, extended family, neighborhood or local community, city, nation and finally with the largest circle, "humanity as a whole". In explicating her cosmopolitan view, Nussbaum made it clear that "we need not give up our special affections and identifications, whether ethnic or gender-based or religious".

> We need not think of them as superficial, and we may think of our identity as in part constituted by them. We may and should devote special attention to them in education. But we should work to make all human beings part of our community of dialogue and concern, base our political deliberations on that interlocking commonality, and give the circle that defines our humanity a special attention and respect.[18]

No-one has only one identity. We most likely have multiple identities that are complexly interconnected. It is not necessary to assume "coexistence precedes existence"[19] to restore the relational dimension of human life. Therefore, we do not have to choose either the nation-state or the world in a dualistic conception. A world consciousness informed by new cosmopolitanism is not to eliminate the concept of nation, but to think about the world *through* nation-states and international relations, while also thinking about nation-states from the perspective of the world. This helps us overcome the dualism of nation-state and world order, establish a way of thinking nationally about the global, and simultaneously think globally about the national.

**III—Reimaging the global:
    a world of coconstruction**

The depth and breadth of cultural encounters in the age of globalization are unprecedented, but this does not make a new cosmopolitan order inevitable. Cultural encounters

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18. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Patriotism and cosmopolitanism", in *For love of country: debating the limits of patriotism*, p. 9.

19. Zhao Tingyang, "An introduction to all-under-heaven system" (in Chinese), p. 63-5.

in history have led to a variety of consequences, some desirable and some others terrible. What future world the current globalization would lead to is contingent on many factors and conditioned with uncertainty. However, how we imagine the global can still significantly affect the future world order. A part of new cosmopolitan thought that we attempt to develop is to propose "a world of coconstruction" as a new way of imaging the global. Its fundamental propositions include: peoples of all nations not only *live* together in a world, but also need to *build* a world together; only in a world in which we consciously make and remake can we coexist peacefully and prosperously; the global order of a world of coconstruction is normatively based on shared values, taking on a constructivist and transcultural form of universalism.

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The new cosmopolitan imagination rejects essentialism in understanding both particularity and universality. Neither cultures of nations nor global norms are statically given in essentialist ways. Under the condition of innercultural and transcultural encounters, they both are in constantly dynamic courses of making and remaking. The dynamics are relational, as Delanty puts, defined by "the relations between the social actors and the processes by which some of these relations generate enduring cultural regularities".

> It is in relationships that cultural phenomena such as identities, memories, values, beliefs, trust etc are generated. The nature of social relationships is that they are not static, but fluid, mobile and contested. It therefore follows from this that culture, relationally defined, also has these characteristics. (...) culture does not depict something external, but is itself a process of

self-constitution. Culture does not merely transmit, but interprets and transforms that which it communicates.[20]

Theorizing cultural phenomena in both relational and transformative terms sheds new light on understanding of the relations between the inside and the outside of a culture. It also opens potentials of cultural self-transformation and innovation. Every encounter with the outside could make a new impact on social agents of a given cultural community so that they are likely to discover a "strange" horizon in which other different cognitive and normative references become available. They are inspired or encouraged or led or even forced to be brought into a reflexive position where they may well start rethinking themselves and their culture and reforming their self-understanding.

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Encountering otherness is an adventurous journey that challenges coherence of the previous self and even threatens to undermine self-identity. It is in this adventure that social actors are faced with attractions and challenges presented by the other and also provided with opportunities and intellectual resources for reconstructing their cultural identities. Once new self-understanding is achieved, some culturally outside elements have entered to the inside of the culture in question. Cultural encounter, especially with the "strange" other, is a dynamic of cultural changes. The outside can be both a threat to cultural survival and a resource for cultural innovation. In this perspective, a given culture

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20. Gerard Delanty, "Cultural diversity, democracy and the prospects of cosmopolitanism: a theory of cultural encounters", p. 640.

is always in the tension between conservative reservation and progressive innovation, between self-identification or self-assertion and self-reflection or self-problematization. Both sides are intrinsic to a cultural community. By exploring the implications of cultural encounter on the dynamics of cultural formation and transformation, we come into a more dialectic understanding of relations of a culture between the self and the other, the given and the constructive, continuity and discontinuity, identification and differentiation, and so on. A relational and constructivist approach to culture will blur and even deconstruct a series of dualistic boundaries and accordingly allow more possibilities for cultural self-transformation.

142   Emphasis on cultural self-transformation implies the potential for constructing transcultural universalism in a way beyond overlapping consensus in its weak sense. Normative principles for a world of coconstruction must be based on dialogues among nations. Every national culture has its own global imagination, which may well be developed into a universalistic discourse but is often articulated in its own particular way. When nations and cultures speak and listen to each other, various universalistic discourses are presented in the world in their own particular ways. This presence comes into an intellectual landscape where many "particular universalities" meet each other, reach "overlapping consensus" by dialogue and then are ready to "converge" into a global normative regime of shared values. Or probably not? This scenario may comfort the eagerness and anxiety of cosmopolitans in search of univer-

sality but on the other hand may well be an unrealistic utopia. It is far more difficult to "converge" many "particular universalities" into a global one. While the possibility of convergence is always open to cosmopolitans, we need to think seriously about the condition for achieving the goal.

Transcultural universality is in principle constructed based on dialogue among cultures presented as diverse particularistic and (particular) universalistic discourses. It is thus also a form of "dialogue-oriented universalism", to use Tong's term. However, unless the conceived dialogue can legitimately and explicitly demand a change and transformation, there is little chance of reaching meaningful consensus. While the concept "overlapping consensus" formulated by John Rawls suggests necessary change (repositioning and refraining) to be made on the part of supporters of different comprehensive doctrines in order to reach consensus on principles of justice, its popular usage means "finding a common ground": little more than finding what happens to be overlapped among existing various beliefs, values and norms. But the overlapping parts we readily have are probably not important or even relevant to normative principles and procedures on which we want most but often fail to reach consensus. Many theoretical approaches (including multiculturalism, transnationalism and globalism) suffer from a similar problem in facing the challenges of diversity, plurality and difference.

Could any Chinese way of thinking provide an inspiration for dealing with the problem? In the doctrine of "seeking the common while reserving differences" (求同存

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异), the Chinese character "求" (seek) has different meanings (including beg, request, pursue, seek, look for and demand), but in any case it suggests making a hard effort to pursue a goal. "Seeking the common" is a position stronger than reaching overlapping consensus. Precisely because different cultures may not overlap on what matters, the consensus is not something ready-made but needs to be pursued by making efforts. It would be impossible to pursue transcultural universality while maintaining each culture's existing particularity unaffected. "Common ground" is not something already there to be discovered; it needs to be fostered, constructed and even created. In this sense, "dialogue-oriented universalism" must also be contestation-involved and creation-engaged universalism. This line of thought echoes what Delanty called "critical cosmopolitanism":

> A critical cosmopolitan approach thus proceeds on the assumption that the cultural models of society contain learning potential in terms of moral and political normative criteria. It suggests a view of culture as a sphere of contestation and interpretation.[21]

Imaging the global as a world of coconstruction requires a more important and radical role for cultural dialogue and exchange than previously conceived, that is, to mutually know better, to increase understanding and to reduce misunderstanding. It is not enough to make exchanges without changing each other. The ideal of new cosmo-

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21. Gerard Delanty, "Cultural diversity, democracy and the prospects of cosmopolitanism: a theory of cultural encounters", p. 642.

politanism involves not merely "overlapping consensus" among existing values and norms of different cultures, but also self- and mutual-transformations in which culturally different ways of thinking would have to change in light of new experiences of cultural encounter. In the era of globalization, major civilizations have undergone substantial encounters, and cultures have undergone mutual penetrations in virtually all aspects. Encounter with the other as a cultural logic has become more and more visible at both macro and micro levels. No political community or cultural entity can exclude the possibility that the outside could be inside. This presents an enormous challenge to cultural identity. To realize clearly who we are, we not only need to look back on "who we have been" but also to look forward to "who we want to be".

Empires in history tended to imagine their civilizations as universally good and able to rule the whole world, through either conquest or converting difference. The old imperial imagination that a single civilization dominates the world must be abandoned along with various kinds of centrism, whether it is Eurocentrism, Sinocentrism or Americentrism. Neither Western nor Chinese civilization contains ideas readily available for forming a new cosmopolitan order. Both Chinese and Western values and norms need to be creatively and critically transformed, since no single cultural tradition is able to provide a reliable cognitive and desirable normative basis for the future global order. At the same time, a variety of national cultures have become commonly shared resources for co-constructing

the world. Chinese traditional wisdom, as well as Europe-an rationalism, belongs to the whole of humankind. In this era, in the cultural sense we are on the same horizon. This does not mean that we have entered a period of homogenization of culture, but it does mean that we see different kinds of culturally rich landscape; we see each other. What is really important to transcultural universalism in the real sense is, as Tong put it,

> to regard universalism as a more reflexively constructive process that is informed by the rich achievements of the debates between universalism and particularism as well as among different types of universalism, so as to avoid the tendencies to reduce the constructive process of universalism to economic globalization, global Westernization or homogenization in various other forms.[22]

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IV—Conclusion: towards the end of the hegemonic world

Chinese tradition has multiple faces. There is not only the idea of Tianxia, which could mean inclusiveness and caring for the well-being of all peoples, and the doctrines of "seeking the common while reserving differences", and "harmony without homogeneity", which could appeal for toleration and respect of difference. There is also the story of King Goujian, which may provoke revanchism and the dictum of "whoever conquers the world rules the world" (打天下坐天下), which could encourage "rule by force" (霸道). What matters most is how to make good

22. Tong Shijun, "Varieties of universalism", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 2009, v. 12, n. 4, p. 461.

use of traditional ideas and wisdoms for today's world, rather than how to pick up any of them as typical or authentic Chinese ways of thinking.

We do need to avoid a more than negligible possibility: China's rise to a strong competitive power leads the world into a radical *realpolitik* and reinforces the old structure of global hegemony. If China finally becomes a new hegemonic power and dominates the world, would that mean China's victory? Maybe, but it would certainly not mean a victory of the Chinese civilization. "Changing only a player but still in the old game" means that Chinese culture has not contributed much to transformation and reformation of the world. However, this is not the only possible (and certainly not inevitable) prospect for the rise of China. Its rise as a "hard power" (economic, military and technical), even from a cosmopolitan perspective, can still be positive. Because only on the basis of some hard power could China be able to resist the existing power of global hegemony and also transform the hegemonic structure while transforming China itself. Moving from confronting the hegemony to overcoming it seems to be a necessary process, or—to use a Hegelian term—a process of *Aufhebung*.

Nevertheless, a desirable world does not rely on World History moving toward the self-realization of the Hegelian mystical Spirit (whether called "idea", "God" or "Tianxia"), but does require an awakening of consciousness, at all levels: individual, societal, national and global. The new world consciousness realizes the inescapable condition of worldwide cultural encounters and its implications for the

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common human future. In the relational world of cultural encounter, political and moral actions are also considerably interactive. How a nation acts often depends on how it has been and would be treated. If you treat one like an enemy, you have a good chance to get one; the same applies to a friend. In a sense, no single nation, however great and powerful, could completely decide its own fate, let alone that of the whole world. This is already a world of coexistence and a more democratic and just world order must be coconstructed.

For both China and the rest of world, the best possible scenario of China's rise is not that China rules the world or returns to the old Tianxia system. Rather, it is that China will eventually play a significant role in bringing the world into a post-hegemonic world of dialogue and coconstruction. This would also be one of the most important contributions made by the Chinese civilization to the world. The greatness of the Chinese civilization lies in the fact that the victory of the Chinese civilization can mean such a world in which China has no hegemonic position. If China happens to become a new hegemonic power, it should be the last hegemony, the one that ends the hegemonic world. This is not a prophecy but a hope, a hope with good reasons.