

Spring 2024

Ancient China's Political Legacies: How National Identity and Historical Narratives Construct Images of Global Power

Kelany Michel De La Cruz Reyes
Bard College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](#).

Recommended Citation

De La Cruz Reyes, Kelany Michel, "Ancient China's Political Legacies: How National Identity and Historical Narratives Construct Images of Global Power" (2024). *Senior Projects Spring 2024*. 65.

https://digitalcommons.bard.edu/senproj_s2024/65

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Bard Undergraduate Senior Projects at Bard Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Senior Projects Spring 2024 by an authorized administrator of Bard Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@bard.edu.

Ancient China's Political Legacies: How National Identity and Historical Narratives Construct

Images of Global Power

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by

Kelany M. De La Cruz Reyes

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2024

*To first-generation students:
You are a star.*

Acknowledgements

I praise God for all that he has taught me over the past year and the strength and intellectual capacity he has given me for this project, and a warm thank you to my family for giving me wings to fly.

Special thanks to Robert Culp for his support and beautiful guidance. I learned so much through this process and could not imagine having a better Senior Project advisor. I hope to become as intelligent as you. I knew that you would have a great influence on my intellectual life from the moment I entered your class.

Thank you also to all the professors that encouraged and nurtured my curiosity for Chinese culture and history, especially professor Li Huiwen, for believing in me.

Thank you to Michelle Murray, I was heartbroken after I took your *Global Citizenship* class. Yet, it helped me to become critically engaged and hungry for knowledge about the international system. Thank you also for your amazing comments on my Sproj. Thanks to Shuangting Xiong for her insightful mid-way board feedback, and to all the other professors and Bard intellectuals who offered guidance and support on my project and post-Bard plans.

I also owe this accomplishment to the nations that have shaped my worldview and character: the Dominican Republic, for making me a nationalist; the United States, for making me a dreamer; China, for helping me become a critical thinker; and Taiwan, thank you for helping me become a woman of action.

Thank you to everyone that made my time at Bard unforgettable: Trish Fleming, Denise Minin, Stephanie Kufner, Jovanny Suriel, Claudette Aldebot, Shakwat Chowdhury, Thomas Bartscherer, Melanie Nicholson, Father Jim Hess, and Michael Sadowski. Thanks also to my professors at National Taiwan University; three months and you had a great academic impact on me.

To all my Bard-met friends: my first friends, the not-Suspicious Book Club, the long-distance friends, the close acquaintances, and the ones that I tell nothing and everything to, Noa and Jenny—I will miss you terribly.

Finally, thank you Bard College for providing an unforgettable academic and life experience.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Shaping Power - The Influence of Modern Chinese Political Thought on China's International Self-positioning	5
Chapter 2: Rhetoric as Power Projection	26
Conclusion	69

Introduction

China's approach to development will never compare with the barbaric imperialistic approaches of Western states, implies Wen Wang as he states, "Indeed, over the course of the past 500 years of globalization, is there any country whose rise has been more civilized than China's daring ascent?" (Wen, 2022)¹. Other Chinese scholars agree with Wang's argument claiming that China's rise, if anything, is similar to that of other powerful nations (Hao and Hou 2009). This attitude towards China's role and behavior in international affairs is a result of China's historical consciousness. Indeed, throughout this paper you will see that Chinese international political discourse has an ideal of peace and, more precisely, harmony, as established by the Tianxia System's legacy. With this concept in mind, it is hard for many Chinese thinkers, or many who understand China's international history prior to Western intervention, to see China as a threatening rising power.

On the other hand, Western and American-centered studies on China's rise often see China's power development as a threat (Choi 2012; Wray 2020). Wray, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), for example, at an event hosted by the Hudson Institute, presented a series of issues indicating how threatening China's behavior is, not only to the international community but also to American individuals. This depiction of China as a fearsome and threatening international actor creates an unwelcoming atmosphere for China and can be detrimental to international trust. Yet, this rhetoric is not hard to find when analyzing China's rise from a Western perspective. Therefore, it is very important to also study China-centered studies on China's rise and its international position. Analyzing China from a Chinese perspective, based

¹ Wen Wang is a very important agent in China's politics, many of his "research reports have been affirmed with the instructions or comments by the CPC and state leaders of China. Besides, he is an advisory consultant for several important Chinese ministries and commissions and has won many honors" (Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China, n.d.).

on their past approaches to international leadership and engagement, results in less negative criticism and more sensitivity towards China. Which can result in a friendlier international community. More importantly, understanding how the legacy of the most successful political systems in Chinese history influence modern China gives significant insights to understand contemporary China's self-conception and desired position in the global community. For this reason, this paper examines the following question: how is China using its historical narrative and self-conception to present itself as a leader in the global community?

This paper concludes that China's most important past political systems, the Tianxia System (Zhou dynasty, c. 1046 BC until 256 BC)² and the late Imperial System (Ming and Qing dynasty, 1368 - 1911), have left a legacy of harmony, relationality, and mutual cooperation that have been incredibly influential in shaping how the People's Republic of China's government shapes the country's worldview and self-conception within the international system. China's Imperial System and especially the Tianxia System have left China with a historical narrative that creates the image of a peacefully-minded and world-oriented nation. Therefore, the People's Republic of China (PRC) presents itself as a model state for other nations by illustrating a world-centered approach to international affairs and providing a framework for peaceful coexistence in the increasingly-globalized system of international relations.

To evaluate the aforementioned claim, this paper is divided into two chapters. The first chapter assesses political theories written by leading Chinese scholars. The primary intellectual examined is Zhao Tingyang, whose personal reconstruction of the Tianxia System offers a provocative approach to international affairs based on world politics. Secondarily, I analyze

² Zhao does not specify the Zhou dynasty period he refers to but I am positioning it as the early Zhou dynasty (Western Zhou (ca. 1050–771 BCE) period when the Tianxia System and central government rule were most adhered to. During the latter Zhou dynasty, starting with the Spring and Autumn period (c. 771 – c. 481 BC), the power of the royal house began to decline, and slowly the Zhou Tianxia System began to collapse as individual states started to self-govern (Lewis, 1990).

Chih-Yu Shih's political theories about China's rise, where he evaluates how roles and positions within Tianxia affect how China's rise is perceived. Shih's theories are important because they help to further analyze Zhao's model of Tianxia and to better understand how China can use attributes from Tianxia to create its international self-image. By evaluating different rhetoric about the Tianxia System, I conclude that Chinese scholars have a high level of influence over how Chinese leaders are informed by China's political and international history.

The second chapter analyzes two PRC government documents: 1) "A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions" written by the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (September 2023); and 2) "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects: Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China October 16, 2022" written by Xi Jinping. The first source depicts the PRC's proposed actions for a better international community. In it, the rhetoric provides examples and ideas that show China's abilities, moral attitude, and sense of responsibility. The second government document details China's domestic affairs and international goals. It serves as a great source to test China's consistency in its international political discourse because we are able to observe how China thinks of itself in relation to the world and how its internal governance mirrors its external goals and positioning. By connecting these two documents to the characteristics of the Tianxia System, we can see how China has been shaped by Tianxia rhetoric and historical accomplishments. The Tianxia discourse projects an efficient Chinese government and international leadership as well as a desirable system of collaboration and mutual gain. Lastly, our evaluation of Chinese IR theorists' discourse, as well as the Chinese government's portrayals of China and its goals, reveals that on the basis of Tianxia characteristics China positions itself as a reliable and

world-oriented nation state with sustainable historical and cultural leadership experience oriented primarily toward harmony and cooperation.

Chapter 1

Shaping Power: The Influence of Modern Chinese Political Thought on China's International Self-positioning

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze research papers written by Chinese and other Asian Pacific scholars to examine how their thinking builds a script for China to follow and a stage for it to perform on. These scholars are identified by their academic and/or national association to Chinese or Asia Pacific academic and research institutions. Additionally, many of them are close enough to the Chinese state to make arguments the state can draw from. Consequently, they can influence leaders who are thinking about China's global role. This chapter assesses Chinese political thought on Tianxia, examining similarities and differences to analyze its influence on China's political thinking and international self-identification.

I primarily focus on the scholarly work of Zhao Tingyang's idea of a Global Tianxia System with comparative focus to Chih-Yu Shih's work. Zhao Tingyang is a political philosopher and researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). CASS is a Chinese state ministry-level institution and think tank under the State Council. Hao Yufan, another scholar I will discuss, is the presidential chair professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen and affiliates with many other universities. He currently holds honorary adjunct professorships at Fudan University, Shanghai University of International Studies, Sun Yat-sen University and Jinan University" ("HAO Yufan", n.d.).

The importance of these scholars lies in their power to make claims about China that defy traditional Western views of international relations and who China is and should be as a historical hegemon and current rising power. Their voices illustrate a new generation of scholars

that are building a new system of understanding in regards to contemporary international politics. Thus, they are not only updating and building a new line of international political thinking, they are also making a new stage for these concepts to be accepted and challenged. Fundamentally, at the core of their thinking is the Chinese State. They are putting China at the center of new international political thinking and thus making it a major player in how a new era of international relations is understood. Viewing China's role through their perspective shines light into the creation of China's international identity and global understanding because these scholars provide historical resources, such as discourse on the Tianxia System, that the PRC government can use to reshape their worldview and self-conception.

All-Under-Heaven in Modernity

Zhao Tingyang, is an advocate of world harmony and world politics through the all-under-heaven system of world governance. He argues that due to globalization, world politics is in need of a "new all-under-heaven to establish true perpetual peace" (Zhao, 2012) throughout the world. He is trying to figure out how to create a world of coexistence and mutual cooperation while also tackling the problem of world disorder/conflict. His answer to both is a political world system of all-under-heaven. He uses ideas such as world over state; familyship and relations rather than individuals; coexistence prior to existence; human obligations over human rights; compatible universalism; and total inclusivity.

These features fit together into the Tianxia system as follows. The implication of "world over state" describes a system where all units (states) in the system have a world inclusive mindset. This approach allows for countries to see themselves as part of a whole rather than individual "states" seeking the interest of their political/cultural communities. For instance, climate change is a world problem. Therefore, all countries must work together to find

sustainable solutions that can bring forth a better natural environment. Similarly, Zhao calls for countries in the Tianxia system to embody this type of worldly thinking where problems and opportunities are conceived and evaluated with a worldly mindset where the wellbeing of all countries is taken as a priority. This stands opposed to the state-centered approach of modern times where countries are led by their self-interest. Bilateral relations, for example, are determined by decision making that more or less benefits both states but they are less aware of the implicit effects their decisions have on other states.

Additionally, these ideas form a system of interiority where all countries are included and considered. The world-concept becoming politicized results in political compatibility and peace. This does not mean uniformity in countries' domestic governing systems, rather it means that their political goals are more world oriented. By the same token, familyship and relations are prioritized over individuals because the family, as a unit of the system, has a very important role in developing individuals. This way of thinking is clearly influenced by the Confucian idea that the family is a school for social action and this can be extended to the social world³ (Chan, 1969). Familiship proposes a basis for what relationality means because it is there that the most important relationships are nurtured. This idea is important for Zhao because in his examination of globalization he gives special attention to the multicultural society; he acknowledges the importance of including everyone, and the best way for everyone to be included is to think of the world as a family. By focusing on individuals, it is easy to lose the commonality between them. Meanwhile, focusing on relations and treating others like family facilitates mutual understanding. That is, if we treat everyone like family, peace becomes abundant. He also mentions that human obligations and human rights are mutually conditioned, however, if it comes to decision, human obligations are more important because they emphasize the idea of

³ *The Great Learning* by Confucius

communal living. For this reason coexistence comes prior to existence. This means that a person's freedom is limited by the freedom of others because their mutual relation and wellbeing is more important than self-interests.

Zhao's framework is inspired by the Zhou dynasty (over three millennia ago) design of Tianxia. In the Zhou dynasty, nations held some level of sovereignty and were regarded in equal terms while also being under leadership from a central state (Zhao, 2016). For the sake of harmony, people adjusted to one another's hierarchical position and the system continued to change based on these relational adjustments (Lewis, 1989). In understanding relations, family ethics (where the first relations are formed) are linked to state order. If there is peace within the family, which is based on filial piety, where the father behaves like father and son behaves like son, there is order in the state. Zhao's modern Tianxia framework does not hold such hierarchical attributes. He takes the meaning of relations to be mutual understanding and respect while getting rid of the social or relational order. This relationality facilitates compatible universalism, which allows for all groups and cultures to unite through their communality rather than particularities. This unity also cultivates the internalization of community and family-like relations that Zhao seeks to promote as a way to be universally inclusive.

Zhao Tingyang positions himself at the crossroads between Western and Chinese political thinking by calling for both systems of political thought to unite for the harmony of the world. Zhao's perspective, however, is special because he clearly shows his disapproval of Western political and international thinking and highlights the promising results of an innovative all-under-heaven system. One of Zhao's core concepts is the idea of worldness. This means that the world is one and no individual state should behave on its own; for the sake of order, cooperation, and harmony, the world should be seen as a whole, through relations, not from the

eyes of one nation-state, individual, or community. In opposition to traditional scripts guided by ideas of self-interest or war prevention, Tianxia's universal claim focuses on ideas of peace and unity.

The features of Zhao's framework for Tianxia fit into a global system that erases images of states and borders as well as individual interests. While he does not eliminate state individuality, he denounces the current Westphalian idea of state sovereignty that often divides states into zero sum games for the sake of national interest or traps states in a structure of particularity that isolates them from the rest of the world. The idea of internationalism is also weakened in order to introduce a world-centered approach to communications and genuine relationships.

Zhao's Universal Tianxia Script – Principles and Practices

Zhao has consistently stated that his modern Tianxia Global System is inspired by the Zhou Dynasty, as the Zhou Dynasty established the system, but Zhao is very clear on emphasizing that the Tianxia system needed for this time needs revision and has a lot of space for new ideas to be incorporated into it (Zhao 2012; 2016). Nevertheless, he proposes the following script for global governance⁴:

1. A World Constitution for a compatible inclusive system;
2. Compatible Universalism to create a system of respect for cultural “pluralism” with values that are determined in relations with others;
3. Relational Values as Universal Values.

The Tianxia System involves *Tiandao* (the heavenly way) as wholly connected to nature and heaven, which essentially means, the natural way of things. In ancient Chinese, *Tian* signaled

⁴ One of Zhao's main arguments lies in the idea that we should not see international affairs as international (state to state), rather, we should focus on the world, the global that affects all peoples.

both heaven and nature, where Tian encompasses everything in the world (Zhao, 2016). “The continuity and commonality among heaven–human–earth as a trinity is the ‘way’[...] Dao is ‘a way of being that archives optimization in any modality’” (Zhao, 2016). This definition of Dao denotes that there are common features between heaven, humans, and earth that upon being upheld and respected result in the best possible accomplishments. This way is seen in the natural change, transformation, and birth of things. Defying these commonalities and the continuity between them is standing against the heavenly way, *Tiandao*.

Within the *Tiandao* concept are three simultaneously important dimensions: 1) correlating with *tian*– humans must not act willfully and in self-interest to destroy or harm what nature has created; 2) procreative growth– “to let all life flourish and proliferate” with the goal of coexistence; and 3) non exteriority– no exclusive attitude or practices (Zhao, 2016). The idea of *Tiandao* is at the core of the universality of *Tianxia* because it emphasizes the root of “security and shared well-being”, which is what *Tianxia* as a global system seeks to achieve. The idea of correlating with nature means that people do not act freely on the basis of self-interest. It also means that people’s freedom is limited by the rights of others. For example, nuclear weapons in all its glory defies and offends every part of nature because in essence it is a weapon of destruction designed for the fulfillment of imperialistic fantasies. Respecting nature also defies the idea of borders and rights, where leaders see nature and territory as things to be conquered and manipulated rather than nourished and encouraged to grow and multiply.

At the nucleus of *Tianxia* is also coexistence. *Tianxia* itself illustrates and embodies coexistence because it means all under heaven, meaning nothing and no one is excluded. To approve and protect this cohabitation means to prioritize mutual well being and to promote a family-like approach to cooperation. The aforementioned ideas lead all others.

Tianxia - Opportunity or Threat?

Chih-Yu Shih, a chair professor at National Taiwan University, in evaluating China's role, analyzes characteristics that would make China's role in international relations one of opportunities or threats. He bases his conclusions on two stances that a state could take: 1) the role state—concerned with its image and “conforms to existing international norms,” and 2) the ego state—one who “enacts a role reflecting the internal identity to the effect of reforming or even defying existing international norms” (Shih, 2012). The former offers “security and opportunity for his or her social other” while the latter causes anxiety (Shih, 2012). China's relations with other states is dictated by the lens through which it is perceived, this in turn informs how China's rise in modernization should be evaluated. Shih explains the following: If China is perceived to be both a role maker (ego state) and a role taker it brings both threat and opportunity. This idea can be summarized as Asianism, where Asia as a region takes a standing role against the traditionally leading West. If China is a role maker but not a role taker, it is evaluated through the lens of a nation-state. This would pose a threat because China would be energetically self-centered, disregarding the need for community.

In the case of China as a role taker but not a role maker, Shih introduces the Tianxia discourse, which Shih initially describes as only resulting in opportunities. But Shih is highly critical of the Tianxia System, he also claims that Tianxia encompasses both the ego state and the role taker state as will be discussed later. Overall, his arguments take on the traditional route of describing Tianxia as a harmony-oriented international system. The last evaluation would be China as neither a role maker nor role taker which would not result in either threat or opportunity—civilization (sinicization): “China as a continent or commonwealth” that works in terms of its own internal system. For the sake of this paper, it is only important to focus on China

as a role maker (nation-state) and role taker (Tianxia). However, it is important to mention that Shih believes that these two foci are limited because one disregards the need for belonging and the other ignores the ideas of ranking and social order that could be enforced.

Shih's description of the nation-state as a threat is primarily set by the fact that the traditional international system is based on the necessities of nation-states individually, which means their needs and interests take precedence over relations (Shih, 2012). Consequently, intellectuals who analyze China's rise through a nation-state lens will highlight that China does not care about its self-image enough to renounce its self-interests for the sake of social conformity. However, Shih complicates matters by adding how different Chinese discourses dictate China's role. He does so to include the importance of both group belonging and self-centrism to nation states. For the nation-state discourse, role making involves "national interest passion" which brings excitement to the state but anxiety to the social group it is making its role in (Shih, 2012). On the other hand, role making could also mean "Equal sovereignty Neither passion nor anxiety"(Shih, 2012). Moved by national interest, China's pursuit of international recognition becomes a threat as it takes the role of defiance against the traditional international social order. However, seeing China's rise holistically also requires us to see its need for acceptance. Shih states that "the pursuit of national interest could be a disguise for the quest for acceptance in terms of attaining an equal sovereignty." Considering China's long fight against foreign invasion and political assault—pointing to how the West looks down on China's political system—, I agree with Shih's comparative understanding of this discourse because the PRC's approach to maximize power can be justified by how power situates China on the global stage as a compatible candidate for relations. In other words, China's pursuit of national interest is not strong enough evidence to portray it as a role maker state that will pose a threat to the

international community. China's pursuit of personal interests can be a way to strengthen its sovereignty and status in the international system, therefore this quest for power is the key for China to be accepted in the system. In this sense, China must be a powerful country able to present and protect its sovereign rights in territory, international equality, and the right to represent itself. As a result, looking at China's rise more holistically means balancing how we see its dedication to attaining power and its desire for global acceptance.

Shih argues that China, in a way, has never been a nation state; in reality China's idea of what a "nation state" looks like is inherently European, so the "image of being a nation-state is more important than the identity of being a nation-state" (Shih, 2012). Based on Shih's idea of image versus identity, China's self-creation as a nation state is a reflection of Western ideals. Based on the nation's new political branding, often described as leading with "Chinese Characteristics," we can see that identity is just as important. In fact, the PRC's attempts to define certain China-led ideas as *Chinese* reiterates the PRC's desire to be seen as a nation state. Consequently, it is important to highlight Shih's argument denoting that evaluating China as a threat for simply acting as a nation state (based on identity) is a narrow course of analysis because it does not take into account essential parts of social interaction (concerning image).

Identifying as a self-centered state takes as much role playing as it takes to be an image-concerned state (Shih, 2012). Essentially, we can go so far as to argue that role taking and role making are inherently inseparable because one can not seek to be seen and accepted without first believing that one is worthy of acceptance. For instance, being concerned about one's international status and image in relation to the already established social circle presupposes a self-centrism that you are aware of who you are. A state identity is very important to its determination to be included in international arenas. Therefore, a nation state has to have enough

self-determination to desire to be included in a social dynamic. This identity and desire for belonging illustrates the state's assumption about what it deserves. While this approach is less anxiety-producing than forcefully creating a new role and forcefully asserting that role regardless of the established social norms and relations, it is still a type of self-centrism that requires self-identification and self-worth. Similarly, belonging and conforming to norms can serve as a way to strengthen the state's believed identity within its social role as well as self-identity. In being accepted, the country receives a status symbol of being part of a group that manages the way nation states interact as well as strength to confidently stand for its interests among states that are all seeking international validation and national power. Put simply, it is true that nation states are naturally interest-driven, however, their need for international membership balances, or at least weakens, the risks that come with national interests.

The Tianxia discourse also provides different analytical perspectives. Shih characterizes this as follows: Tianxia as role making results in “hegemonic expansion (passion and anxiety)” and as role taking “center or periphery anxiety” (Shih, 2012). This implies that Tianxia can not be simply evaluated as a case of opportunities on the basis of belonging and selflessness, as Zhao Tingyang does. The scholar elaborates on his argument by illustrating the following:

Once the need for self-centrism sneaks into the enforcement of the Tianxia system, contenders for moral leadership will not restrain themselves only to self-rectification but will instead physically prevent others from joining the bid for higher status [...] The result of such a transition means that the highest moral leadership will then become sensitive to signs of disrespect. These signs inform them of whom to punish or quell, hence initiating role making rather than role taking. (Shih, 2012).

With this statement Shih problematizes his earlier point regarding Tianxia as an opportunity. In his earlier argumentation of Tianxia, Shih illustrates the oversimplified approach to understanding Tianxia as a system of community based assessment where states that form part

of the system do not have to see China as a threat because as a central nation China would be open to criticism for the well-being of all. This is the responsibility that the leader of Tianxia takes on as a selfless and globally centered leader. Shih complicates this by introducing the idea that this selflessness is not perpetual. The scholar mentions that within Tianxia, states belong to a harmonious world order and are ranked not in accordance with prestige and power, but rather selflessness (Shih, 2012). Selflessness is a moral ground. As a result, upon further establishment of roles within Tianxia this moral ground can become an issue of debate. A system that is based on hierarchical order, whether in terms of material power or morality, will always have states that are in constant combat for dominance unless there is consensus of a sole and omnipotent leader. While this worked during the Zhou times, it is not likely to work in modernization because of the identity of states. What Shih is trying to say is that upon choosing a central leader, states will fight to show their moral superiority. This will inevitably result in a power struggle between the most powerful nations. This is an issue that Zhao does not address in his reproduction of the Tianxia System, which is important because with or without a central leadership, on the basis of moral superiority, nation states can seek to self-declare their position as the leader of the system with a hegemonic approach that excludes people rather than include them in a collaborative space of interaction. Additionally, the desire to be accepted in the hierarchical system can also cause anxiety to China or the state seeking to occupy central leadership because its role playing as a leader can be rejected. In this way, either state, at the periphery or center of Tianxia, will become anxious for either acceptance or leadership.

Unexpectedly, Chih-Yu Shih mentions, even if critically, how China's role in Tianxia could be firmly established by simply looking at how seriously China takes its international responsibilities. For example, all the monetary support it gives to underdeveloped countries in

Africa and the global south as well as its multilateral approach to regional collaboration through international institutions like ASEAN. Taking this behavior into consideration as an example of selflessness and well-being for all, all-under-heaven is indeed bound to benefit all. This indeed is how many scholars see China when conceptualizing China's dedication to its history with a harmonious world order. This approach clearly declares China as a role taking state—often regarding moral leadership. Many Chinese politicians strongly believe this idea because their historical consciousness draws on the qualities of a relational way of living that perpetuates peace and mutual collaboration.

Outsiders, such as Western scholars and politicians, on the other hand, consider this a role making strategy because much of the world does not understand the idea of relational and selfless engagement outside of what they narrowly understand to be a system of hierarchy centered around China. Not to mention that for many Western states the fundamental aim of being a responsible leader in or outside Tianxia is ultimately to protect the rights of its citizens, whereas for China the nation comes before individual interests. For the Chinese state, national interest leads to individual rights. Whereas, for Western states, individual rights lead national interests. With these characteristics in mind, China and the West lack shared communality. As such, even if they unite under Tianxia with the notion of respected nation-states, their interests would lead to moral discrepancies because they have different understandings and goals for their citizens and nation.

China at the Center or Periphery of Tianxia

Tianxia's influence over how China's role can be determined can be understood with more detail by positioning China at the center and at the periphery of the system from the perspective of a role maker as well as a role taker (Shih, 2012). This implies that there are

different possibilities for China's role within Tianxia depending on its role (maker or taker) and its position (center or periphery). Through the role maker's perspective, when China is at the Center of Tianxia, a "soft power" approach is adopted. This means that Chinese leaders that see China as a role maker will lead China to seek to expand its soft-power influence. China will seek to expand its soft power and thereof its role-making abilities will expand. This soft power, however, does not expand outwards in an effortless manner. Shih argues that in order to do so China must charm the foreigners, and in doing so it can happen that in opening up to the world by sharing its culture, China is in effect being affected by other countries instead, especially when sugar coating its beliefs and ideas for the sake of acceptance from others. This could cause anxiety in Chinese leaders. Moreover, from the role maker's perspective, when China is at the periphery, a "social capital" approach is reflected; Chinese leaders see this as an opportunity to better its international relations. Through this approach, however, foreign analysts see China as trying to make and "exploit" relationships for its own benefit. At the same time, Chinese leaders could be anxious due to cultural differences in how each state deals with relationships.

Analysts who see China as a role taker perceive that a "harmony" approach is reflected when China is at the center of Tianxia, but a "reformist" approach when it is at the periphery. When China is at the center as a role taker Chinese leaders will focus on building relationships that are based on mutual concerns and mutual benefits. Shih relates this example of Tianxia to the Zhao Tingyang Tianxia System. While Zhao does not set a central leader, Shih recalls Zhao's illustration of Tianxia because of its idea about a kind of democracy where all parties involved would compromise in order to solve mutual problems (Shih, 2012). However, China at the periphery would cause anxiety to China and other international players because, as Shih states, "If Chinese leaders perceive that China remains in the periphery relative to the United States, the

United States is expected to compromise. It is unlikely that the United States will practically compromise its interest for the sake of harmony. China should work hard to overtake the United States in strength, so that China could eventually demonstrate how Tianxia should operate” (Shih, 2012). In other words, China’s lack of agency as a periphery state and the United States unwillingness to compromise would inevitably bring a clash of power and enforce power politics that would result in anxiety for both parties. Yet, the reformist approach has another side that prioritizes good image and self-rectification. This approach shows China’s dedication to belonging and its role as a selfless state that ignores self-interest for relationships. As visible, Shih sees different possibilities for China’s behavior within a globalized Tianxia order depending on its role (maker or taker) or/and its position (center or periphery).

The Rhetoric of Tianxia

Most of the scholarly work analyzed in this chapter argue that traditional Chinese political thinking is based on peace and relations. The narrative they focused on is Tianxia, which, as shown through Zhao’s and Shih’s interpretations, is regularly described as inherently harmonious, selfless, and relation-driven. In each scholarly work the authors argue that the model of Tianxia can be used in a way that is productive for the global community. For example, both Zhao and Shih illustrate that the system is based on trustful relations that put global needs and opportunities at the center while collectively assessing and tackling global issues and risks. While each article is defending and or criticizing different framings for the Tianxia system, they do not fail to stress that Tianxia is based on community and trust and that its inherent goal is to provide security and mutual opportunities without making others feel belittled or alienated. In fact, all the virtue coming from Tianxia is a result of community responsibility and trust. The following excerpts can further illustrate this point:

Confucius was not an idealist, he was a realist. His envisioned best possible world was a world of *datong* 大同 or “Expansive Harmony” –a world with the highest level of well-being, in which everyone shares in mutual appreciation, mutual trust, and mutual assistance. This would be a harmonious and peaceful world in which strategies for competitive conflict have been invalidated [...] The world of Expansive Harmony concerns itself with the criteria of security, harmony and peace, mutual trust, mutual assistance, and the material conditions for a surviving and thriving life. But it doesn’t require uniformity. This means that the world that Confucius envisioned recognized a plurality of different ways of life, seeking diversity and pluralism as ideals without requiring uniformity. (Zhao, 2016).

Basically, Tianxia is a philosophy at the abstract level and a life attitude at the practical level. The country at the center, whether it be the United States or China, should care about others. No one is outside by definition. By considering that everyone in the world belongs to a harmonious world order, they are then hierarchically ranked in accordance with how well one is in compliance with the cultural idea of selflessness. Accordingly, all are expected to learn their due roles by emulating the selfless state at the center. In this system, there exists the opportunity to enhance one’s status if one is devoted to self-rectification. While the roles each plays may differ, no one should be fixed upon any specific roles because they are not an essential character of one’s identity. Tianxia thus provides the same identity to all under heaven on the one hand and connects everyone together through differentiated roles played by them, on the other. Ideally, no single player is left alone without being cared for by others (Shih, 2012).

As you can see, both excerpts highlight the communal approach of the Tianxia system.

They both reflect visions of enhanced trust, mutual opportunities, and devotion to obligations for the sake of the whole, not the individual. Additionally, both emphasize that this system is based on interdependence and inclusivity, no state is intentionally left behind and everyone behaves with the interest of others in mind. These Tianxia attributes are thus proven to be consistent.

Nevertheless, the approaches to understanding Tianxia, as shown by these two intellectuals, also provide insight into what scholars miss or over-emphasize in characterizing Tianxia. For example, in drawing a picture for Zhao’s Tianxia, Zhao refuses to share how he sees Tianxia leadership being exercised. As we know, during the Zhou period Tianxia was a system with a central leadership and was highly based on ranking/hierarchy. Zhao does not fail to vividly explain how the Zhou dynasty’s Tianxia worked, and he uses Confucian literature and

values to support his arguments. But he purposely leaves out ideas that were fundamental to the original Tianxia system. This is understandable because he is reframing the Tianxia concept and creating a new model. Yet, his decision to choose and pick what aspects of Tianxia to include in his model leave room for questions and criticism. The concern is not in his creative decisions but rather that he does not fully explain why he leaves certain attributes of the original system out. For instance, because some critics criticize Tianxia as an approach to build a political narrative for the benefit of the Chinese state, Zhao declares that, “even if the concept of Tianxia comes from China, its relevance belongs to the world”. In response to questions about social order we can look at the following statement: “A *tianxia* system belongs to the world, and not any particular nation-state” (Zhao, 2016). In this way, Zhao fails to theorize what a Tianxia system would look like with a central state. While his responses leave readers wondering about how the system rejects ideas of hierarchy, not clearly explaining how leadership within Tianxia would work nevertheless serves his statement very well because he focuses on the universality of the concept and theorizes how all states, in their differences and commonalities can work together for the “best possible world”. Part of the centrality of Zhao’s argument is the universal heart of the Tianxia model regardless of the difference, and as the statement above shows, with respect to differences.

On the other hand, Chih-Yu Shih’s approach to analyzing Tianxia is precisely to identify how China’s role can be conceptualized within that system. In it, Shih holds a more objective view of Tianxia as well as China. Thus, he only describes each object for the sake of his argument. Neither of his arguments regarding role and position seem to be particularly true or false in his personal view, rather it is a strategic approach to lead readers to understand his argument. I say it is not personally true or false because Shih is very critical of Tianxia. For

example, he argues that Tianxia can be both a threat or an opportunity depending on which perspective you use to analyze the concept and who is at the center or periphery of the system. This approach makes it so that either argument for Tianxia becomes justified or supported based on evidence used for each perspective even if the arguments are contrary to each other. This is because each perspective leads to China being seen differently. Regardless of his objective point of view, his argument about the peaceful and inclusive nature of Tianxia is consistent with the general understanding of the Tianxia System. However, he differs from Zhao in that he does make hypothetical claims to understand Tianxia as a global system with a central power, as well as China as a leader of Tianxia.

In the passage above you can clearly see that Shih identifies a hierarchical ranking system based on the level of selflessness of each state. While these roles and rankings do not have social or power-based value, they exist to inform the state on how well they are reciprocating the care and selflessness of the leading state at the center of Tianxia (Shih, 2012). Not to mention that Shih clearly explores the system as a hierarchy-based structure by placing a state at the center, unlike Zhao. This state symbolizes the higher level of selflessness and moral superiority.

The idea of leadership based on moral superiority has already surfaced in Chinese-articulated literature. More often than not, Chinese scholars and politicians place China, not at the center or with more alleged moral power; rather in comparison to countries like the United States, these scholars illustrate a picture of how Chinese leadership is more peacefully inclined. This attitude implicitly creates an atmosphere of competitiveness regarding who is more morally superior. But some scholars are actually very open about their views on moral superiority. This is obvious through their discursive tone. For example, Yufan Hao and Ying Hou, in their comparative analysis of Chinese foreign policy-making, demonstrate biases in how

they approach comparing the US and China. The scholars choose specific domestic and international behavior or attitudes that often target the United States. Ironically, they argue that “significant changes in Chinese foreign policy in recent years are remarkably similar to those of other major powers” (Yufan and Hou, 2009). They are making the argument that the rise of Chinese power should not be as gravely feared as it is because China’s approach to gaining international power is in sync with the approaches of growing powers of the past. Yet, they make this case by showcasing the virtue of the Chinese state in comparison to what they characterize as the faults of (in this case) the United States. They do so by highlighting how China’s united front in decision making often proves more effective than the decision making made by different branches of the American government or by establishing that the “paramount leader in China does not need to worry about electoral politics when making foreign policy” (Hao and Hou 2009). This implies that the pressure of pleasing the public leads American leaders to behave in ways they otherwise would not for the sake of their personal interests (to be reelected). On the other hand, Chinese leaders worry more about the well-being of the state rather than a certain partisan group of people or their own personal interest. Through this comparative explanation you can see how, within the Chinese nation, China has the upper hand because they are evaluated as leaning towards wellbeing for the whole rather than particular groups.

Other statements further show how Hao and Hou, in trying to show a detailed comparative analysis, implicitly or explicitly, bring up Chinese moral superiority. This is illustrated in the following remark, “different historical experiences and cultural backgrounds determine the different political cultures in China and the United States. In China, the traditional wisdom of harmonious philosophy enables Chinese leaders to respect the political systems and ways of life of other countries and nations instead of seeking to ‘liberate’ them by spreading their

own patterns of development” (Hao and Hou 2009). This description is clearly more favorable than the following, “the theory of American exceptionalism holds that the American people are God’s chosen people living in the ‘promised land,’ which tends to make American leaders idealists, liberalists, and even adventurers with a sense of mission to expand American values and democracy to other parts of the world” (Hao and Hou 2009). Both statements hold some truth, however, it is evident that the United States is at loss. They signal that a conceited and selfish nation that thinks its values go above the sovereign rights of other nations lacks the humbleness and compassion of a morally guided leader. Meanwhile, a nation that prioritizes international peace and respects diverse political systems is likely to gain wider acceptance and emerge as an effective leader. These comparisons put China at a very high position but they are not the highlight of my argument.

My main point is to show how Tianxia characteristics are involved when illustrating who China is and the attributes that position it as a rightful superpower. I do not think Hao and Hou are arguing that China is rising (when talking about foreign policy) in a traditional manner. Rather, the scholars highlight that China’s historical and cultural superiority places it at a higher moral standard. Therefore, they suggest that the allegations made to criticize and fear China’s development are unnecessary and ultimately flawed. The final remark in their article provides substantial support for my argument, “Just as the neoclassical realist analytical framework shows, China’s internal factors—its peculiar culture, historical experience, and national characteristics—will make Chinese development as well as foreign policy making unique with ‘Chinese characteristics’” (Hao and Hou, 2009). This description of China’s background is not a simple account for why China’s development can not be so easily compared even if its foreign

policy approach is similar to that of the US, it is primarily highlighting what favorably distinguishes China from global powers like the United States.

Conclusion

“A few American scholars have blindly forecast recently, ‘China is a Declining Power.’ When Chinese scholars hear this, many smile wide, suppressing chuckles. To them, these erroneous end-of-China slogans only reveal knee-jerk jealousy, and nothing more” (Wang, 2022). My first impression of this statement was amazement at how bold Wang is. In addition to rebuking Americans for their erroneous academic and political understanding of China, he also labels them as “jealous”. Additionally, he emphasizes how confident Chinese scholars are about their country as a world actor and its growth. In this statement, the reference to Chinese scholars is worth exploring because it shows the importance of the thoughts and voices of Chinese scholars when it comes to Chinese international matters. For Wang, the fact that Chinese scholars are not worried about what Americans think about China reveal that China is in good standing. Most importantly, it shows the power that Chinese scholars have for defining the global position of the Chinese state. This remark highlights how international thought about China is shifting gears as to whose voice matters. By identifying that Chinese scholars are in a position of power, the discourse around who China is and who it is meant to be internationally begins to shift towards a more Asian-inclusive and less Western-focused zone.

The theories discussed above are extremely supportive of a system of international relations that is heavily informed by Chinese historical background. The analysis provided by these scholars is undoubtedly promising to illustrate an international structure that puts China at the forefront of global interaction. Within the People’s Republic of China’s political thinking, leading with “Chinese Characteristics” has become a valuable and revealing slogan. This phrase

dictates that China will not pursue a Western approach to collaboration or international engagement. The Tianxia concept along with its ideas of harmony provide a perfect Chinese-centered approach to internal and external affairs. As shown through Hao and Hou's comparative analysis, many Chinese scholars are already influenced by China's historical consciousness. Their perspective is colored by their understanding of Tianxia history. Similarly, Chinese leaders can be informed by history-consistent assessments of their role in the international system and borrow from the ideas and rhetoric provided by intellectuals like these to enforce China's international position and contemporary engagement. Indeed, the PRC government already backs their international positioning and goals by using rhetoric based on models of Tianxia and other culturally relevant Chinese history; this is visible in chapter two of this paper.

Chapter 2

Rhetoric as Power Projection

Introduction

In this chapter I analyze two primary documents from the People's Republic of China (PRC) to explore how the Chinese government's perception of China narrates its place in the international community. This chapter also examines how popular academic political theories such as the ones highlighted in Chapter One influence the way China presents itself to the international community. First, I examine the extent to which the shadows of Confucian and tributary perspectives influence China as a nation and as an international actor today. Simultaneously, I survey how rhetoric from Chinese scholars have been integrated into the PRC's international political discourse. To do so, I review some scholarly work that focuses on the time when China was a dominant power and analyze that system—the Tribute System of the Qing and Ming Dynasty. This sets the tone to understand the history of power and influence that China has held as a regional power and how that historic consciousness can present itself in contemporary PRC rhetoric. Following, I analyze the narratives and threads of argument found in PRC government documents to understand the PRC's aspirations and historical consciousness. Through this analysis I explore the tensions and contradictions, as well as the consistency of their thinking to identify how the Chinese state places itself in the global community. Finally, this chapter concludes that the rhetoric deployed by the PRC government, as illustrated by talks and writings by Xi Jinping, establish China as an exemplar developing state that holds power by modeling normative geo-political behavior while rejecting both hegemonic and egalitarian ideas of international structures. Secondarily, the analysis makes clear that the PRC has been greatly influenced by Chinese scholars and their understanding of Chinese political history.

The first source, “A Global Community of Shared Future: China’s Proposals and Actions,” details China’s proposals for the future by sharing its international ideals, criticizing hegemonies, calling for unity and equality in the international community, and emphasizing why China is a model country. Within this article, the PRC government presents a script for a global harmonious community, just like it did during its imperial time. The document presents China’s hopes and aspirations and paints a clear picture of Chinese leadership in the twenty-first century. I look at this document because it exhibits a structure for global governance that neither opposes nor accepts the norms of the international community, but rather adds to the conversation of international engagement and places China at a place of leadership. This document is distinctive because it places China’s views at the forefront of the conversation. Additionally, the perspectives are genuinely China-centered. This allows for us to see how China goes back to a method of leadership that allows them to design how the world of international affairs and collaboration should work, which provides access for us to deepen our understanding of the history and legacy of China’s leadership experience.

“Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects: *Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China October 16, 2022*” reflects on everything China has accomplished under the Communist party. It also details what the party needs to improve on and what they hope to accomplish for the nation. This document shows how the Chinese Communist Party leads its country and internal affairs. As a result, readers can get an idea of how this attitude can be transferred to the international system as China takes on more international responsibilities.

Together, these two documents indicate that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sees China as a leading nation state with historic and modern knowledge and influence for the cooperative development of family-like international interchange in the world. They suggest that China's role in the global arena, its successful development, and its international actions can lead to better and necessary improvements for the world and especially developing countries. Thus, its role is not only one of influence through modeling but also one of facilitating reform in international affairs.

The Sino-centric World Order

China's Superiority

In contemporary times, China identifies as a developing country and is seen as such by the global community. At the same time, its economic and military power concern powerful nation states who think China will negatively impact the global order. From a contemporary point of view, China's rise is puzzling and menacing. However, upon analyzing China's history and cultural tradition, the idea of China's rising power in the global community and regionally as new is nothing but laughable. In the scholarly study of China's cultural and historical tradition, China's empire and regional role has been described in glorious detail. Research work by distinguished scholars like John K. Fairbank, Hamashita Takeshi, and Yuan-kang Wang always emphasize China's hegemonic power even when intensely criticizing the flaws of China's sino-centric regional international system. China's hegemonic power was mostly based on the tribute system—a system of global interdependence with China at the center focused on Chinese cultural and ritualistic exchange, trade, and security. The Tribute System has been described many times but the main idea is centered on China's superiority and the hierarchical relationships that this superiority established.

For instance, Yuan-kang Wang, in his criticism of the *Tribute System and Chinese World Order* goes against the popular idea that the Chinese world order was based on harmony, and instead connects the system to structural realism. Nevertheless, he does not fail to go along with the common description of the Tribute System as follows:

Under this hierarchical system, foreign states were attracted by the superior Chinese culture and civilization and voluntarily became vassals. At home, they adopted the Chinese calendar, and their rulers had to be enfeoffed by the Chinese emperor. (...) Vassal states periodically sent embassies to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor with goods produced in their own countries. In court meetings, tributary envoys performed certain rituals, including kowtow, to symbolize their submission to the Chinese emperor and to accept their inferior status as a vassal state. In return, the Chinese emperor, to demonstrate the benevolence of his throne, lavished these envoys with a much higher value of Chinese goods and luxuries such as silk, tea, treasures, and agricultural products. In accordance with Confucianism, the influx of foreign envoys to pay tribute to the Chinese emperor strengthened the legitimacy of his throne, because the tribute symbolized his status as the accepted ruler of the universe. (Wang, 2011).

In scholar Hamashita's attempt to understand "modernization" in Asia—in relation to the arrival of Western powers—he emphasizes that to understand modernization in Asia, it is necessary to understand "how each country and area within Asia attempted to cope with the transformation of the tribute system." Thus he emphasizes the essential role of the Tribute System. He describes the Tribute System as follows:

The fundamental procedures required to maintain tributary relations were the investiture of local rulers and visits to the Chinese capital, when imperial recognition of the tribute mission confirmed recognition of the rulers. The relationship was characterized as one of superior and subordinate. "Loyal" states, areas and tribes were expected to pay tribute to China regularly as a token of submission. In exchange, not only were their rulers given recognition, but tributary missions provided opportunities to receive gifts and engage in lucrative trade (Hamashita, 2008).

In addition, it is helpful to look at Hamashita's description of the protocol followed by vassal states:

Tributary protocol involved the following: presentation of gifts from the tributary state to the Chinese Emperor, return of presents from the latter to the King and consort of the tributary state, presentation of personal gifts from tributary envoys and “rewards” to them from the Chinese, and official and private trade in goods brought aboard the tributary ship (Hamashita, 2008).

It is also important to keep in mind that Western powers arriving in Asia and desiring to engage in trade had to adapt to the sino-centric world order and respect the Tribute System even if they did not see China as superior (Hamashita, 2008). Similarly, the Tribute system was expanded outside of China; states, seeking validity and power, required tribute from “weaker” states (Hamashita, 2008).

In understanding how the Tribute System established a Sino-centric world order and China as a hegemonic power, we can see that the rise of China should not be a surprise. During the Ming and Qing era, China’s power had its ups and downs based on how they dealt with international relations and what their domestic priorities were. Nevertheless, there was never a question of whether China was powerful or not. One interesting way it illustrated its power was in its ability to give recognition to kings in vassal states. Both Wang and Hamashita mention that bringing tribute to China enforced a given king’s reign within their state because he and his state were recognized by China. This is important because recognition was personal, with the Chinese Emperor recognizing that the vassal king was legitimate and worthy to rule that tributary state, and was also a social agreement for nation states. For example, Korea was seen as different from other tributary states described as “barbaric” or savage because they followed Confucian tradition and other aspects of Chinese culture faithfully. Korea’s particular circumstance proved the superiority of China’s cultural and political superiority because they followed Chinese tradition.⁵ It also proved Korea’s national superiority because of their relation to China, which

⁵ Upon recognizing Korea and its king as better than other vassal states because of their loyalty, the Chinese Emperor shows its power to distinguish and recognize great and mediocre kingdoms.

other states also recognized. The recognition was also a statement letting others know that this is a country that has a connection with China and should be respected— during the fifteenth century this was observed because of China’s naval power (Wang 2011). The main point is that China had international power to grant recognition and international power to kings in Asia that paid tribute to it. It also had domestic power within foreign lands because it had an impact on who was recognized as king.

The emperor had this power because it was considered the son of heaven. By having the capability to name kings, recognize and establish them, this title as son of heaven is heavily supported and legitimized. It is understandable that as the son of heaven you have, not only the power, but also the responsibility to set structure in the international system, especially when the idea of Tianxia (all under heaven) comes in. The concept of Tianxia during the Tribute System period was seen as a concept not a system. This is one of the reasons Zhao Tingyang considers the system of Tianxia to be specifically in practice within the Zhou dynasty, after which the system becomes an ideal concept (Zhao 2016). Thus, with the Son of Heaven title along with the submissiveness of tributary states, it is reasonable that China’s gifts to tributary states were greater than those brought forth by the vassal states. Wang states that China’s ability to provide great amounts and better quality of gifts showed Chinese superiority because it represented the self-sufficiency of the Chinese empire (Wang 2011). Hamashita, in the statement above, brings forth the fact that presenting the gifts China gave were part of the protocol, again showcasing the richness and generosity of the Chinese nation. Thus, we can conclude that the Sino-centric world order in Asia, while often challenged by rival powers like Japan, was continuously upheld by other states, if not practically—some states did not see China as superior— at least symbolically.

Chinese power was symbolic since it was supported by tradition that led the tribute states to action as well as the showcasing of power that often required ritual performance: kotow, presentations, gifts. Yet, it was also effective and legitimizing. It was effective because foreign states did what China expected them to do; they participated in the Chinese world order. This was possible because the Tribute System provided geo-political stability by orchestrating regional relations, which in Chinese political history was one of the most important approaches to international engagement. Moreover, China also offered economic benefits. It was also legitimizing because it allowed Ming and Qing China to be perceived as they desired. All in all, China was a great hegemonic leader in Asia.

China's Responsibility to Maintain Harmony within Tianxia (All-Under-Heaven)

With an understanding of China's sovereignty as shown by the Tribute System, it is important to understand why China prevailed in being one of the only countries in Asia to hold hegemonic power for centuries. Narratives regarding the Sino-centric world order never fail to include the following: Tianxia (all-under-Heaven), Tianzi (Son of Heaven—China's Emperor), Confucian teachings, and harmony. When analyzing China's past and contemporary political and international affairs, I argue that these terms/ideas can not be separated or excluded. Regarding international recognition, China had the unique power to bring fortune to foreign states by recognizing their kings; similarly, foreign state's involvement in the Tribute System and their recognition of China as superior legitimized the superiority and heaven given power of imperial China (Wang 2011). This power is connected to the most important term mentioned above, *all under heaven*. This points to China in particular, but also encompasses the world. Within Tianxia, the Son of Heaven was the ruler of the universe because he was appointed by heaven.

Under Confucianism, the Son of Heaven was superior and held extreme responsibility to maintain stability within China and harmony in the world. Harmony was at the core of Chinese leadership. In fact, in Chinese viewpoint, “Sons of heaven remained superior to ordinary mortals because of their unique function in maintaining order among mankind and maintaining harmony between human society and the rest of the cosmos” (Fairbank 1968). This meant that emperors were destined to work for a world where China had stability and universal harmony was nurtured. While some scholars disagree with the idea of the Sino-centric world order as harmonious, as did Wang through his examination of China’s annexation of Vietnam, its “inaction” in Hani, its maritime expeditions, and the Sino-Japanese War over Korea (Wang 2011), there is no doubt that China’s world order, in action harmonious or not, did have the symbolic idea of state stability and global harmony at the center as they followed Confucian tradition. In the study of China’s contemporary international goals and their global self-conception, harmony (in the global world) is a core value. Yet, the ideology, if taken from Confucian and Tributary perspectives, would only fit in today's globalized society, especially within the democratic and collaborative framework the People’s Republic of China is proposing today, if it stands against the hierarchical arrangement the system was embedded with.

Imagery of a New Sino-Centric World Order

By analyzing the People's Republic of China's government documents, which incorporate language that reference the late imperial Chinese world order and elements of Tianxia, we can ask how China is evoking historical patterns that point back to a sinocentric order. What are they trying to accomplish through these historical references, and where do they establish these patterns and ways of thinking within their international and domestic spaces today? The following statement offers an example of Chinese thinking where China is at the center—which points to China's glorification of its past and praise of its future.

“中国没有称王称霸的基因，没有大国博弈的冲动，坚定站在历史正确一边，坚定奉行“大道之行，天下为公”。2023年8月22日

年金砖国家工商论坛闭幕式

“China does not have imperialistic or hegemonic genes, or an impulse for power relations. We firmly stand on the right side of history, firmly believing “When the Great Way is pursued, the world is established for public good.”⁶ (My translation)

The quote above is credited to Xi Jinping⁷, immediately making the words significant and essential to the People's Republic of China's depiction of itself. The statement makes many claims, but three of them stand out: 1) China has been and is free from imperialist or hegemonic thoughts or desires; 2) China is not interested in competing with major powers or involving itself with power relation issues; and 3) Chinese history shows that China has kept itself on the right path, pursuing what is right because to do what is right is the way for all under heaven to experience common good. The first part of the statement above reveals that China has no desires for hegemonic pursuits, and by mentioning genes, it emphasizes the idea that China has never had and will never have this desire. The term “genes” is important because it points to the

⁶ Excerpt from Xi Jinping's speech at BRICS Business Forum closing ceremony, (2023).

⁷ “China's Diplomacy in the New Era”. China Diplomacy.
<http://www.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/> Accessed Nov 09, 2023.

intrinsic design and foundation of something. In other words, Xi Jinping is saying that hegemony and imperialism have nothing to do with China, it is not part of its foundation. Additionally, because genes are not meant to be changed, China will remain separate from the ideas and attributes that hegemonism inserts in a country. The second part supports the first section by restating that China does not wish to compete for power in the international system. In this case, China sends the message that it wants to live in harmony alongside other major states. Lastly, the quote contains an affirmation of China's righteous history and accompanies it with an idiom from China's greatly known philosopher, Confucius, who is known for pursuing peace within the state and in the world.

China's ability to stand on the right side of history seems to be virtuous because it shows that China has stood for greater good. By connecting state virtue to a belief in doing what's right for the public good, Xi Jinping makes this perspective specific to China. This is clear within the last two sections of the statement where he affirms China's historical goodness by emphasizing that they have done good throughout history because of their belief in Confucius' idea of doing what is right for the public good. What is important here is that Confucius, while looking for peace and stability within the Chinese state and in the world, also believed and strongly emphasized hierarchy.

Confucius believed that when one follows the Way, the public good prospers. Xi Jinping states that China has been on the right side of history and wants to continue doing so because it seeks the good of all. Confucius' "天下", which commonly refers to the region supervised by the "Son of Heaven," can also be extended to the world, as "all under heaven". Thus, China has had a history of righteousness because of the nurturing and upholding of Chinese values and its calls for other states to follow their lead by doing what is right without self-interest.

But what is the right side of history? From the context of the statement, it is known that when referring to the “right side of history” Xi Jinping is talking about the things done and pursued within the system of international relations. The first context for this understanding is that the quote can be found within the “外交金句” (diplomatic quotes/words of wisdom) section of China’s diplomacy website. Secondly, the quote’s first words refer to China’s role in the international system and the last word refers to how it has acted and wishes to continue acting and thinking within the international community. Xi Jinping’s statement is an allegory of Chinese superior thinking and essential role within international relations. It lets the public know that China has a history of pursuing what is right and good for all. Its beliefs and systems are created for harmony and for communal leadership without power competition. At the same time, it encourages the international community to think about Chinese values by directing their attention to the Chinese idea of following the righteous path for the common good. Without a doubt, these ideas follow Confucian ideologies and are consistent with how imperial China thought of itself and how they promoted its international relations. This relation to the Tribute System reveals a contradiction in Xi Jinping’s argument because he seeks to promote an idea of harmony through collaboration and common good by using ideas from a system that highlights hierarchy, something he rejects today.

At the same time, Xi Jinping is not the only one that shows partiality in what aspects of Confucianism and Chinese political history to highlight in their call for rectification in the international system. Thereby, we are able to see a shift in argumentation and political tactics within Chinese political discourse. For example, Zhao Tingyang also abandons ideas of social ranking within his new evaluation of Tianxia and in doing so he also highlights rhetoric similar to Xi Jinping as you can see in the following lines, “The practice of the expansive way is to

recognize ‘the world as a common property’ 天下为公. It is to prefer worthies and the capable. It is to teach trustworthiness and cultivate harmony” (Zhao 2016). As we can see, Xi Jinping and Zhao Tingyang echo each other. Zhao Tingyang, in the statement above, is introducing aspects of his Tianxia System, which includes the idea of Tiandao (expansive way), and Xi Jinping is describing how China’s international thinking is informed. Both of them use “天下为公” to describe the object of attention to which their systems or concepts for global engagement are working for. They both affirm that their approach to international relations is world focused. For Xi Jinping this is not about global governance, rather it is about being mindful of others and acting in ways that do not harm other communities. This attitude is in parallel to what Zhao Tingyang refers to when he asks nation states to have a worldly mindset.

This fact points to the close connection between Chinese researchers like Zhao Tingyang and the state. It is needless to say that as a scholar within one of the PRC’s research institutes, Zhao has immense responsibility and influence to inform or at least generate information useful to the government. Their similar line of thinking reveals that their attitudes towards the international community are not far from each other.

Righteousness Rooted in the Chinese State

As shown in the statement above, China’s non-hegemonic nature is supported by its idea of righteousness. This is interesting because Shih’s evaluation of a central leader within Tianxia would be based on moral superiority. However, he also mentions that this moral standard could lead to a political struggle on the basis of who claimed to be the best model for the system. On the other hand, Zhao believes in a moral standard that is mutually understood and adhered to by all nations.

The idea of righteousness is deeply illustrated in “A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions.” This paper was published in the People’s Republic of China’s English-language Website. The white paper was published from Beijing by China's State Council Information Office. The office is under the Chinese State Council, which is the primary information office for China’s government; its goal is to promote trust and collaboration between China and foreign countries⁸.

For context, it is important to understand the following details about the document and its publisher. Based on the publisher of this document two things are evident: 1) the document’s main purpose is to enlighten foreign countries on what China’s views on global affairs are; and 2) this document has been highly edited to illustrate what China believes other countries want to hear but still does so with China’s interest in mind—especially because it has been translated from Mandarin to English. By looking at this document, it is possible to see that China seeks to establish trust not only as a country but also as a global leader because it paints itself as trustworthy on a moral high ground. In other words, this is China’s way of asserting a leadership position in the global arena. The attitude of the text is not confrontational but rather has a tone of concern and warning against an age of international relations where countries “gang up” against each other. With this in mind, China takes the role of a country seeking to unite the global community for a common purpose. This goal derives from its desire to use its self-righteousness for public good.

Xi Jinping's statement proves that the Chinese state sees China as a nation which follows the righteous way and has done it throughout its history. By being a model nation that does good for the public good, China can be a model for other states to also engage in multi-beneficial

⁸ “About SCIO.” The State Council Information Office; The People’s Republic of China. <http://english.scio.gov.cn/aboutscio/index.htm>

international engagement. This concept of righteousness, as portrayed above, is China-centered because it derives from its history and Confucian culture. Yet, while the idea of doing what is right is China-focused, it is no longer China-centered because China is starting to share the idea that any country can do what is right and must do so for the benefit of all. (This can be seen more clearly through the analysis of “A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions”, discussed below.)

When this idea is China-centered it shadows late imperial systems of power where China is the determinant of what is right and demands that lesser states adhere to that standard. This is significant because Zhao Tingyang also alludes to a certain moral standard that all states must adopt in order for the system of Tianxia to function for the wellbeing of all; and Shih, while not close to the PRC government, indicates that the Tianxia System is ordered based on how well nation states conform to the same cultural idea of selflessness (Shih 2012). This is important to mention because it points to how China-related political history, like Tianxia, is present in current international rhetoric. In this China-centered approach to righteousness, China serves as an ideal model and, as Shih says in regards to Tianxia’s center leader, other states are meant to emulate its selflessness.

On the other hand, the China-focused part of the idea recognizes the moral superiority of China because it introduces the foundation for a new non hegemonic or imperialist system and the necessity of other states at the same time. Through this approach, belonging and community is more important than the image of the state. This means that China is not prioritizing its image of moral superiority. It is simply referring to it to prove and illustrate that it is a capable and trustworthy member of the international community. In either case, China has the upper hand but interdependence is recognized as essential. This is because China occupies a position of

dominance through its moral conceptions but does not claim a dominant center. It is a model state that can empower other countries to seek a moral approach to international affairs, thus emphasizing states' need to behave in ways that underline the importance of coexistence and interdependence.

Righteousness through interdependence:

Living on the same planet, all countries, adjacent or distant, large or small, developed or developing, are members of an emerging community of shared interests, responsibility, and destiny, whose wellbeing and security are interrelated. Only when appropriate attention is paid to the collective future of humanity is it possible that the wishes of every country, people and individual come true. Whatever we may encounter on our journey ahead, the only right choice is to work together for the benefit of all. (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

This excerpt is illustrative of “大道之行，天下为公”. At its core is the idea that states must behave with the interest of the international community in mind. To do otherwise would not only be selfish, but also foolish because the future of all is interconnected. Thus, to do what is right for the public good, that is, all countries—regardless of their economic or geographical location— is indeed following the path of righteousness. By stating that all states are “members of a community of shared interests,” China acknowledges the opportunities and risks at hand in a world that is more and more globalized each day. This interconnectedness dictates that all countries, regardless of where they are in their development process or which geographical region they belong to, are affected by the actions of other states. Therefore, they can not ignore each other because their interests are continuously merging. This means they share equal responsibility to do what is best for everyone involved in this community. In this excerpt, doing what is right refers to dealing with international affairs in a way that benefits everyone on the planet because of the “collective future of humanity”.

It is important to identify that while the conception of a future of shared interest is a result of globalization, the Chineseness in this idea brings the international community back to a system where China facilitates geo-political relations. Through the idea of communication and collective work, China draws back from the collaborative nature of the Tribute System where countries worked together for international stability, and economic gains. While the PRC does not mention economic benefits above, the idea of “shared interests” points out that economic cooperation is part of it because it is a tool used for the betterment of human life in all countries. During the Late Imperial period, this concept of international interaction was legitimized by the involvement of foreign states. Through this text China seeks to establish trust between itself and the international community. Therefore, this work can serve as part of an attempt to legitimize China's contemporary approach to global governance.

Through this excerpt, it is clear that China seeks to get everyone involved in following what it perceives to be the right path. In its structure and form, the message is articulated by China, placing China as a leader who cares about the international state of affairs. To the Chinese state, this means leaving behind personal interests for the public good. China sees that there is a need for communal work rather than self-sufficient ideals. Yet, it establishes space for sovereignty and differentiation between states. In essence, the PRC is not calling for a global government, but rather a united world-focused order. This outlook on international affairs and the international community reflects Zhao Tingyang's concept of worldness where the concept of international affairs is approached through a world inclusive approach rather than state-to-state interaction. Zhao's idea also pertains to mutual goals and a shared future—though he does not use the same language. His idea was also evoked by the needs generated by globalization.

Righteousness by preserving the sovereignty of nation states:

Promoting the common values of humanity is not about canonizing the values of any particular country, but about seeking common ground while reserving differences, harmony without uniformity, and fully respecting the diversity of civilizations and the right of all countries to independently choose their social systems and development paths. (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

To do what is right, according to this short passage, means to respect the sovereignty of other states. By accepting that each country has its own social system, and by encouraging other states to respect that, China sends the message that no country is better than others, not even itself, thus illustrating that there can be many right ways to lead a country. Respecting members of the international community means tolerating others. Thus, even though there is international interdependence, there are set boundaries to protect the interest of each state. This structure differs from the interdependence seen in Tributary times where nations were closely related in ritual and political and international operations. In modern times, collaborating with each other is beneficial for all but does not cross boundaries. It brings up the idea that all countries have the right to deal with internal affairs as they please—as long as they continue to do what is right for the international community. This approach leads back to China's objective of renouncing power relations and hegemony because it emphasizes that each nation has sovereignty and should not be dictated as if it belonged to another state. It also elaborates on the idea that all countries are worthy of respect regardless of where they stand in the international system. In this passage, the concept of hegemony is extended to the political and cultural oppression that some countries can exercise through their power and influence. To do this is not to follow the path of righteousness because it violates the sovereignty of nation states.

The statements regarding righteousness shown above align with the idea of building a community with universal principles, or as Zhao calls it, "compatible universalism." In other

words, Xi Jinping is also advocating for a community led by common international principles that are complimentary to all states but do not ignore or highlight the particularity of individual states. Special state values that are primarily consistent with a nation's cultural and historical background are accepted and respected. But they are not stressed as more important or superior to the values of other states. At the same time, they are also not dismissed. "Compatible universalism" creates an inclusive community built on cultural pluralism (Zhao 2012). As a result, universal values ensure that all nations engage with each other on the basis of compatibility as established by common principles while also ensuring that states do not lose their individuality.

The two excerpts shown above share two different points of view on righteousness shared by China. The first excerpt holds a humanistic perspective. Countries must do what is proper for the peace and stability of the international community because this will allow for each country to succeed and all people to live a good life. The second excerpt is focused on the need to respect states' internal affairs. All together, China brings an approach that encompasses the political/social realm of states as well as how the behavior of the international community affects individual people. This perspective describes righteousness as doing what is right for you without hindering the success of others, and places special emphasis on doing what is right for you in a way that also benefits others outside your immediate circle of influence.

This rhetoric goes against some aspects of the historical narrative from which the People's Republic of China pulls to support its righteous and harmonious genes. Wang, in his analysis of the Chinese World Order, illustrates that late imperial China was in fact self-centered and at times imperialistic. His broad analysis explains China's hegemonism clearly. Even a quick look at the hierarchical structure of the Tribute System is sufficient to problematize the PRC's

international relations rhetoric. The PRC should not anchor its new conceptions for the present and future from a past that was exclusive, punitive, and sometimes tyrannical towards weaker states. Yet, it does so continuously throughout their document. This can only be the result of a type of strategy where the Chinese government highlights the ideals of China's history—in relation to providing geopolitical stability and being a recognized leader in East Asia— while forgetting the aspects of Chinese leadership that made other states subordinate in a patronizing way. The PRC formulation of China's history encourages the international community to recognize China's character as approachable, a very important attribute in international relations.

In characterizing itself as a valuable member of society, China attempts to help states see China in a new light without ignoring its powerful features. In, “Deep Roots in History and Cultural Traditions,” the third chapter of the source being analyzed, the first paragraph reads:

The concept of a global community of shared future has deep roots in China's profound cultural heritage and its unique experience of modernization. It carries forward the diplomatic traditions of the People's Republic of China and draws on the outstanding achievements of all other civilizations. It manifests China's time-honored historical traditions, distinct characteristics of the times, and a wealth of humanistic values.

To be clear, in this analysis I define “shared future” as harmony because a community of shared future encompasses collaboration, communication, and trust— all important aspects of harmony. Moreover, this is what the PRC advocates for within the document. Thereafter, the excerpt affirms that harmony is grounded in Chinese cultural heritage and diplomatic traditions, and is complimented by the contributions of other countries. This refers to the non-changing idea of Chinese righteousness throughout history—this righteousness is connected to their commitment to humanistic values, as mentioned in the last sentence.

Sinocentrism is illustrated in this statement because Chinese values are seen as the standard. In connection to late imperial China, a parallel can be pointed out: China is perceived

as superior, yet neighboring countries are necessary members of the system for their own good as well as to legitimize China's superiority. Through this collaborative work, China extends the idea and value of righteousness to other states. But righteousness remains centered around China because of the idea that China's cultural heritage and global experience are roots of a "global community of shared future". The statement above is essential in setting China at the center of what it means to be a responsible member and leader in international governance. In fact, according to the text, China is the foundation of a proper and well-organized international system of cooperation in the global community.

Xi's concept of a "shared future" is quite similar to Zhao Tingyang's new interpretation of Tianxia. However, Xi uses China's history to center China while Zhao does not see a central leadership within his version of global governance and engagement. This is significant because in spite of the many intellectual similarities found within each proposed international model, Xi uses Chinese history to highlight China's leadership role while Zhao only establishes that the concept of Tianxia comes from China but "belongs to the world".

It is important to remember that Xi Jinping and Zhao Tingyang are presenting and proposing different models for international affairs, a system of shared future and Tianxia, respectively. While their makeup is relatively similar, they have different approaches and goals. Xi seeks to establish a friendlier system of international relations that rejects traditional forms of international engagement based on imperialism and hegemonism as inspired by the Westphalian model. Zhao seeks to promote a Tianxia System for global governance that creates a closer international community based on universal values and mutual wellbeing. Xi is inspired by a diverse range of Chinese political and cultural history and Zhao is inspired by the Zhou dynasty's Tianxia System. Yet, regardless of their different terminology and emphasis, the overall approach

of each international script, its goals, definition, and requisites, are parallel in language and practical implications.

Therefore, it is interesting to see that while the models are technically the same, with the exception of the idea of global governance, they have different approaches to what it means to be an actor in the system and how the international order should work. Zhao obviously rejects ideas of social hierarchy on any basis. Xi also opposes social ranking, as will be demonstrated later on, and the PRC is very careful to exhibit their desire for a fair and just system where all states are respected. Yet, Xi's argument analyzed above shows partiality to China on the basis of its gracious and rich cultural and political background. While this does not denote social ranking it clearly shows favoritism towards a particular cultural or political idea. China is the model.

Inevitably, this self praise is supportive of Chih-Yu Shih's argument that the image of being a state is more important than the identity of being a state. In presenting China in this way, one can see that the PRC government is creating an image for itself in the international community. It wants to be acknowledged or even praised for who it is. But in this case, the characterization it depicts is image producing and also identity establishing. Both show the importance of image because China is portraying an image of itself that it is simultaneously creating. In establishing its image it is also internalizing it⁹. It is internalizing this international image by drawing from its history and justifying who it is. An identity driven state does not need external validation. However, it is clear that China is seeking international validation through the

⁹ The image China presents of itself can be easily perceived as a strategic performance to accomplish its international goals, however, it is precisely this performance that builds China's identity. As Erik Ringmar points out, performance is action making meaning (Ringmar, 2012). Meaning, whether the image China promotes for itself is a performance or not, it inevitably becomes identity when their actions (in this case rhetoric alluding to who they want the international community to see) start to create meaning. We can see that in presenting (action) who they are through rhetoric (performance) they are making meaning (identity). Their performance is making "meaning". Performance is enacting who they are. We can see that through Chinese political theories explored in this paper because they show that the Chinese perspective on who China is (a harmonious and world-focused developing state) is becoming "common sense".

way it depicts itself because it seeks to establish itself within a group, not individually. Again, the PRC's approach shows signs of desire for belonging but it also shows that it is trying to identify as a nation state, which is illustrated through the central position it places itself in.

Moreover, through the idea of collaborative and unified work, China portrays itself as a responsible role player with a central position. As it proposes the framework of a shared future, it establishes that this is a Chinese model of global governance where the participation of other states complement what is already set in stone. The contributions of other states in this model of a shared future is dictated by China's diplomatic traditions. One important word used in the English translation of this document is "manifests". The word has the strength to perceive or seek to construct the future as well as cultivate ideas of the past. First, because it leads readers to believe that China's goal could be achieved through collaborative work in the future, and secondly, because it assumes that China has had this progressive thought in the past and has been successful. This leads back to the idea of firmly standing on the right side of history. In other words, Chinese cultural heritage has a history of believing in the public good and the benefit of a global community with a shared future. In relation to a system of global governance through Tianxia, which is persistent in PRC rhetoric through the mentioning of Tianxia-related moral arguments, Shih's claim about Tianxia being understood as hegemonic expansion through the lens of a role maker state is highlighted.

Clearly, China is not demanding to be awarded the title of global leader. In fact, it reiterates that it wants to help to nurture a system exclusive of hegemonic ideals and power relations. However, the statement above points to the power struggle that could evolve on the basis of morality. In a hypothetical example where the Tianxia System is established, Shih's argument would be strongly supported because, as you can see, the PRC government is already

alluding to moral superiority even though there is no competition in which high morality distinguishes winner from loser. Morality, nevertheless, plays an important role in how states are perceived, especially in an era of globalization where nation states are rapidly adjusting to citizen-led initiatives on the basis of human rights, war, and overall human engagement. China sees the potential in clarifying and highlighting that it stands with the people and seeks to act for the people. As an international actor, it has the responsibility to be engaged in processes that lead to global peace and its claimed identity makes it the best actor to promote such peaceful and people-centered initiatives.

Referring more closely to the statement mentioned earlier, China's attempt to nurture a system of international relations where all countries are respected and valued illustrates the type of responsibility that China held in the late imperial period's Tribute System. Yet, it simultaneously rejects hegemonic and imperialistic ideas. Its current ideas of diplomacy with Chinese characteristics are founded by the international agreements set by, the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the Geneva Conventions in 1864, the Charter of the United Nations in 1945, and the Bandung Conference in 1955 (The State Council; The People's Republic of China, 2023). These documents share the idea and commitment to respecting state sovereignty, committing to the rule of international law, and respect for humanity. The Bandung Conference in 1955 is especially important because it focuses on Asian and African Countries. The final communique establishes the importance of close cooperation between these countries in regards to economic development, technological innovation, standing against colonialism, and cultural engagement (Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference). This specific document almost directly reflects the statements shown in the writing published by the State Council of the People's Republic of China.

The guidance that China uses to structure a system of international relations demonstrates an inclusive approach. Its perspective is unique because it tries to unify thoughts from all over the world and includes characteristics special to Chinese culture. This forms a new yet known thread of ideas that are in some ways more inclusive than the current script for international relations. For example, China makes a unique case for including developing and poor nations. In fact, while advocating for the rights and space developing countries need and are entitled to, China places itself as a pioneer for the institutionalization of equality in the international community. As often seen, powerful nations do stand for the rights of the underprivileged, but it is often under the “human rights” umbrella. China is setting a new trend by not only standing up for the wellbeing of all citizens but also for their nations. This makes sense because the Chinese government believes that a country comes before the individual. The citizens nurture the government and the government protects the people—people work for the government and the government works for the people (Xi Jinping, 2022). Nation before individual means that the sovereignty of states is the major priority because it provides peace and well-being for the citizens. Western states tend to pose the individual as a sovereign entity whose rights need to be upheld at all costs. Meanwhile, China does not necessarily see the individual as a political unit, it is the state’s responsibility to care for the individual, therefore it is more important for the state to be in a state of peace and wellbeing because this will inevitably result in protecting public good for all citizens. This idea is similar to Zhao’s idea of human obligations essentially being first but equal to human rights (Zhao 2012). This means that the wellbeing of the collective is more important than the individual.

Ideas of equal and mutual cooperation are clearly portrayed in statements like the following: “Mutually beneficial cooperation means that countries should reject the maximization

of self-interest, address the legitimate concerns of other countries while pursuing their own interests, and promote common development of all countries alongside their own development” (The State Council; The People’s Republic of China, 2023). To be clear, this statement does not ignore the value of pursuing one’s own interests and empowerment. It clearly states that countries can help others while thinking of what is best for themselves. This means that a nation can decide to aid another country with the intention to better itself. In a human-to-human relationship this could be described as dishonest because the individual would help while expecting something in return, or solely because they will get something in return. Yet, in this case, the idea of helping is more important than the intention of the helper. In other words, a country does not have to be altruistic in order to be good but it is important that the nation is not solely led by self-interest. This is their meaning of helping others improve while improving yourself. This means that China recognizes that countries intrinsically desire power. As a result, it calls for countries to share that power, not for them to get rid of it. Meaning, countries can lean into desiring higher development and better international status as long as it is not harmful to others, and especially when it benefits the global community.

Power sharing between nation states in the global community can be better understood through a modern analysis of Confucius’s writing, the “Great Learning”. As mentioned before, Confucian thinking often has a hierarchical side that explains most of his ideas relating to world peace. Abandoning these hierarchical thoughts though, we can focus on the essential roles of the self, the family and the state for the concepts of the world. In the “Great Learning” it is declared that in order for harmony to triumph in the world, individuals must first cultivate their personal lives, then regulate the family, and bring order to the states (Chan, 1969). Taking this model and applying it to Xi Jinping’s call for sharing power, leaders must be fair and just in their pursuit of

state-power, the state must do what is best for its citizens and nation, and the state and individual leaders must refrain from maximizing their power. Most importantly, the international community must be seen as a family. In this pattern of thinking, members of this global family, nation states, take responsibility for working hard for the good of their nation through self-development (economic, agriculture, technological, etc.). This means to regulate the state. Nation states sharing their advancements and making foreign policies that respect the dignity of other nations with a communal spirit result in a harmonious world.

Major countries are particularly called to be inclusive and respectful of countries that have not shared the same advantages and development progress. China also calls them to look at a country based on its ambitions and “sense of responsibility” rather than “size, strength or power.” By being an advocate for emerging global participants, China does not only become a leader, it also establishes itself as a mediator and collaborator. This position leads back to the characteristics seen in China in tributary times when it took the role of intercessor by leading and establishing rule and harmony in East Asia. This script defies what has already been established in the international system, which often calls for major powers and hegemonic leaders to contain peace on their own. In contrast, China calls for the end of hegemonic power. Instead of making one power responsible for global peace and stability, it highlights the importance of equal international responsibility while maintaining that some powers will still be more powerful than others because of their level of development and history. China believes that this fact should not stand as a barrier for multilateralism, which illustrates the importance of compatible universalism by creating inclusive structures and institutions for shared interests and through a similar set of values.

This mindset is consistent with the People's Republic of China's domestic idea of government. They have adopted a China-first like mindset that is institutionalized within their domestic governance for the sake of the other members of their government— the people. The Chinese people are seen as the main influences of PRC governance and the government is viewed as working for the people. This is shown in their Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China where Xi Jinping illustrates his hopes for the future of the country. There, he repeatedly states the party's interests in government reform, economic, social, and technological development, and mutual collaboration between branches of the government and the people (Xi Jinping, 2022). The core idea is that every country is different and has different needs. Therefore, China must stand on its own and seek nation-specific approaches for the wellbeing of its nation and people. These approaches are not in contrast to having an inclusive and collaborative international system. They show the importance of country sovereignty and self-accountability.

Multilinear Approach to Governance

By exploring the ideas and issues discussed in the report to the National Congress of the Communist Party of China I found that the PRC's multilinear approach to domestic governance can be extended to the international community. Indeed, Xi Jinping's address to the National Party Congress reveals that the PRC is in fact using multidimensional and multilinear thinking to deal with domestic and international political matters. For instance, they see different political institutions in China as an asset to governance in China but assert that the Communist Party is the must fit for ruling the country and bringing rejuvenation to the nation. On a similar stance, it believes that countries are equal while also realizing that there are stronger countries with greater status. This attitude provides a realistic view on power structures and social order within their

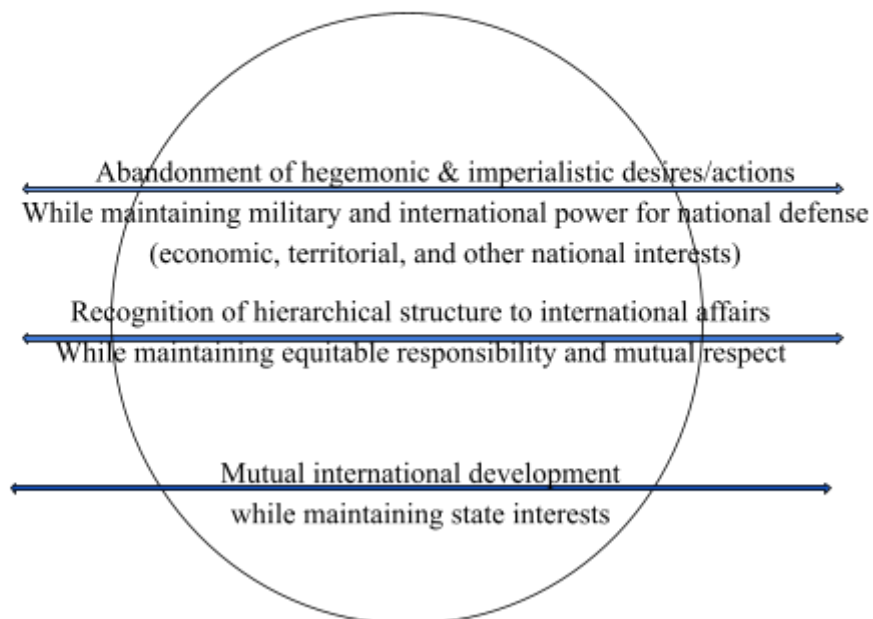
engagement: nations can all act in ways that benefit the whole community but there are obvious signs that some nations have more power. The PRC government also calls for genuine collaboration and the end of cold-war-like ideals and movements, while establishing that it will defend its interests by whatever means necessary. Again, you can see that standing up for oneself does not necessarily stand in opposition to mutual collaboration. This pattern of thinking highlights binary oppositions, but most importantly declares alternative ways to navigate international governance and affairs. To understand these ideas, I developed two diagrams. The following diagram provides further illustration on the dimensions visible in China's international thinking through its report to the National Party Congress:

Binary Oppositions in Chinese Government Thinking

Diagram 1.0

Circle: Global System

Lines: Methods of international governance and global interchange



This diagram shows the different dimensions in binary oppositions of PRC thinking of governance. The circle represents the global system and global community, and the arrows

illustrate the methods of international governance and global exchange as promoted by the PRC. The arrows extend beyond the circle to represent the mathematical concept of parallel lines, lines that extend infinitely and do not intersect at any point. The importance of parallelism between these concepts is important because it signals that the concepts on each side of the arrow do not go against each other, they are always in a complementary relationship. Moreover, the diagram shows that the PRC's core principle can be summarized as the pursuit of power without the desire of selfish power maximization. In essence, the diagram above highlights that within the idea of mutual development and a "shared future" lies the rejection of hegemonism and the desire to construct a trustworthy international system. It also shows that states have the right to keep and protect their sovereignty. For further clarification, it is useful to compare this structure to the current power-centered structure of international engagement initiated by Western states. The first line of argument implies that nation states can pursue their betterment in development whether it is economic, military, or territory wise (not referring to forceful involvement or the invasion of other states). This means that they can work in ways that put their economy at top position within international affairs, can develop and advance military weapons and organization, and can do what is necessary to protect their territory from foreign invasion. From a Western point of view, it is easy to label this approach as a threat because this behavior is commonly attributed to hegemonism. However, China is denouncing this understanding of economic, military and territorial advancement. They do not conform to this understanding because China has been rapidly evolving and increasing its economic and military power but this does not mean they are seeking to become a hegemon. In fact, they repeatedly state that China will always be a developing country. Therefore, the PRC strongly believes that development does not equal hegemony or lead to power struggles in the international community.

The second line makes the recognition that based on the history and development process of each state, a social hierarchy within the international community has been built. This does not mean that some countries are better than others, but rather that their development places them in positions where they are visibly not at the same level economically, militarily, environmentally, etc. as other countries. This is one of the reasons that development should not be seen as a threat but rather an opportunity for all countries to seek to become their best self. Additionally, their lower position within the international community does not deny their inherent value and responsibility within the international system. All nations deserve the same level of respect and the right to fair international engagement.

Lastly, the diagram illustrates the importance of mutual international development. This illustrates Xi's statement that when one country prospers it should be for the betterment of the global community. It also reiterates that a country's self-interest can be used for the benefit of the world. This can be imagined as bettering a certain part of one's country, such as technological development, and expanding it to the rest of the world. For example, China has been developing sustainable farming practices to combat climate change and has used their new agriculture technology to help African countries like Rwanda do the same (The State Council; The People's Republic of China, 2023). It is likely that China's helping efforts in countries like Rwanda are driven by economic gain. However, this is acceptable because the way it seeks its own benefits also benefits other countries. Thus, countries are welcome to seek their own benefits while promoting the development of the whole world. The PRC government reveals that in both documents studied in this paper as the following excerpts show:

It is the modernization of peaceful development. In pursuing modernization, China will not tread the old path of war, colonization, and plunder taken by some countries. That brutal and blood-stained path of enrichment at the expense of others caused great suffering for the people of developing countries. We will stand firmly on the right side of

history and on the side of human progress. Dedicated to peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit, we will strive to safeguard world peace and development as we pursue our own development, and we will make greater contributions to world peace and development through our own development (Xi Jinping, 2022).

To build a global community of shared future is to pursue openness, inclusiveness, mutual benefit, equity and justice. The goal is not to replace one system or civilization with another. Instead, it is about countries with different social systems, ideologies, histories, cultures and levels of development coming together to promote shared interests, shared rights, and shared responsibilities in global affairs. The vision of a global community of shared future stands on the right side of history and on the side of human progress. It introduces a new approach for international relations, provides new ideas for global governance, opens up new prospects for international exchanges, and draws a new blueprint for a better world (The State Council Information office of the People's Republic of China, 2023).

These two documents were both shared by institutions or members of the Chinese government roughly a year apart and share very similar messages. As you can see above, there are several repetitions. For instance, the first lines in each paragraph illustrate what the desired outcome from collaboration is and what it is not. In Xi Jinping's 2022 report the tone has more of a negative connotation since it starts by stating what China will not do. Through this rhetoric, Xi places China at a higher position of moral authority because while he does not mention any particular nation, he emphasizes that past global powers have taken advantage of developing countries and abused the rights of the people. By bringing up the negative characteristics of other countries in power, China has a clear path for establishing itself as a more humane and less selfish nation, as well as an exemplary one.

The first sentence of the second paragraph has a relatively similar message except it has a positive connotation. Instead of shaming previous powerful states, it calls for all states to realize what mutual cooperation is and to lead with justice and inclusivity. The methods of sharing the idea of mutual and equal cooperation are somewhat similar in each document. The slight

difference makes sense based on the audience. In the first paragraph, the audience are members of the National Party Congress. This indicates that the report must not only be motivational but also patriotic. In inspiring the Chinese nation, especially members of the CCP, Xi Jinping had to state clearly how he has made and will make positive contributions to the Chinese nation by establishing how special China is in comparison to barbaric and power-hungry countries. On the other hand, the message to the international community must have a positive and inviting tone to illustrate China's dedication to a world of global governance where countries work together. Nevertheless, it is evident that the message remains consistent throughout China's rhetoric about collaborative work and development. For instance, both passages have the famous lines "we stand on the right side of history" with the addition of "human progress". Based on the PRC's concern for humanity, standing for "human progress" means refraining from war and other state behaviors that affect the peace and technological advancement of humanity. This message becomes more important as it appears consistently on various Chinese government documents and speeches. It demonstrates that this is an idea that is internalized within their government and scheduled to be persistently shared with the international community.

This not only seems to be an essential message in Chinese political and international rhetoric but also an identity. As mentioned before, China sees itself as righteous for not interacting with hegemonic ideas or imperialistic activity. This is something they use as part of their narrative in presenting themselves. Presently, it is obvious that this concept is not simply an approach to help international actors see China differently, in actuality it is vividly a deeply internalized concept of self.

This self image is important as the PRC resorts to promoting an inclusive system of international affairs because high moral standards have always been part of Chinese leadership.

The ideas promoted above point back to previous systems coming from Chinese political history. The Imperial System was deeply invested in collaboration and the Tianxia System, as reviewed by Zhao Tingyang, also emphasized collaboration, mutual benefits, and the good of the whole world. The statements above can actually be evaluated as particular examples of the world-centered approach that Zhao elicits to. As Xi Jinping highlights how China's development will be for the betterment of the world and to nurture peace, you can see Zhao's idea come to life. The PRC's approach is genuinely world-centered and also calls for the inclusion of all nations. It differs from Zhao's account in that Xi does not mind international competition. The rest of the argument lies on the foundation of mutual cooperation and mutual benefits. In fact, I think Xi's concept of "shared future" and Zhao's new Tianxia System promote the same system for the global community. Only two differences emerge: 1) Zhao calls for global governance, and 2) Zhao does not specify whether a social political hierarchy exists within his version of the global community. The differences make sense because it would be extremely problematic to establish a central leader in the international system amidst a globalized world that is in a constant power struggle. Zhao, as a philosopher is also attuned to theory and imagination, which makes an idealized "best world" possible to imagine. Xi Jinping on the other hand, is a politician and talks on behalf of a nation. For Xi, calling for world governance would not only be globally risky but also domestically disorienting.

Regardless of differences, the models of governance are very similar. The genetic makeup of these models are so in tune that they make the differences look relatively insignificant. As discussed in the previous chapter, Zhao's Tianxia is built on the basis of world centrism, relationality, and compatible universality. These core values are all set for the wellbeing of "all under heaven," which transcends the simple view of humans and even connects

human civilization to nature. It values coexistence and places special emphasis on abandoning self-interest for the sake of community safety and wellbeing. Additionally, the responsibility to act accordingly for the sake of others is especially important to generate harmony in the global family.

Drawing from the statements shown above, one can clearly see that the PRC government is committed to “peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit” (Xi Jinping, 2022) and “a global community of shared future... to pursue openness, inclusiveness, mutual benefit, equity and justice” (The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, 2023). These are also the goals and objectives of Zhao’s system. Inclusivity is important as to not leave anyone out and cooperation is built on trust and consideration of other members of the international family. No country is expected to act in ways that will harm other nations, and they are encouraged to act in ways that will benefit the world, not only themselves. As you can see, there is a clear connection between the two models of international cooperation. Yet, it is important to mention that Xi, while influenced by China’s historical consciousness, is also influenced by the widespread system of international affairs built by the Westphalian discourse. For this reason, the PRC seems to attempt to contribute to the current system by adding particular elements that can make it more inclusive and led by Chinese values and characteristics. I elaborate more on this point through the next diagram.

China's Alternative Model for International Interaction

Diagram 1.1
 Circle: Global System
 Double Triangles & Diamonds: nationstates

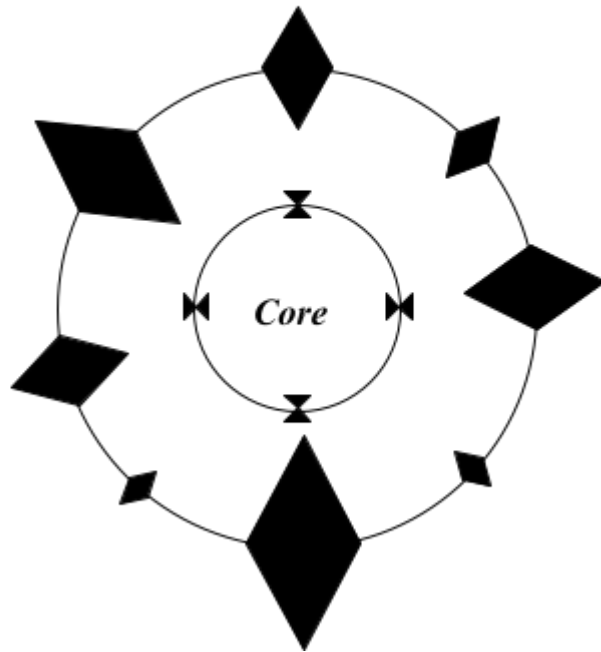


Diagram 1.1 illustrates another multidimensional level of viewing international interchange and global governance. As mentioned before, China accepts some level of hierarchy but rejects hegemonism and imperialism. According to Xi Jinping, collaboration and a shared future is the best mindset for nation-states to have if they wish to lead a harmonious and successful global society. The diagram above is designed with ideas of equity and inclusion, as well as mutual responsibility and sovereign dignity at the core. The inner circle represents the core principle of a global society where all nation states are equally respected, hold the same statuses, and hold mutual responsibility. However, the outer circle denotes the flexible and sovereign parts of nation states where states are in power and unbothered by competition but rather lean in to pursue their interests and self-advancement. The outer circle contains diamond-shaped figures (symbolizing nation states) of different sizes. The size denotes their

advancement and influence in the international system (i.e the bigger in size the greater its influence and international position). Meanwhile, all states (represented by double-triangle-shaped figures) in the inner circle are the same size to symbolize that they are equal regardless of their development. This circle emphasizes the shared future of nation states. For this reason they all have the same responsibility. The outer layer of the international system (outer circle) highlights the sovereign nature of the international system and is not criticized for its competitive nature.

While the above is reasonable, it is still challenging to understand how China opposes a self-centered approach to international collaboration as well as the cold-war mindset but engages in realist thinking in its global interactions and domestic structure. This can be understood by further analyzing the PRC's government's goals. For instance, Xi mentions that one of their development goals for the year 2035 is to "Further increase China's international standing and influence; enable China to play a greater role in global governance" (Xi Jinping 2022). These goals can be seen as not harmful in essence, but they have hegemonic dimensions, such as the accumulation of power. Additionally, it can also be said that its attempt to become a greater actor in the global system is self-centered because this is a domestic goal, not a global one where other actors are involved in helping China reach that status for a specific and collaborative goal. While this approach seems hegemonic, it is solely self-centered. Which China supports. As mentioned before, China does not condemn the ambition to become a better country. Thus, whether this is connected to other nations or not does not add or take away from China's rhetoric reliability. Even though it is hard to tell whether the idea of a shared future is genuine, it is evident that China incorporates this idea in many of the things they say domestically and internationally, thus, it is worth navigating.

Moreover, this pursuit of self-interest is supported by China's encouragement for all nations to be ambitious and responsible in their international engagement. Thus, China's "realist" approach to international interaction is an example for how to seek your own country's development without harming others and for the good of all. This point of view can illustrate that China is developing and adding to the development efforts of the world by showcasing how a developing country is actively positioning itself in places of power where essential decisions that dictate global peace and development take place. By way of illustration you can take a look at some of their other goals, "Join the ranks of the world's most innovative countries, with great self-reliance and strength in science and technology," and also, "Become a leading country in education, science and technology, talent, sports, and health; significantly enhance national soft power" (Xi Jinping 2022). This is a very powerful picture of a hard-working and ambitious nation. As a result, through the Chinese government's rhetoric, it is clear that China sees a difference between standing in a place of influence versus becoming a hegemonic/imperialist power. The former is acceptable because it serves as a way to unionize nationstates and make faster and better development for human progress. The latter is seen as illegitimate because it is solely focused on maximizing state power while disregarding the dignity and rights of nation states and peoples.

The Communist Party of China (CCP) can be declared a party that truly works for the good of its people as it considers many aspects of human life. This is the aspiration that all developing and developed countries should have. Which can be the reason China supports other countries' advancement towards global positions of influence, especially the global south that lived under colonial rule or were violated by Western powers. That is the reason the statements above show a desire for growth. Furthermore, when the idea of becoming a "leading" country is

analyzed, two things are clear: 1) China wants to be one of the best countries in these fields; and 2) China is competing to become one of the greatest countries in the world. The first point further supports the idea of China behaving as an exemplar developing country and the latter shows the competitive spirit that is illustrated in the outer circle in diagram 1.1.

The last quote mentioned above emphasizes a desire for influential power by mentioning that all of this development must happen for the enhancement of “national soft power.” In an age where war has proven to be detrimental for all parties involved, soft power is becoming essential because it allows countries to get what they want in non-confrontational ways. It is also important to highlight that the first quote mentions the idea of ranks which is also acceptable in the outer layer of China’s international thinking. Thus, while the Chinese government exhibits hegemonic-like thinking, it is nonetheless reasonable because it stands outside the hegemonic ideas of maximization of power and territorial manipulation; rather, it focuses on fair competition and desire for influence.

In spite of China’s different views on power, its desire for growth can still be easily taken as threatening. As mentioned before, the Chinese state holds a protective-like mindset that contradicts their call for trust in international affairs. Interestingly enough, this protective mindset can be explained by the history of foreign aggression that China experienced (Shih Chih-Yu, 2012). This mindset can also be seen as a strategic way for China to stand against what it fears the most, foreign invasion and imperialism. Thus, its efforts to improve military power might be preventative measures rather than threatening plans. As Chih-Yu Shih mentions, “the pursuit of national interests could be a disguise for the quest for acceptance in terms of attaining an equal sovereignty.” As an illustration you can read Xi Jinping’s statements to the National Party Congress where his fear of outside powers is revealed. In his statement, it is stated,

“External attempts to suppress and contain China may escalate at any time.” Following it, he also stated:

Our country has entered a period of development in which strategic opportunities, risks, and challenges are concurrent and uncertainties and unforeseen factors are rising. Various “black swan” and “gray rhino” events may occur at any time. We must therefore be more mindful of potential dangers, be prepared to deal with worst-case scenarios, and be ready to withstand high winds, choppy waters, and even dangerous storms... (Xi Jinping 2022).

The main purpose of the statement above is to preface why the Chinese Communist Party is in the best position to lead the country and to show why the people should help to strengthen the party. Nevertheless, the statement reveals the mindset of the CCP. In the document published by the State Council Information Office, the CCP government clearly states that it does not believe that rising countries are inherently bound to cause chaos in the international system in the pursuit of power. However, through the argument above they state that they do believe that rising countries will be at risk from external factors because of their rising power. This reiterates the type of hegemonic mindset China believes current global powers hold. Especially important is the idea of “containing China.” They talk about this with a concerned tone, as if the leaders of the international community are against China expanding its influence and developing into a greater power. The “at any time” part of this statement further illustrates the immediacy of their concern. Thus, it is as if China must be extremely aware and prepare to protect its sovereign rights. As a result, as China improves its protective measures, the international community sees China as threatening and fears it won’t be a responsible leader if given the chance. This lack of trust makes the international powers leading the international community and countries like China be in constant suspicion of each other. Therefore, they are both always in motion to try to guess the other’s next step.

This realist thinking establishes that as China grows other countries will try to protect themselves in an effort to not be influenced or threatened by China. On the other hand, China also feels the need to protect itself as a response to the threat they assume they will receive from other countries. This attitude, while very common in the international community, is very problematic when it is introduced and accepted in the thinking and strategic work of the People's Republic of China. Especially under Xi Jinping's world view because of his beliefs on shared future and common good for humanity. Through Xi Jinping's and Zhao Tingyang's world view, as seen in statements mentioned above, nation states should trust each other and interact in a way that does not cause harm to others. Thus, there should be no fear of threat. Nevertheless, Xi Jinping, while introducing an alternative view of how to use power in a mutually beneficial way, internalizes fears from the global system it is trying to escape and navigate.

Conclusion

According to the Chinese government's conception of China in the world and China's historical background, China's place in the global system is undeniably one of extreme power and leadership in facilitating global collaboration. Political history coming from China, as described in Zhao's Tianxia System, highly influences the way China sees itself and the global community. As seen above, China calls for trust and collaboration in the global system, but also supports fair competition that does not rely on "hegemonic" or "imperialist" thinking. At the center of the Chinese state's international politics is a belief in a shared future in opposition to the system of international affairs where states are in constant struggle to maximize their power through individual-focussed means. China's place in the international system can also be described as an actor standing in places of influence to improve collaboration and development in the new era. This self-characterization stands in contrast to the historical characteristics of

global powers that have sought to stay in power by violating the dignity of other states and their people for material and territorial gains—that is, influence through imposition, as seen in the Wesphalian structured international system.

Xi Jinping's proposed structure for the international system highlights China's historical path in leadership. During the Tribute System era of the Ming and Qing dynasties, rule and power was not about domination, which are the cornerstones of hegemonic governance, instead they ruled in relation to influence and mutual collaboration. During most of that period, Chinese culture stood in high regard throughout the Asian region. Countries like Korea were incredibly submissive to the Chinese state not because of internalized inferiority or force but rather cultural admiration. Moreover, the Tribute System spread throughout the region as a script for international affairs and interchange. China's level of influence led the region to a designated and respected international system that impacted their economy and cultural structure. The Tribute System was incredibly influential and beneficial for everyone involved. Not to mention that the core values were also the harmony of "all-under-heaven" and the betterment of all states. Zhao's Tianxia System clearly depicts the international structure that Xi is promoting in his conceptualization of Global Community of Shared Future, which is founded on Confucian ideas of familyship.

In contemporary times, China stands in a position of influence to lead the region in economic development and global collaboration as an exemplary developing country—providing influence through modeling. Xi Jinping advocates for neither a hegemonic/imperialist or entirely egalitarian system but rather one where nation states can compete while maintaining equal respect.

The rhetoric used by the Chinese government is powerful in its narrative and is relatively convincing. Xi believes China has the ability to stand as a model nation and step into a global system that needs regulations and more guidance in its cooperative actions. Additionally, China can be identified as an architect for advocating for the rights, interests, and representation of the global south in the global community because, as a successful developing power, China is not only a model for other countries but also a leading actor in guiding systematic international adjustment in the new era. This characterization of China as a leader matches more with Shih's description of a system led by moral superiority; it departs from the Tianxia System that Zhao presents, where there is no central or leading power.

The characterization that the Chinese Communist Party portrays about China complements the existing group of powers leading global governance. This is because global powers such as the United States and other Western powers who evolved through the maximization of their territorial, economic, and military power (often through the exploitation of weaker states) have kept an international system with very traditional views whereas China brings in a new perspective. The rise of China as a modeling developing state focused on peaceful collaboration, the goal of a shared future, and fair competition would bring an extraordinary shift to the global arena without challenging the existing power structure of the traditional system of international affairs because it seeks international acceptance. However, the United States is already occupying a hegemonic position in the international community, thus, any new proposed framework—especially one coming from China—would likely be perceived as a threat. The acceptance of China as a freely influential state, however,—without criticism of its domestic governance— would not only bring fresh and diverse ideas for global governance but also encourage the global south to improve its development and collaboration efforts and give

them a voice to express how the system could be of better assistance to countries that face financial and social challenges, among others.

China's historical and cultural background seeds into a justifiable role for itself internationally. It is nevertheless hard to say if this argument can be accepted by the international community and if upon achieving such status China will sustain its established rhetorical goals. The practicality of their aspirations are not completely reliable based on its words and actions—how it treats other states and their mutual conflicts, such as the South China Sea dispute.

Zhao Tingyang's approach to designing the new Tianxia System using China's historically informed political and cultural philosophy—which we have seen informs PRC political rhetoric—while also ideally beautiful and morally insightful—lacks the foundation to place a reliable central leadership for the system. This is because it has an idealist belief in a central government led by all which could result in a power struggle between the center states. Not to mention that he does not reveal how leaders would be chosen, or who would be chosen to lead in between the multicultural political sphere. Thus, just as China can inspire and lead other developing countries into a future of collaboration and mutual gain, it can also lead them to a more competitive international system if it abandons its moral standards upon achieving its desired international position. Then the new competitive environment can become a stage for further misunderstandings and exploitation of power by rising powers and threatened global leaders.

Conclusion

We have been looking at different theories of world order that encapsulate the most important legacies set by the Tianxia System and other Chinese political structures, such as the Imperial System. Special attention was given to Zhao Tingyang's new conceptualization of Tianxia. Chih-Yu Shih's political analysis of Tianxia discourse was used to evaluate how the Tianxia System would reshape the modern international system, including an assessment of China's role as a central power within that structure. Shih's different perspective on Tianxia revealed the unavoidable threats and opportunities that a system of international relations set by Tianxia can provide and Zhao showed how a perfect Tianxia could result in an ideal world without involving a central leadership.

Zhao's Tianxia System illustrates an ideal international system. While this system does not claim to have a central power, the theory it provides allows us to imagine how ancient Chinese leadership functioned in the past and how such Chinese cultural history can provide a new approach to global governance. Meanwhile, Shih allows us to understand that China's identity and image within the international system, when observed through Tianxia discourse, have many possibilities. The idea of China as a role taker usually involves more opportunities than risks because the role is based on conforming to already established international norms. Through this perspective, China cares more about its image than its identity. On the other hand, the idea of China as a role maker corresponds to China performing on the basis of self-interest.

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, Western-centered approaches to understanding China typically conclude that China's rise is a threat. For example, a report to the Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, suggests that China is

not a peace-oriented country¹⁰ (Review Commission, U.S. China Economic and Security, 2017).

While the review assesses the state of US-China relationship, it does so from an American perspective, and mainly focuses on how the United States can act to preserve its hegemonic position and influence the PRC's international behavior. This approach is useful for American national security but it is a narrow approach to understanding US-China relations because it fails to seek to understand China's point of view.

Focusing on China's perspective to understand China is the best approach to achieve an appropriate understanding of China's self-position and image in the international community.

Through the analysis provided in this paper, we are able to see clearly the most important characteristics of the Tianxia System and its central leadership, which highly influence modern Chinese political leaders. Tianxia can be summarized as a harmonious and world-centered international system based on relationality, selflessness, mutual cooperation, and universal compatibility; the central leader of Tianxia must adhere to these values and emulate them as a model member with the highest moral standards.

The People's Republic of China's government documents reveal that China firmly believes it holds Tianxia's most important values. Additionally, it seeks to expand those values to the international community because it believes that China stands on the right side of history.

The PRC lays out international principles to lead international affairs in a more peaceful and community-focused manner. Their approach reveals a responsible international community

¹⁰ The "2017 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission" is a report from the U.S.-China Economic and Security review commission sent to the Congress. The Report reviews various areas sent by Congress to be investigated by the review commission. There are a vast number of areas investigated including, but not limited to: China's stand on Nuclear Proliferation and the ways the United States can intervene or encourage the People's Republic of China to not seek proliferation; The United States trade system with China and how such transfers can threaten the national security of the United States (including the dependence of the national security industrial base of the United States on imports from China); the economic security of the United States, and employment in the United States; China's large economic growth and how that can impact the world energy and natural resources; in between others.

member that embodies Tianxia characteristics such as selflessness and world-centeredness. Through its approach, one can see how the legacies of Tianxia surface in the PRC's rhetoric and international image-making. Thus, we can see that ancient Chinese political thinking led China's international conceptualization to be primarily based on relations and commonalities that lead to mutual opportunities. China's historical narrative also leads the PRC to present an image of China as a model developing power that is in opposition to hegemony and imperialism but supports fair and friendly competition.

When Shih centers China as a leader in the Tianxia System, both as a role taker and role maker, the outcomes are more positive than the ones shown when China is at the periphery. While his examples are theoretical, they suggest that China is the most appropriate leader for this system. Shih indicates that China would lead through relational means and upon conforming to the system, other nations would reap the fruits of a harmonious world. Perhaps surprisingly, the PRC government is not only tapping into its past in order to support its identity, it also draws from the goals and structures of the Tianxia System and even the Imperial system to create a system built on what Zhao would call compatible universalism without the original concepts of social hierarchy. Its proposals for a shared future are almost identical to that of the Tianxia System: it is inclusive, sustains international equality, and encourages mutual cooperation. These attributes are incredibly important for the international system, especially when we take a look at the current state of international affairs.

Xi and other Chinese political leaders are using this framework and promoting this world-view because it builds the PRC's global image. As mentioned earlier, China is often seen through Western eyes, and often criticized for its political ideals. Providing a respectable and historically efficient structure for international leadership, as well as harmony-embracing cultural

values, China builds a nation-state image that stands against images that present China as a threatening international actor. Moreover, the PRC's framework claims that its model for addressing global issues can provide a more peaceful and stable world order. If other countries accept China's worldview, the PRC receives acknowledgement that can position it in a respectable global position. This is important to the Chinese nation because they want to establish themselves as a sovereign nation state with influence and able to defend its national and international interests.

That said, in reality, we do not know if China's goals would be sustained after it achieves its desired position in the international community. As Shih claims, states can become corrupt for the sake of maintaining their status. However, it is also important to remember, as Shih himself declared, that for China the image of a nation state is more important than the identity of being a nation state. In fact, in the second chapter of this paper you can see that China is just becoming a nation state. I say this because the way in which Xi Jinping organizes and transmits China's ideas and goals reveal a strategic plan for state structuration. He sets out a detailed plan to establish the Chinese nation state domestically and internationally. This approach reveals genuine desire for respect and acknowledgement. The strong attachment to Chinese political legacies also indicates that China, while having a rich cultural and political background, is looking back at who it was to build its identity in opposition to the identity the international community has imposed on it.

China's behavior and goals can be connected to both the role maker and role taker state, in Shih's formulation, because it is establishing itself as it believes it is meant to be seen based on its historical narrative and is simultaneously seeking international acknowledgment. Its need for belonging will likely lead it to conform to current international norms, however, its goals help it to promote distinctive ideas that can help establish a more just international system.

This understanding of China's self-conception in the international community is solely based on the rhetoric the PRC provides to its citizens and the global community, as well as the theories shared by Chinese scholars. Thus, this paper does not examine China's international policies in their application to give exact examples or support China's desired position internationally. However, the analysis provided gives insight into how Chinese scholars and the Chinese government see China and present it to the international community. This research helps to provide an alternative focus to China-related international discourse based on Chinese-led approaches to international affairs in opposition to the Western-driven discussion on China's rise and the threat many think it poses to the international system.

Bibliography

- “About SCIO.” The State Council Information Office; The People’s Republic of China. <http://english.scio.gov.cn/aboutscio/index.htm>. Accessed November 2023.
- Ringmar, Erik. “Performing International Systems: Two East-Asian Alternatives to the Westphalian Order.” *International Organization* 66, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 1–26. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.intorgz66.6&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Chan, Wing-Tsit. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. New Impression. Princeton University Press, 1969. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat03691a&AN=bard.b2362418&site=eds-live&scope=site>.
- Choi, Wooseon. “Structural Realism and Dulles’s China Policy.” *Review of International Studies* 38, no. 1 (2012): 119–40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41485493>.
- Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China. n.d. “Abouts Us.” Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies Renmin University of China. Retrieved 2024. http://rdcy.ruc.edu.cn/yw/ABOUT_RDCY/Abouts_Us/index.htm.
- Fairbank, John King. *The Chinese World Order; Traditional China’s Foreign Relations*. Harvard East Asian Series: 32. Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Final Communiqué of the Asian-African Conference. [online]. (Collection 'European Integration studies'). Retrieved from <https://www.cvce.eu/s/9b>.
- Gesley, Jenny. “The Peace of Westphalia | In Custodia Legis.” Library of Congress Blogs, 2017. <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2017/10/the-peace-of-westphalia/>.
- Hamashita, Takeshi. “The tribute trade system and modern Asia.” Translated by Neil Burton and Christian Daniels. In *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*, 12-26. Edited by Linda Grove and Mark Selden. Routledge, 2008.
- Hamashita, Takeshi. “The Ryukyu Maritime Network from the Fourteenth to Eighteenth centuries: China, Korea, Japan, And Southeast Asia.” In *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*, 57-84. Edited by Linda Grove and Mark Selden. Routledge, 2008.
- Hao, Yufan, and Ying Hou. “Chinese Foreign Policy Making: A Comparative Perspective.” *Public Administration Review* 69 (December): S136–41. 2009. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.pbca.mnstm69.188&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

“HAO Yufan.” n.d. The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen.
<https://hss.cuhk.edu.cn/en/teacher/420>.

“Introduction to COSC CCICH_Counsellors.” n.d. Counsellors' Office of the State Council.
 Accessed April 2, 2024. <http://english.counsellor.gov.cn/jgj.htm>.

Lewis, Mark Edward. *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*. [Electronic Resource]. SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture. State University of New York Press, 1990.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat03691a&AN=bard.b2009140&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

Review Commission, U.S. China Economic and Security. n.d. “2017 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.” 2017.
https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/annual_reports/2017_Annual_Report_to_Congress.pdf.

Shih, Chih-yu. “Assigning Role Characteristics to China: The Role State Versus The Ego State.” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8 (1): 71–91. 2012.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.24909854&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

Schindler, Dietrich, and Jiří Toman. *The Laws of Armed Conflicts*, pp. 280-281. Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2018.

The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China. “A Global Community of Shared Future: China’s Proposals and Actions.” *English.Gov.CN; The State Council; The People’s Republic of China*, 2023.

“United Nations Charter (full text) | United Nations.” n.d. the United Nations. Accessed January 14, 2024.
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text>.

Wang, Yuan-kang. “THE MING TRIBUTE SYSTEM.” In *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*, 145–80. Columbia University Press, 2011.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7312/wang15140.11>.

Wen, Wang. “Why China’s Rise Will Continue.” *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, no. 21 (July): 84–97. 2022.
<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.48686698&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

Wray, Christopher. “The Threat Posed by the Chinese Government and the Chinese Communist Party to the Economic and National Security of the United States.” FBI. 2020.
<https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/the-threat-posed-by-the-chinese-government-and-the-chinese-communist-party-to-the-economic-and-national-security-of-the-united-states>.

Xi, Jinping. "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive in Unity to Build a Modern Socialist Country in All Respects: Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China October 16, 2022." 2022.

Zhao, Tingyang. "All-Under-Heaven and Methodological Relationism: An Old Story and New World Peace". In Fred Dallmayr & Tingyang Zhao (eds.), *Contemporary Chinese Political Thought: Debates and Perspectives*. University Press of Kentucky. 2012.

Zhao, Tingyang, and Odd Arne Westad. *All under Heaven : The Tianxia System for a Possible World Order*. . Translated by Joseph E. Harroff. Oakland, California: University of California Press. 2021.

<http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=6612988>.