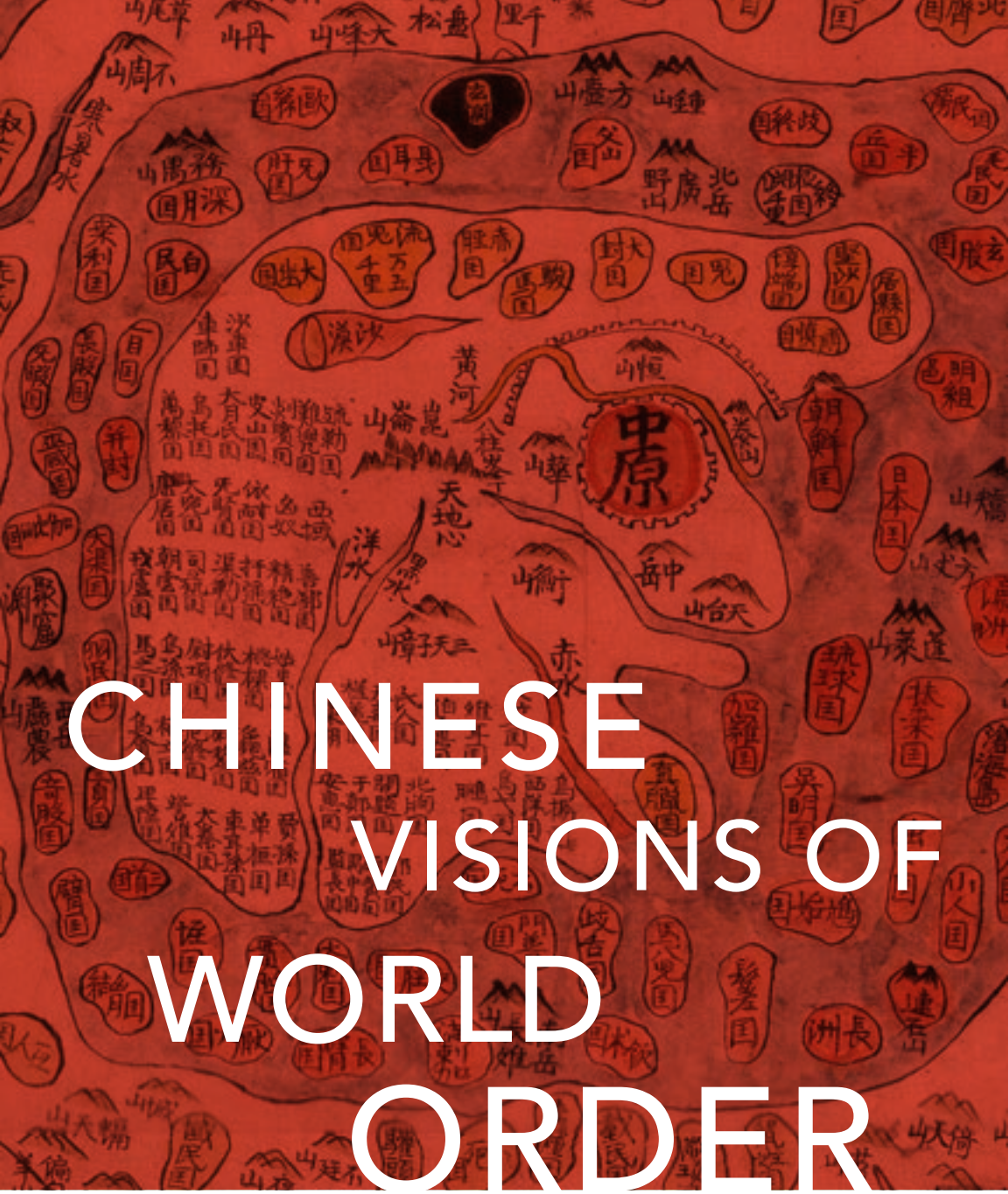

CHINESE VISIONS OF WORLD ORDER

Tianxia, Culture, and World Politics / *Ban Wang, Editor*

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Introduction / Ban Wang

As China is becoming a major power in the world, thinkers and writers are debating the implications of a Chinese vision of world order. The classical idea of *tianxia* has become the focus of debate in scholarship and public discourse. Literally meaning "all under heaven," tianxia refers to a system of governance held together by a regime of culture and values that transcends racial and geographical boundaries (more on this later). This new interest in tianxia calls to mind a similar focus half a century ago. In *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, edited by John K. Fairbank in 1968, scholars examined imperial China's trade and ritualistic relations with the adjacent regions of East and Southeast Asia under the rubric of the "Chinese culture area." In his introduction, Fairbank claims that the Chinese concept and practice of an international order flourished over two millennia "until the Western powers intruded into East Asia in the mid-nineteenth century."[1] Such investigations of a Chinese world vision, he cautions, would have to confront the challenge of the concepts of nation, sovereignty, and equality of states, which are ill equipped to deal with the body of thought and practice associated with tianxia. This challenge persists today and reflects the confrontation of two worldviews. Recent scholarship continues to address the gap between the Western interstate concepts and Chinese world visions. Taking issue with the entrenched model of balance of power in interstate relations, David Kang discerns a broad pattern of diplomacy, ritual, and hierarchy as the condition of peaceful coexistence among Sinicized East Asian countries.[2]

Despite economic globalization and interdependence, despite the flow of capital, commodities, media, and culture across borders, geopolitical conflict and economic competition by powerful nations continue and often flare up. Interstate conflict, unequal development, neoliberal agendas, and environmental

disasters are tearing the world apart. The divided world seems to have an increasing need for a cosmopolitan ethos, leadership, and cooperation.

As China has risen among the global powers, it has come into more direct confrontation with the international system rooted in "nation, sovereignty, and equality of states." Since joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, China has gained a firm foothold in world institutions and has exercised increasing leverage. All signs point to China being in a position to claim global leadership and reshape the economic order. While some see this claim as imperial hubris, others view it as beneficial. But where does this ambition come from? Many have argued that the rising China cannot be understood without tracing its roots in ancient history.[3] With power comes responsibility, and China's strategies are derived from an ambition from its past in which China strove, in Joseph Levenson's words, to go "against the world to join it."[4] Its campaign of One Belt, One Road harks back to the ancient trade routes across Euro-Asian lands, and its Asian Infrastructure Development Bank recalls precolonial maritime trade networks. Chinese leaders and writers are fond of cloaking China's image in the time-honored mantle of its five-thousand-year history. Crystallized in the doctrine of tianxia, its ambition had remained submerged, but it has been raising its head in the last few decades. An examination of tianxia and especially its modern avatars—cosmopolitanism, Confucianism, socialist internationalism, and transnationalism—will offer a sense of how China draws on its past to advance a different worldview.

Taking issue with the current world system, Zhao Tingyang, whose work is at the center of the tianxia debate, invokes the idea of tianxia in opposition to the modern nation-state and related political theory. His story of tianxia's genesis focuses on the dawning of a vision that departed from the state-centered polity. In the fall of the Shang dynasty, the small kingdom of Zhou (ca. 1046–771 BCE) prevailed over the powerful Shang because Zhou had moral appeal and Shang was corrupt. But, vulnerable to Shang's remnants, the new kingdom of Zhou had to cobble together the fragmented areas by investing cultural authority in a framework capable of pacifying subversive forces. In a departure from state-centered politics, tianxia was born. Its mission is to win support from all populations, *de minxin* (得民心), and to provide a framework for social and economic life. Winning people's hearts and minds is pivotal to the legitimacy of tianxia, which is buttressed by a culture of morality, ritual, and rites. Sustained by affective ties rather than coercion, tianxia distinguishes the inside from the outside less by geography and ethnicity than by cultural competence. Boundaries are fluid and relational: whoever attains cultural norms can be an insider, and the outsider can move in on merit. [5]

Zhao Tingyang is not the first to pit tianxia against the international system. When China encountered the West in the nineteenth century, thinkers resorted to the classical tradition to question the unfamiliar world. Wei Tsai-ying suggests that Kang Youwei's mentor, Liao Ping, revamped the tianxia vision against the nation-state system.[6] Premised on the formal equality of nations, international law constructed a world prone to conflict, anarchy, and lawlessness. State sovereignty was a tool wielded by the strong nations to forge a power balance at the expense of the weak. Drawing from the Confucian classic *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*), Liao Ping considered tianxia a corrective to crisis-ridden interstate relations. In view of the similar power struggle in the Spring and Autumn period, he found that the Confucian classics proposed a model of governance by two lords of the states of Qi and Wei: *ba* (霸) and *bo* (伯), referring to military domination and imperial authority. While he favored authority, Liao Ping sensed that a combination of domination and authority could work together to impose an order over lesser states. Instead of mere realpolitik, he envisaged a moral and formal arrangement anchored in family and kin. Access to the power center was based on cultural and ritualistic criteria that fanned out to the periphery. Through cultural transformation and instruction (*jiaohua* 教化), the Kingly Way (*wangdao* 王道), the compass of authority, held sway over the realm and knew no bounds.

Like Liao Ping's attempt to recover the past to inform the future, contemporary tianxia discourse stems as much from a sense of frustrated tianxia aspirations as from China's newfound position. Well received among intellectuals and academics, Zhao Tingyang's book *The Tianxia System* (*Tianxia tixi* 天下體系) has made a strong impact on popular culture and state policy.[7] Critical of self-seeking, expansionist nation-states, the book focuses on the conflict between a morally conceived international society and antagonistic nation-states.

Yan Xuetong, a professor at Tsinghua University, has also updated tianxia by critiquing the international system.[8] Yan deplores the current hegemonic system as well as China's deficit of leadership. In his book *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, Yan revisits the pre–Qin dynasty thinkers and recovers interstate relations modeled on "all under heaven." The key to pre-Qin political philosophy is "humane authority," which includes ideals of social justice, public service, and moral leadership. Yan proposes combining a moral tianxia with strategic alliances for curtailing geoconflict. Advocating for leadership that is humane, moral, responsible, and capable, he prioritizes the common good over national self-interest.

The resurgence of tianxia has also met with some criticism. As William Callahan has noted, Zhao proposes "a system that values order over freedom,

ethics over law, and elite governance over democracy and human rights."[9] Through the lens of the international system, Callahan views tianxia not as a regime of culture and authority but as the projection of a global hegemon. Callahan's view points to the tension between culture and power, ethics and law in the conceptions of tianxia. Despite its popular revival, tianxia has rarely been defined with rigor. According to the late Benjamin Schwartz, the concept presents "a notion of universal kingship linked to a widely shared sense of participation in a higher culture." Rooted in a religious and cosmic foundation, the idea embodies a universal authority and a sacred set of ritual and kin relationships as "the absolute criteria dividing barbarians from the men of the Middle Kingdom." But authority was achieved through "military-political consolidation over large areas."[10] For Yuri Pines, tianxia denotes an imperial culture "that looks like a classical hegemonic construction in the Gramscian sense."[11] The early empire builders, while developing military and administrative mechanisms, "formulated ideals, values, and perceptions that laid the intellectual foundation" for "the unification of All under Heaven."[12] As a cultural and intellectual construct, tianxia emerged as a centerpiece of Chinese political culture set in the framework of empire. Two aspects become apparent in the above definitions: normative appeal and realpolitik. For Zhao Tingyang and others, the normative ideal aspires to a worldview that transcends the differences in particular communities, nation-states, race, and ethnicity. "The entire world under heaven" yearns for a common world beyond the modern political landscape fraught with power struggle and rivalry, echoing Levenson's idea of "regime of value" as opposed to the *guo* (state).[13] A faith in common values privileges political unity over differences by virtue of shared culture immanent in the everyday lifeworld, customs, and commerce. Levenson wrote that the tianxia mind-set accepted cultural differences as the way of the world. Although they distinguished the civilized from the barbarians, Confucian thinkers were aware that "the barbarians are always with us." Tianxia was "a criterion, a standpoint, not a point of departure."[14]

Guarding against the use of tianxia as a sign of Chinese exceptionalism, we propose that the concept offers an alternative vision to the current international system. In contemporary discussion, its projection of a worldwide public is crystallized in a statement from the Confucian classic *Records of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記): "When the Great Way was practiced, the world was shared by all alike."[15] While the military and political consolidation of large areas and the related tribute system was common among ancient empires, tianxia insists on "the anchorage of a universal authority in the moral and ritualistic framework of a secular high culture."[16]

Some people's meat, however, is poison to others. Schooled in modern political thought, possessive individualism, and the doctrine of state equality, critics tend to see the Chinese worldview as presumptive and a threat, regarding it as an expression of nationalist hubris of a rising hegemon. The fault line of culture versus realpolitik threads through current debate, intellectual history, and the chapters of this volume. Indeed, as a body of thought and practice, tianxia has wavered between the normative claim to values and culture on the one hand, and coercive mechanisms of domination on the other. The concept has played out between an impulse toward universal principles and an ideological cover for power politics. In its modern avatars, the fault line parallels the divide between cosmopolitanism and interstate geopolitics. As changeable and varied meanings of tianxia reflect historical vicissitudes, a historical and interpretive inquiry into the concept may shed light on the tension between culture and power, and morality and politics.

Rather than disembodied metaphysics over and above history, the contributors to this volume rethink tianxia as implicated in historical contingency and political practices. By keeping an eye on the nexus of culture and realpolitik, we attend to the concept's rise and fall, its use and abuse, its mutation and metamorphoses in modern times. As a universal mandate, tianxia aspires to normative principles, and its validity rests not on the power to impose on others but on its potential as a critique of parochial interests and structures of domination. A coercive state may resort to it as an ideological alibi to disguise its private interests as general interests, but the normative thrust may also invoke universal principles to pit the public criteria of justice against such parochial agendas and abuse of power.

In what follows, this introduction provides context and analysis for the chapters, which are grouped under four themes. Beginning with the recent Confucian revival, part I revisits the Confucian classics and uses tianxia ideas to question nationalist historiography and the interstate system. Part II focuses on cross-cultural exchange, learning, and comparison of civilizations. Indebted to the tianxia worldview, this learning process embraces the humanist ideal of a common world. Examining tianxia's relation to socialist internationalism in Mao's China, part III traces the relevance of the classical vision to the socialist imagination, whereby working peoples of peripheral nations strove to emancipate themselves in a concerted struggle against colonialism and imperialism. The two essays of part IV are skeptical of the official version of tianxia and see its rhetoric as part of a state-sponsored ideological campaign. By supporting the critical stance of intellectual autonomy, the last chapter reaffirms the hopes of the Global South.

In general, the contributors trace tianxia's intellectual resources, track its historical mutations, explore its limitations, critique its abuses, rearticulate its worldviews, explore its manifestations, and reconsider its hidden links to China's rise. The four parts are interrelated, but each provides a reference point for reconsidering tianxia as an alternative vision of world order.

Tianxia, Confucianism, and Empire

In recent decades, a revival of Confucianism has sought to promote China's new image—its millennial culture, identity, and role on the world stage. The revival involves the government, institutions, popular culture, the media, and local communities. In small towns and villages, Confucianism is filling the vacuum left by the collapse of the dominant ideology and moral fabric. The intellectual goal of this new Confucianism, however, is to look to past resources to advance a new worldview to meet the challenges of the contemporary world.[17]

The revival of Confucianism is nothing new. When Confucian China crumbled before Western encroachment, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, while absorbing Western knowledge to strengthen China, wove the Confucian idea of tianxia into the nation-building project. Writing about his European trips, Liang proposed the idea of the cosmopolitan state (*shijie zhuyi de guojia*, 世界主義的國家). Inspired by the League of Nations, Liang saw the possibility of nation-states working together toward a world community.[18] Although China had yet to attain the status of a nation-state, all nation-states that committed themselves to the cosmopolitan principle could have a chance to reconcile their aggressive and self-seeking agendas.[19]

To Liang, nation building was only a way station to the cosmopolitan state. The *raison d'état* is not self-interested but entails a planetary ethic, which progresses in a spiral from the individual to the family to the nation-state, culminating in a united world. Drawing on the Confucian doctrine of *xiu qi zhi ping* (修齊治平)—cultivate the self, order family ties, govern the country, and bring peace to all under heaven—Liang envisions a self that is not self-serving but sociable, and a nation-state that is not aggressive but a team player:

> The ultimate aim of an individual's life is to make a contribution to humanity as a whole. Why? Because humanity as a whole is the upper limit of the self. If you want to develop yourself, you need to move in this direction. Why must the state exist? The reason is that with the state, it is easier to rally the cultural power of a national group; to perpetuate and grow it so that a country will be able to contribute to humanity as a

> whole and help the world grow as well. Building a state is thus a means of advancing humanity, just as the coordination of a municipal government with self-governing local regions is a means of building a state. In this light, individuals should not rest content with making their own state wealthy and powerful, but should instead make their nation an addition to humanity. Otherwise the state is built to no purpose.[20]

Liang goes on to claim that contribution to humanity would require a synthetic convergence of Chinese and Western cultures to create a world culture.[21]

The contemporary scholar Wang Hui has built on Liang's claim on a Chinese vision of world order. His monumental work *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* (*Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi*) links Confucian universalism to cosmopolitan ideals by reviewing diverse schools of thought in modern China. Weaving together classical resources, Western Enlightenment, socialism, and social democratic ideas, Wang analyzes the dialectic between culture and politics, the particular and the universal, the national and international. A history of Chinese thinkers in constant conversation with Western traditions, his book advances a critical mode of modernity against capitalist modernity.[22] As the Qing dynasty was swept into the system of nation-states, Liao Ping and Kang Youwei, through New Text Confucianism, provided strategies for thinking about world governance and nation building.[23] Deploying ideas of Confucian universalism or empire rather than tianxia, Wang refrains from elevating the Confucian view to a universal discourse. But empire serves as a substitute: it embodies a political culture that transcends the nation-state system. Wang describes the way the Chinese state evolved into something more than a nation-state. In the late imperial era, tianxia enabled the Manchus to shore up their legitimacy as a Chinese regime by incorporating diverse ethnic communities, populations, and religions "into a flexible and pluralistic political structure."[24] Although national knowledge and institutions helped China to become strong on the way to becoming an important part of the world, Chinese thinkers went beyond them and aspired to a different worldview.

The European nation-state, keyed to individual subjectivity, political economy, and legal institutions, imposes a global narrative of modernity. The cornerstone of the international system and historiography, the nation-state drives global capitalism and colonialism. Nationalist historiography deems imperial China to be devoid of history and lacking inner dynamics, languishing under the Mandate of Heaven. Discontent with that view compelled the historians of the Japanese Kyoto School to discern evidence of a proto-nation-state in the Tang-Song transition. The result is a reconstruction of East Asian modernity.

Wang Hui recasts this Asian modernity with a Confucian logic. Instead of national signs, the self-understanding of Song Confucianism recalls the unity of rites and music of the golden age of the Three Dynasties and the subsequent decay in the hollowing out of value from institutions.[25] Projecting a political vision broader than that of the nation-state, Wang overcomes the tired dichotomy between nation-state and empire. The empire embraced interregional communication, centralized political power, multiethnic demographics, fluid cultural identities, and varied regionalisms. It overlapped with the national form as China waded deeper into the modern world.[26] In Wang's version of Confucian China and its modern fate, Chinese modernity attests to the transformation of an ancient cosmology from the Confucian heaven (*tianli* 天理) to the scientific, public principle (*gongli* 公理).[27] Instead of the new replacing the old, Confucian universalism persists in modern thought in the articulation of a morally coherent, culturally meaningful, and politically integrative universe.[28] Wang Hui's work confirms Levenson's remark that Chinese historians harbor cosmopolitan aspirations in writing about China.[29]

The empire versus nation-state distinction also informs nation-centered historiography. In chapter 1, Mark Lewis and Mei-yu Hsieh question China's image as a timeless empire qua nation-state in terms of territorial integrity and ethnic homogeneity. Attentive to China's tenacious ties to the past, they trace the Han dynasty's road to empire through cultural interaction, ethnic commingling, and cosmopolitan linkages. This process bears witness to a shift from a ritualistic and shared culture to an entwined operation of diplomacy, alliance, population management, socioeconomic exchange, and military campaigns. From a limited polity besieged with pluralistic, decentering forces, the Han evolved into a tianxia polity governed by a single, supreme ruler. The pinnacle of the empire commanded the recognition and the services of the Han peasantry, the Indo-European oasis kingdoms, and numerous steppe peoples. Initially, the ruler asserted his superiority over his former peers through gift exchange and kinship ties with the Xiongnu ruler. Dividing the world between two masters, this balance of power allowed each to strengthen his power. The necessity of curbing local challengers and bolstering imperial authority brought ethnic minorities into the fold, as they were absorbed into and employed in the Han regime. This inclusive policy made imperial rule explicitly transethnic and transregional, setting the example for subsequent empire builders. The rise of the Han corresponded to the earlier vision of a single tianxia wherein all people, no matter how distant or alien, were brought together under the imperium.

This narrative challenges the image of a timeless China with a homogeneous Chinese people residing in a bounded place called the Middle Kingdom. To

the contrary, the Han chronicles show that all parties, inside and outside, could promote the power and status of the ruling house, and cultural and ethnic differences were negligible. In this multicultural empire, very little evidence shows that different peoples must be folded into a common ethnocultural tradition. The Han managed to integrate diverse peoples of varied cultures and regions into the expanded state and constructed an interregional network connecting polities across the steppes.

In their contributions, Wang Hui and Prasenjit Duara retrieve ideas from Confucian sources. Reinterpreting Kang Youwei's New Text scholarship, Wang Hui in chapter 2 addresses the fault line between empire and nation-state. Treating culture as vital to political unity, Kang seeks to transcend conflicted feudal fiefs by means of a cultural politics that propelled Confucianism's rise to orthodoxy. From the competing schools of thought in the Spring and Autumn era, Confucianism emerged as a common culture and a regime of value. Kang draws a parallel between the rise of orthodox Confucianism and the clash of civilizations in the early twentieth century, when rival religions and cultures competed for supremacy. Here, the need for cultural authority amid political breakdown prefigures the importance of cosmopolitanism among warring colonial and imperialist states. Rendering the empire as a multiethnic state to combat divisiveness, Kang Youwei addresses the question of ethnicity by appealing to the notion of empire sustained by cultural authority and state religion, which transcends ethnic divides and cultural differences. As a civilization and empire, China encompasses loose social relations, multiple ethnicities, and heterogeneous cultures in a vast land.

Taking a leaf from the ancient doctrine of *tian*, if not tianxia, Prasenjit Duara in chapter 3 addresses the tension between the nation-state system and cosmopolitanism. Based on state sovereignty, self-other relations, and neoliberalism, the modern world has run into deep trouble. This calls for a cosmopolitan ethos capable of sharing sovereignty with regional communities and making decisions on matters of common concern.

The religious experience of transcendence points a way out by drawing strength from the Confucian ritual of self-cultivation. Self-cultivation not only trains individuals to develop spiritual wisdom but also encourages them to undertake a moral mapping of the world as the locus of the common good. Comparing Kant's kingdom of ends with the tianxia vision, Duara focuses on the Confucian trajectory of moving from the inner to the outer realm. While reserved for sage-kings in the past, the ethical life in tian—a symbol of transcendent moral authority—has played a significant role in sustaining social and moral bonds in Chinese society. In today's global societies, the ethical ideal

could foster a sense of authority and sympathetic feelings. Cultivating righteous service and enhancing the unity of spirit and body, tian exercises moral authority over the power of nation-states and impels a habit of the heart that bears allegiance to ever-expanding communities. As self-cultivation spreads moral influence to both intimates and strangers, individuals could reenact past intellectual resources for a new universalism. Echoing Liang Qichao's abovementioned moral progress of the individual through the ascending scales of family and community en route to cosmopolitan ethos, the transcendent authority represents a worldview that develops from the ground up, linking mundane experiences to the universal.

Tianxia, Cross-Cultural Learning, and Cosmopolitanism

Joseph Levenson observed that the historian of Confucian China was a cosmopolitan thinker in disguise. Although Confucian universalism was in retreat at the turn of the twentieth century, a "burgeoning cosmopolitanism" might rise "from the ashes of cosmopolitanism."[30]

Tianxia invites comparison with cosmopolitanism. Kant's universal rationality envisages that humans are bound by mutual obligations to arrange in concert their social and political life in order to realize a condition of universal justice and peace. Against humans' propensity toward sensuality and self-interest, Kantian ethics proposes that individuals and states must act on principles that are true and acceptable for all human beings. By curbing self-regarding and parochial tendencies, people across the world will learn to act as cultural agents by exercising their autonomy and creativity from the prior conditions of the natural world. The cultural agents follow a path from the particular to the universal: they lighten the burdens of history and tradition and fulfill what is distinctively human and universally rational.[31] In Pheng Cheah's analysis, as a passage to cosmopolitanism, culture involves learning, enlightenment, and the growth of arts and science, akin to the German ideal of *Bildung.* The cosmopolitan ideal finds a proper medium in the vision of "society of culture" that aspires to the universal community and promotes cosmopolitan sociality. Moving across national and territorial barriers, culture becomes cross-cultural exchange and learning, where "universally communicable pleasure, elegance and refinement" could overcome human limits inherent in our nature, which includes the primordial identities of race, ethnicity, and nation. "The moral progress of humanity," writes Cheah, "can be guaranteed only through cultural products that preserve for posterity all the significant achievements of humanity as a moral species beyond the lives of the individual actors."[32] Cosmopolitanism articulates the intellectual and

ethical conditions for global politics, just as tianxia aspires to a regime of value and shared culture.

Both Kant and Kang Youwei, in Ban Wang's analysis in chapter 4, believe that moral and aesthetic experience could build bridges among peoples and nations. Kant's aesthetic notion of *sensus communis* resonates with Kang Youwei's vision of world community. While Kant focuses on cosmopolitan ethics, Kang Youwei explores how aesthetic experience promotes cross-cultural sympathy and communication. As an antidote to the warring states with their "unsocial sociability," Kant's theory of aesthetic humanity envisages a shared plane of sense and sensibility over and above self-interest and geopolitical conflict, proposing a cosmopolitan culture to heal the disjointed world. Aesthetic experience gestures toward a vision of rationally conceived society, enabling intersubjectivity and human sympathy. Similarly, Kang Youwei conceives of international relations in terms of morality and aesthetics. To him the aesthetic consists in learning from and immersing oneself in diverse cultures in a way that involves all the senses and the soul. Learning allows us to have intimate access to others and fosters sympathy and appreciation of pluralistic cultural forms, bridging the gaps among members of different nations.

Kang Youwei's worldview also contains a critical thrust embedded in the Confucian tradition. Vigilant about political corruption and cultural decay, the critique takes aim at the regime's immoral behavior as it falls short of the normative criteria embodied by the Kingly Way. The classic *Spring and Autumn Annals* stages a critique of the severance of politics from morality and of ritual from music (禮崩樂壞). This critique in the name of ethico-political integrity has encouraged generations of Confucians to remonstrate against moral decay and political atrophy in reforms. As the symbol of the sage-king, the Duke of Zhou occupied a position combining virtue with authority and was capable of implementing universal laws of the Kingly Way. This upholding of value against a fallen reality is well illustrated in the critique of the classic *Zuozhuan* (Zuo commentary). A narrative of the might-makes-right, winner-takes-all approach, the *Zuozhuan* implies a form of realpolitik rooted in political expediency and a concern with success and failure. In contrast, the *Spring and Autumn Annals* embodies ideas and beliefs that can be treated ahistorically by extracting moral precepts of perennial value. It treats historical events not as a gripping narrative of power and intrigue but as the transhistorical mirror of benevolence, righteousness, and justice.

The concern with universalism informs China's fascination with Greek antiquity in the early twentieth century. In chapter 5, Yiqun Zhou notes a blurred sense of differences between China and the West among Chinese admirers of

Greek civilization. Supported by the thinking of tianxia, they approached the civilization of the West as having universal significance for humanity's past, present, and future. The progressives embraced Greek antiquity and Western civilization as a beacon of enlightenment, modernity, and progress—a mirror that exposed the deficiencies and backwardness of the Chinese past. They believed China should strive to catch up and empower itself in order to survive and compete in the modern world. The conservatives, on the other hand, seemed more concerned about saving Chinese tradition in order to stand proudly on a par with the West. They combined the finest elements of tradition and modernity, East and West, in hopes that Chinese culture could contribute to a cosmopolitan world culture. To advance China in keeping with universal norms, they looked back and valorized the pre-Qin era as a civilizational embryo comparable to the most advanced of Western civilizations. Judicious borrowing from the West would also provide the new norms for world civilization. For all the varying mix of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, a persistent quest for cosmopolitan culture underscores the comparison of China and the West.

Riding on the wave of China's rise, however, contemporary writers, such as Gan Yang and Liu Xiaofeng, are pushing for Chinese leadership in propagating cosmopolitan culture—with a strong nationalist overtone. While their forebears looked to the West from the margin and appropriated foreign learning to strengthen China, Gan Yang has proclaimed that the age when the Chinese were pupils is over. With China's new power, Gan and Liu are more assertive and confident. Merging Greek antiquity with Chinese classics, they take a stance against modernity by advocating a meeting of classical minds with Western interlocutors. China has arrived and is poised to wield soft power to forge a new world order.

Could tianxia serve as a benign force in maintaining friendly and peaceful interstate relations? Daniel Bell in chapter 6 posits the idea of hierarchical foreign relations. Integral to tianxia, a hierarchy structured the tribute system for trade, peace, and prosperity in the precolonial era of East Asia. David Kang and Brantly Womack have studied the China-led hierarchy in regional networks in so-called Confucian Asia. Womack's *China among Unequals* accounts for asymmetrical foreign relations in Asia through a glimpse at its tributary system and foreign relations in East Asia.[33] Daniel Bell, in a more Confucian cast of mind, focuses on the complexity of a China-centered hierarchical Asian network, which flouts the sanctified principle of equality of states.

Questioning tianxia as a blueprint for world government, Bell argues that Confucian values limit our attachment and sociality to family, kin, and political community. This thick affective attachment becomes thin as we move beyond

the circle of intimates to others. However, the classic *Great Learning* teaches us to extend our ties beyond family and nation by extending our kindness to others. In this widening gyre, tianxia would entail a moral attitude that resembles global ethics: a concern with obligations we owe to people living outside the territorial boundaries of our own community. Drawing on contemporary Confucian thinkers, Bell makes a case for the hierarchical arrangement of international relations—a proposal that may raise some eyebrows. Instead of domination by a handful of powers, hierarchy entails extra global responsibilities of a strong state. As China engages in economic cooperation with adjacent regions, a benign hierarchy would assign varying degrees of responsibilities and roles to states. An echo of tianxia, this structure may be conducive to solving territorial disputes and maintaining world peace, depending on the lesser states' readiness to accept their places and duties. For all its theoretical soundness, Bell questions the feasibility of this hierarchy, given China's insistence on sovereignty and its neighbors' unwillingness to pledge fealty.

Crucial to workable hierarchy are two related Confucian doctrines: meritocracy and harmony. Meritocracy selects the best and brightest and places them in posts of prominence. Combining virtue, talent, and expertise, this elite manages public affairs and performs administrative duties. With the greater good in mind, the leaders promote the well-being of all under heaven. The administrative hierarchy may even open its doors to talent and experts from foreign lands, like the multiethnic Han Empire. Harmony, on the other hand, brings together diverse ethnic groups to partake of a common culture without shedding their own traditions. Given much historical evidence to the contrary, it seems easy to rebuke hierarchy as authoritarian, meritocracy as elitist, and harmony as Sinocentric. But the rebuke may miss the heuristic value of these ideas in distinguishing liberal democracy from the Asian mode of governance. We may also note that the controversy about hierarchy and equality continues the opposition between nation-state and tianxia.

Tianxia and Socialist Internationalism

With the focus on classical literature and the Qing Empire's encounter with the West, discussion of tianxia tends to gloss over the long twentieth century. Marked by colonialism, the Cold War, decolonization, and socialism, the twentieth century requires a political worldview. Socialism, in its vision of a world run by the sovereign people and free producers, is inherently internationalist. Socialism seeks to go beyond the nation-state by transcending the capitalist world system. How does socialist internationalism relate to tianxia

and by extension Confucian China? How does the Chinese Revolution break with the past while carrying on ancient aspirations? In 1938, Mao posited this link: "Contemporary China has grown out of the China of the past; we are Marxist in our historical approach and must not lop off our history. We should sum up our history from Confucius to Sun Yat-sen and take over this valuable legacy. . . . Communists are internationalists, but we can put Marxism into practice only when it is integrated with the specific characteristics of our country and acquires a definite national form."[34]

A continuous quest for tianxia has resurfaced over and over in new waves of Confucianism and, most notably, in recent accounts of the Chinese Revolution, Maoism, and socialism. Gan Yang's book, with its telling title, *Traversing the Three Grand Traditions* (*Tong santong*), sees a red line running from Confucianism through Mao's China to Deng Xiaoping's reforms.[35] Kun Qian's *Imperial-Time Order* brings to the fore a vision of imperial time in modern historical narratives, Chinese Marxism, nationalism, and socialist internationalism. As a response to historical contingencies, the vision "has always remained above and beyond" specific moments and places, haunting, as the "eternal return" of a persistent motif, intellectual discourses, cultural formations, aesthetic texts, and political practice.[36] This scholarship links the moral ideals of Chinese tradition to popular nationalism and socialist internationalism.

Joseph Levenson linked tianxia with what he called communist cosmopolitanism. But cosmopolitanism in the abstract must be distinguished from socialist internationalism. As a movement against the worldwide uneven and exploitive system, socialist internationalism entails a form of nationalism. As Pheng Cheah explains, Marx was unaware of the importance of the national question to internationalism in his presocialist thinking until he became interested in colonialism. The 1848 revolutions in Ireland and Poland against colonial rule provoked Marx to formulate a strand of socialist internationalism. Based on class analysis and emancipatory movements by the oppressed "class-nation" (a key term in chapter 8), socialist internationalism arose in a global condition of industry and trade that "created everywhere the same relations between the classes of society, and thus destroyed the particular individuality of the various nationalities."[37] Although the ruling bourgeois class adhered to national interests, "big industry created a class, which in all nations had the same interest and with which nationality is already dead: a class which is really rid of all the old world and at the same time stands pitted against it."[38] This worldwide class—the emergent proletariat—is stripped of national affiliations and identity, because it engages in economic activities and labor across national boundaries: workers have no country. But the nation becomes pertinent as the working class

seeks to organize as a self-conscious subject against the oppressor. As in Mao's above quote, the Chinese Marxists must mobilize the toiling masses in the national liberation movement to achieve socialism. It was the same principle of emancipation that prompted Marx to "distinguish between the nationalism of the developed bourgeois states and the nationalism of oppressed, colonized people."[39] Self-determination and emancipation by worldwide working-class nations and their solidarity laid the foundation for socialist internationalism. As Cheah puts it, "proletarian emancipation necessarily involves the emancipation of the oppressed peoples elsewhere because the exploitation of other peoples through colonization is intimately connected to the exploitation of workers within the 'domestic' space of a colonial power."[40]

That national liberation is a vehicle for achieving socialism informs early Chinese thinkers such as Sun Yat-sen and Li Dazhao, who saw China as an actor in unison with other nations in shaking up the colonial and imperialist world. In his early years, Mao Zedong, admirer of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, proposed the union of great multitudes. In the war against Japanese imperialism, Mao claimed that communists are not only nationalists committed to national defense but also internationalists. Patriotism is congenial to internationalism because oppressed nations and peoples share a common destiny and should work in concert to change the world order dominated by colonialist nations.[41] In an interview about communism, Mao cited Kang Youwei's word *datong* (great unity), referring to internationalism.[42]

Just as revolutionaries on the periphery critique colonialism and imperialism by revamping indigenous traditions, tianxia may be a hidden weapon in socialist internationalism. In Viren Murthy's analysis in chapter 7, the ancient source has become a research method and an epistemology under the aegis of Asia as method or China as method. By tracing a genealogy of inquiry by Japanese Sinologists, Murthy delineates an East Asian vision for understanding Chinese socialism as a counterpoint to the capitalist system. Delving into past stirrings for a different future, Nishi Junzō and Mizoguchi Yūzō discerned Confucian features in Maoism. From the 1950s through the 1960s, Nishi envisaged an alternative socialist future based on China's revolutionary experience. Writing in a period marked by neoliberal capitalism and the decline of socialism in the 1980s and 1990s, Mizoguchi viewed China's connection to its past as signs of identity politics.

Rather than a statist mechanism, Nishi sees tianxia as a cultural unity based on a moral worldview. Its scope transcends emperors, people, and things, and its political compass presides over fluid boundaries. Its hierarchy of family bonds sustains loyalty and lineage but still leaves room for public morality. The

public character hinges on tian, as noted above by Duara. Tian entails a relationship between the ruler and the ruled over and above the archaic relations—the "tyranny of cousins," a phrase that Francis Fukuyama borrows from Ernest Gellner to distinguish primordial ties from imperial administration.[43] Instead of small circles of loyalty and lineage, tian opens up a formal space for political intervention, in which the ruler relates to the ruled by virtue of broad moral principles, and political legitimacy derives not from the ruler's person, status, or power but from the Mandate of Heaven. Tianxia designates common property and culture, and has no use for private property. Instead of being governed by coercive power and rules, the individual lives in a society by obeying the norms common to all.

The public space inherent in tianxia provides an opening for participatory politics and popular initiatives. Nishi links this morality to the creative potential of a revolutionary people. In the encounter with the West, Asian regimes and foreign imperialism alienated people from their moral agency. The decline of imperial hierarchy unleashed popular potential and encouraged the people to rise up. And it is through this blank slate that the people are able to emancipate themselves from oppression.

By contrasting the state with tianxia, Mizoguchi locates legitimate power in the people. Drawing on Sun Yat-sen's writings, he distinguishes the people as a nation from the nation-state as a hegemon. The nation-state is legitimized by its benevolence in taking care of the people's needs, well-being, and prosperity. Loss of the people means loss of tianxia. On the other hand, when the state ignores and goes against popular interests, the people have the right to rebel as a revolutionary force. In linking tianxia to revolutionary China, Japanese Sinologists strive to find an alternative universal beyond the conventional narrative of capitalist modernity. China's ancient ideas and peripheral position in the world system offer possibilities for imagining a different modern path.

Although revolutionary discourse evinces traces of tianxia, it was Chinese socialism that actually brought some of its dreams to fruition. In the shift from empire to the modern world, socialist China became a sovereign nation-state. But does this shift retain traces of ancient thinking? Building a people's republic by appropriating the nation-state form, the Chinese Revolution is as much national as social, but did not, as Lin Chun notes in chapter 8, abandon the multicultural, multiethnic identity. Over millennia, intimate ties, interactions, and intermingling created overlapping and multiethnic horizons. This confirms Wang Hui's claims that socialist transformations "incorporate different ethnic groups, populations from different regions, and different religions into a flexible and pluralistic political structure."[44] The socialist state took over the

conditions of diversity and transethnicity, which are at odds with the conventional definition of nation-state.

China's socialist stance, however, rests on another register of the universal: the worldwide struggle by working peoples against capitalist accumulation and expansion. Global capitalism created a world of uneven development and a massive underclass of laborers. Nations and societies are polarized into the ruling class in the center and oppressed communities in the periphery. The Chinese Revolution awakened the Chinese people into the self-consciousness of "class nation," in Lin Chun's analysis. As the people became aware and resentful of oppression, they sought to overturn their subordination and to emancipate themselves by standing up as an independent nation-state. This class nation sees itself as a natural ally with other colonized regions and communities, and is the key to understanding socialist internationalism.

Rather than a description of the preexisting strata, class functions as a regulating concept deployed to raise consciousness, forge solidarity, and mobilize political subjects. In this light, class analysis is integral to the project of self-emancipation aimed at orienting collective action. In solidarity and working in concert, the world's working classes strive to achieve independence and move beyond the rigid categories of ethnicity, nation, and local culture.

For Lin Chun, class nation not only presupposes the solidarity of colonized nations but also informs socialist China's domestic policy toward ethnic minorities. The Chinese Revolution brought numerous ethnic minorities into the socialist fold, because these groups belonged to the same oppressed class under the yoke of the ancient regime, parochial rule, and foreign imperialist encroachments. Socialist internationalism therefore has two faces: ethnic equality in domestic society against majority chauvinism; national independence and peaceful coexistence in the international arena.

Despite her reservations, Lin's account of socialist internationalism as a united front implies a tianxia premise: unity in multicultural, multiethnic, and multinational diversity. In the era of decolonization, socialist internationalism was built on the united front of the newly independent peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America as well as progressive movements in the first world. With Bandung, the symbol of an alliance of newly independent Asian and African nations in the event of the Sino-Soviet split, socialist internationalism transitioned to the third world movement, which forged a network of interdependence, mutual assistance, and cultural exchange among decolonized nations. This proto–Global South alliance worked for about two decades as a world-historical force, with the goals of overturning unequal development and achieving an integrated path of development.

Lisa Rofel captures tianxia's cosmopolitanism by considering the term "worlding" in chapter 9. Worlding refers to the project to envision and articulate a unified world. To engage in worlding is to aspire to a world built on the commonality of humanity, one that respects differences but also embraces universal values. Socialist internationalism, practiced by the former Soviet Union and embodied by the Communist International, promoted socialist movements against capitalism, supported decolonization, and assisted new socialist countries. China benefited from Soviet-style internationalism by receiving aid, technology, and cultural exchange. With the Sino-Soviet split in 1959, Chinese leaders were critical of the Soviets' increasing bureaucracy and hegemony—a big brother ruling over the socialist juniors. Mao shifted the internationalist focus from the Soviets to alliances with developing nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. With China in the lead, the third world movement projected a far-reaching vision to cover the Global South. The third world was launched on the basis of a shared history of colonial oppression, antagonism toward Euro-American powers, uneven development, and the need for national development.

Motivated by altruism and solidarity rather than self-interest, China's support for the third world exhibited elements of tianxia. But the split with the Soviet Union and military assistance to guerrilla forces diverted the third world to nationalist politics, which was the culprit in the decline of internationalist spirit. National self-seeking deviated from internationalism and became mired in the old interstate cycle of domination and subordination.

Returning to contemporary China, Rofel distinguishes socialist internationalism from capitalist cosmopolitanism. The former promotes solidarity and common purposes among disadvantaged peoples in their struggle against hegemony; the latter is a veneer of the neoliberal economy driven by consumption, fashion, and cultural industries. Although it is the ideology of private corporations and the financial elites, this cosmopolitanism operates under the banner of universalism and is touted as the only future for humanity, with no alternative. By riding on its wave, China's glamorous image today obscures democratic and popular modes of internationalism in the socialist past.

Tianxia and Its Discontents

Both Lin and Rofel express reservations about the contemporary revival of tianxia and newfangled cosmopolitanism in postsocialist China. Indeed, talk of tianxia is increasingly perceived as an ideology behind China's soft power offensive on the global stage. As mentioned earlier, tianxia has wavered between

the quest for universal principles and ideological justification for domination. The political practice of tianxia evinces the entwined operation of consent and coercion. Instead of cosmopolitanism, critics see the rise of tianxia as the official ideology behind China's aggressive push into the murky waters of global competition and world politics. A looming Pax Sinica rivaling the Pax Americana, China is projecting its soft power and brandishing its culture around the world.

In Haiyan Lee's analysis in chapter 10, China's charm offensive for soft power—megamedia events and glamorous Orientalist shows—is falling far short of its economic power. Tianxia-related campaigns and discourse, redolent of authoritarianism, Sinocentrism, and imperial hubris, do not help. Lee suggests that we move from the spectacle to the authentic source of a society's universal attractions, which reside in everyday life, habits of the heart, and the moral qualities of integrity, constancy, and innocence. Steadfastly adhered to and practiced by individuals in a morally vacuous world, these virtues may be reenergized and become the real source of soft power that a national society may tap into.

By closely reading a wildly popular TV drama, *Soldiers Sortie*, Lee examines the domestic and international perceptions of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The international media tends to view the PLA in terms of security threats and expresses anxiety about China's peaceful rise. But *Soldiers Sortie* provides insights into the PLA's special place in the dialectics of hard and soft power. Xu Sanduo, the principal protagonist of the drama series, is shown to be a paragon of moral virtue, innocence, constancy, and loyalty, resonating with the humanist values in the Hollywood film *Forrest Gump*. Xu's hard-nosed and earthy virtue, akin to Forrest Gump's humanist ethics, may well be mobilized to appeal to global audiences and win the hearts and minds of all under heaven.

In chapter 11, Chishen Chang and Kuan-Hsing Chen critique Zhao Tingyang's tianxia metaphysics as being out of touch with historical reality. Looping back to chapter 1, Chang and Chen trace the historically varied meanings of tianxia from the Western Zhou to the Warring States period, tracking the concept's genealogical mutations and political implications. The concept came to the fore as a floating signifier as well as a flexible political strategy. Rather than the inclusive embrace of others, tianxia refers to the varying scopes of bounded political community and graded spheres of cultural commonality. Fraught with paradoxes, tianxia's readings mix inclusiveness with exclusive policy, rigid territories with messy boundaries, ethnic homogeneity with racial heterogeneity, civilization with barbarism, insides with outsides. For example, inclusion of adjacent groups in the common culture could mean their subordination to

a discriminatory hierarchy, and the apparent tolerance of cultural differences may mask a segregation of "us from them." A compelling analysis of the jagged lines of tianxia, this chapter questions Zhao Tingyang's critique of the Westphalian system by way of tianxia. Even more disturbing is the brandishing of tianxia for nationalist hubris and triumphalism. If tianxia means a Pax Sinica toppling the Pax Americana, people at the margins would have none of it.

For all their skepticism, Chen and Chang see in tianxia possibilities for a different world vision and a provocation for reflection in the periphery. Citing Japan's road to modernity, which was paved tragically with imperial hubris, colonial brutality, and militarism, Zhang Chengzhi, a paragon of self-reflection from the edge, sends a warning to tianxia ideologues. In his book *Respect and Farewell—to Japan*, Zhang lumps together Japanese expansionism, colonialism, and ancient Sinocentrism. Against these hegemonies, Zhang invokes socialist internationalism and the third world movement. The revolutionary response to Japan's catastrophic world making would be a renewed internationalist alliance among intellectuals of the south in support of victims of global capitalism. Antinuclear pacifism in Japan, support for Palestinian independence, Asian intellectuals against imperialism and chauvinism, and other grassroots activism—all these represent a groundswell of antihegemonic forces, reenergizing the forgotten sources of internationalism and third worldism. These intellectual legacies, suppressed and sidelined in capitalist globalization, need to be rearticulated against official ideology and imperial hubris.

Although the contributors disagree on some points, they share a discontent with the broken world system. Undergirded by nation-state doctrine, ethnicity, territory, colonialism, and interstate antagonism, the current system is plunging humanity into anarchy and chaos. A worldview like tianxia, looking to a world governed by moral norms and public principles rather than antagonism, may alert us to what is woefully missing in the status quo. Peace rather than war, unity rather than division, dialogue rather than conflict, morality rather than force, culture rather than domination, an embrace of differences with a sense of common purpose—all these are laid on the table as we envisage a better world.

NOTES

1. Fairbank, *The Chinese World Order*, 4–5.

2. Kang, *East Asia before the West*.

3. Recently, many works have considered China's links to its civilizational past. See, for example, Jacques, *When China Rules the World*; Hsiung, *China into Its Second Rise*.

4. Levenson, *Revolution and Cosmopolitanism*, 1.

5. Zhao Tingyang, "Cong shijie kaishi de *tianxia* zhengzhi," 44–84.

6. Wei Tsai-ying 魏綵瑩, "Liao Ping's View of China's Role," 54–119.

7. Zhao Tingyang, *Tianxia tixi*.

8. Yan Xuetong, *Ancient Chinese Thought*.

9. Callahan, "Chinese Visions of World Order," 753.

10. Schwartz, "The Chinese Perceptions of World Order," 277–278.

11. Pines, *Envisioning the Eternal Empire*, 2.

12. Pines, *Envisioning the Eternal Empire*, 2.

13. Levenson, "T'ien-hsia and Kuo," 447–451.

14. Levenson, *Revolution and Cosmopolitanism*, 24.

15. De Bary and Bloom, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 343.

16. Schwartz, "The Chinese Perceptions of World Order," 277.

17. See, for example, Billioud and Thoraval, *The Sage and the People*; Angel, *Contemporary Confucian Political Philosophy*; Bell, *China's New Confucianism*.

18. See Luo Zhitian, "Lixiang yu xianshi," 348.

19. Liang Qichao, *Liang Qichao quanji*, 2978.

20. Liang Qichao, *Liang Qichao quanji*, 2985–2986.

21. Liang Qichao, *Liang Qichao quanji*, 2986.

22. Wang Hui, *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi*.

23. New Text Confucianism refers to the study of the classical Confucian texts recovered after the Qin emperor's burning of the classics. The new text scholars defend the authenticity of Confucian doctrines in the new as opposed to the old texts. The themes relevant to Kang Youwei are the image of Confucius as a reformer, the valorization of the *Spring and Autumn Annals* over the *Zuo Commentary*, and transhistorical and normative principles over realpolitik. See Hsiao, *A Modern China and a New World*, 66–67.

24. Wang Hui, *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, 90.

25. Wang Hui, *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, 74–75.

26. Wang Hui, *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, 78.

27. Wang Hui, "Gongli, shishi yu yuejie de zhishi."

28. For a review of Wang Hui's book, see Ban Wang, "Discovering Enlightenment in Chinese History," 217–238.

29. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, vol. 1, xvi.

30. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*.

31. See Kant, "Idea for a Universal History," 41–53.

32. Cheah, *Inhuman Conditions*, 97.

33. Womack, *China among Unequals*.

34. Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, vol. 2, 209.

35. Gan Yang, *Tong santong*.

36. Qian Kun, *Imperial-Time Order*, 50.

37. Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 188–189; Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 78.

38. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 78.

39. Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 188.

40. Cheah, *Spectral Nationality*, 189.
41. Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, 196.
42. Schram, *Mao Tse-Tung*, 201.
43. Fukuyama, *The Origin of Political Order*, 54.
44. Wang Hui, *The Politics of Imagining Asia*, 86.