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**The "Ecumene" as a Paradigmatic Political Symbol:  
Comparison between Voegelin's "The Chinese Ecumene" and Zhao's "Tianxia System"**  
(Draft Version)

Voegelin's research on *Tianxia* is only a prototype that has some deficiencies resulting from the lack of qualified sources and the change of his theoretical interests.<sup>1</sup> However, his narrative on *Tianxia* is still insightful in different ways. Not only does he provides an external view on sinology, but also a new interpretive methodology to understand different socio-political order patterns, including ancient China. Considering the *Tiānxià*-mania in Chinese academia, comparing Voegelin's research with representative Chinese studies can help us further evaluate both the Voegelinian and the Chinese scholars' thoughts on *Tianxia*.

### 1. The *Tiānxià*-mania in the Chinese Context

Presumably, since the encounter between ancient China and the Western powers, Chinese scholars have begun to explain the conflict between the two orders. In the wake of the change of socio-political conditions, Chinese scholars pay more attention to traditional resources/*Huaxia* legacy, including the ancient *Tianxia* theory. Numerous scholars argue that China's *Tianxia* concept is more reasonable and superior to the Western international system, while few refers to its inherent deficiency.<sup>2</sup>

Earlier representative re-emphasis and re-interpretation of *Tianxia* can be traced back to the school of New Confucianism. For instance, Shili Xiong<sup>3</sup> starts the trend of rethinking the

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<sup>1</sup> Voegelin's narratives on China is the basis of this paper. The crucial Voegelin's study on China are as follows: (1) "The Chinese Ecumene" and "Universal Humanity" in *The Ecumenic Age, The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Volume 17, 2000, p.340-370. (For the convenience of citation and quotation, the following reference to *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin* are abbreviated as **CW**; thus the corresponding footnote can be abbreviated as CW, 17: 340-370 (similarly hereinafter).) (2) "The Typescript of The Chinese Ecumene" in 1959-1960 (unpublished source preserved by Prof. Peter J. Opitz) (3) *Israel and Revelation* (CW, 14: 80-110). (4) "World Empire and the Unity of Mankind," Lectures in 1961 (CW, 11: 134-155.). (5) "The Letter to Manfred Henningsen" (CW, 30: 477.).

<sup>2</sup> 梁漱溟, 《中国现代学术经典·梁漱溟卷》, 石家庄, 河北教育出版社, 1996。雷海宗, 《中国的文化与中国的兵》, 北京, 商务印书馆, 2001。徐建新, 《最坏的国际关系理论与最好的天下理论?—评赵汀阳《天下体系: 世界制度哲学导论》》, 赵汀阳, 《天下体系: 世界制度哲学导论》, 南京, 江苏教育出版社, 2005。

<sup>3</sup> Most literature puts the full name of these scholars in such a way that the surname at the front and the given name behind. To follow the English convention, the author makes an adjustment by putting the given name before and the surname behind in this subsection.

traditional Chinese thoughts; he reconsidered the inherent dilemma between “大道之行也，天下为公” (“When the Da Dao (the Grand Course/Way) executes, the *Tianxia* is public/shared by all.”) and “天下为家” (Now, the Grand Course has vanished, the *Tianxia* is private/a family inheritance).<sup>4</sup> He also further developed the relationship between 内圣 (NeiSheng, inner sagelihood) and 外王 (WaiWang, outer kingliness).<sup>5</sup> In addition to Shili Xiong, the contemporary Youlan Feng, Shuming Liang, Zongsan Mou, Fuguan Xu also elucidate the new implications of *Tianxia*. During this period, although scholars hold different views concerning *Tianxia*, they share the same context of responding to the impact of the so-called modern western world; namely, they intended to adapt the Chinese legacy under new socio-political conditions.

In the twenty-first century, the discussion on the *Tianxia* has been again active. In the past two decades, a large number of works on *Tianxia* have emerged in Chinese academia, showing a meaningful intellectual craze<sup>6</sup>, which has also attracted the attention of international academia.<sup>7</sup> Representative scholars include Hui Wang, Zhaoguang Ge, Zhuoyun Xu (Cho-Yun Hsu), and Tingyang Zhao. For instance, Hui Wang refers to a dual narrative structure between the empires and the nation-state in his consideration of the rise of modern Chinese thought. Zhuoyun Xu (Cho-Yun Hsu) and Tingyang Zhao argue that the Chinese *Tianxia* is a cultural concept and is borderless.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Comparison between “The Chinese Ecumene” and “Tianxia System”

<sup>4</sup> 熊十力, 《乾坤衍》, (十力丛书) 上海古籍出版社, 2019. Shili Xiong, *QiánKūnYan*, Shili Series, Shànghǎi gǔjí chūbǎn shè. 刘清平, 儒家倡导的是天下为公还是天下为家:兼论晚年熊十力对孔孟的批判, 探索与争鸣, 2013. Qingping Liu, Confucianism advocates whether “the *Tianxia* is public” or “the ‘*Tianxia*’ is private”: On Shili Xiong’s Criticism of Confucius and Mencius in his later years, Exploration and Free Views, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> 汪晖, 《帝国与国家》, 《现代中国思想的兴起》(上卷/第二部) 北京: 生活·读书·新知三联书店, 2008 年版。

<sup>6</sup> 蒋庆, 《公羊学引论》, 沈阳, 辽宁教育出版社, 1997; 蒋庆, 《政治儒学: 当代儒学的转向、特质与发展》(北京三联书店, 2003)、蒋庆、盛洪, 《以善致善: 蒋庆与盛洪对话》(增订本), 福建教育出版社, 2014。徐建新, 《最坏的国际关系理论与最好的天下理论?—评赵汀阳《天下体系: 世界制度哲学导论》》, 《天下体系: 世界制度哲学导论》, 南京, 江苏教育出版社, 2005。但兴悟:《两大国际体系的冲突与近代中国的生成》, 中国社会科学院研究生院博士论文, 2005 年, 23~38 页; 李少军:《论中国文明的和平内涵: 从传统到现实—对“中国威胁论”的回答》, 载《国际经济评论》, 1999 年第 1 期, 30~33 页; 盛洪:《什么是文明》, 载《战略与管理》, 1995 年第 5 期, 88~89 页。

<sup>7</sup> In recent years, the discussion on *Tianxia* has become more heated, in addition to the Chinese academia, the academic enthusiasm for this issue has extended to the international academia. The representative scholar to interpret the Chinese *Tianxia* is Zhao, Tingyang and the “All-under-heaven System,” and Wang, Hui’s *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*. Modern China. 2008,

As for the international interpretation, it is worthwhile to mention the argument of the “American *Tianxia*” conined by Wang Gungwu and developed by Salvatore Babones. Details please see Salvatore Babones, *American Tianxia: Chinese Money, American Power, and the End of History*, Bristol, UK: Policy Press 2017.

<sup>8</sup> 许倬云, 《说中国: 一个不断变化的复杂共同体》, 桂林: 广西师范大学出版社, 2015 年版, 第 2-47 页。

As far as the research status in Asian academia is concerned, the term *Tianxia* and its meaning remain unclear enough: no matter in terms of the historicity (the origins, the transitions, or the core connotations) or the theoretical paradigm. Furthermore, the relationship between "Tianxia" and the world, "Tianxia" and Zhongguo, also needs further analysis. However, considering the purpose of this subsection, the author chooses Zhao's "The Tianxia System" as a representative case to analyze its primary arguments and compare it with Voegelin's discussion on the Chinese *ecumene*<sup>9</sup>

The reason to choose Zhao's "Tianxia System/All-under-heaven System" is not primarily because its historical sources are comprehensive or its interpretative methodology is justified, but because it provides a relatively complete theoretical exposition/re-interpretation of *Tianxia* in a new socio-political context.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, the comparison is more of a crossreference and a tentative assessment of Zhao and Voegelin on *Tianxia*.

**(1) The Premises.** Generally, Voegelin and Zhao are dissatisfied with the extant socio-political articulation based on the secular nation-state. Both of them argue that politics is more extensive than modern mainstream political theories. For example, Voegelin's political theory intends to explore the order of human existence in history, while Zhao points out that "politics is an ontological problem that determines human life and death." In a sense, they are not satisfied with the liberal modern political system. If the Voegelinian theoretical start point on *Tianxia* is to search for equivalent symbols and experience of *ecumene* in the eastern, then

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<sup>9</sup> 1. 赵汀阳,《天下体系:世界制度哲学导论》,中国人民大学出版社,北京,2011./Tingyang Zhao: *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of World Institution*, China Renmin University Press, 2011.

(The following footnotes will be abbreviated as such: 赵汀阳,《天下体系》(2011)/Tingyang Zhao: *The Tianxia System*, China Renmin University Press, 2011)

2. 赵汀阳,《天下的当代性:世界秩序的与实践与想象》,北京:中信出版社,2016年版,第60页、第142页;赵汀阳,《天下体系》,南京:江苏教育出版社,2005年版。(A Possible World of All-under-heaven System: The World in the post and for the future, CITIC Press Group, Beijing, 2016) (The following footnotes will be abbreviated as such: 赵汀阳,《天下的当代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: *A Possible World of All-under-heaven System*, CITIC Press Group, 2016)

3. Zhao Tingyang, "A Political World Philosophy in terms of All-under-heaven (Tian-xia)," *DIOGENES*, SAGE, 2009.

4. *Tianxia*, tout sous un même ciel. L'ordre du monde dans le passé et pour le futur. Paris 2018

5. Zhao Tingyang, *Alles unter dem Himmel - Vergangenheit und Zukunft der Weltordnung*, Aus dem Chinesischen von Michael Kahn-Ackermann, Suhrkamp Verlag, Berlin, 2020.

6. Feng Zhang, *The Tianxia System: World Order in a Chinese Utopia*, global Asia Book Review, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Since Tingyang Zhao began to elucidate "Tianxia System" at the beginning of the twentieth century, there are numerous analyzes and criticisms on his arguments including the interpretation of historical materials and the methodological principles, for instance, in the second edition in 2011, *The Tianxia System*, included fifteen critical articles in the appendix. Details please see: 赵汀阳,《天下体系》(2011)/Tingyang Zhao: *The Tianxia System*, China Renmin University Press, 2011, p. 111-271.

Zhao's "Tianxia System" is to "construct a universal shared order of coexistence for the world."<sup>11</sup>

**(2) The implication of *Tianxia*.** Voegelin's discussion on *Tianxia* is subordinate to his theory of "The Ecumene Age," which is the oriental equivalent symbolism of the western *ecumene*, precisely, the ancient Greek *ecumene-oceanos*. According to Voegelin's study, *Tianxia* is a contemporary parallel symbolization of ecumenic empires in the Chinese Ecumenic age. Furthermore, as Voegelin contends, "the problem is not the plurality of societies in which the ecumenic symbolism appears-Sumerian, Egyptian, Persian, Greek, Roman, Chinese—but the plurality of Ecumenic Ages."<sup>12</sup> Generally, Voegelin's study on *Tianxia* can be regarded as an Eastern empirical case to enrich "The Ecumenic Age" and also the searching for the order of human existence in history. Namely, Voegelin's investigation of Chinese *Tianxia* is mainly based on the triadic structural paradigm of "The Ecumenic Age": the spiritual outbursts, the concupiscential imperial conquest, and historiography as a new symbolism. Precisely, Voegelin roughly assumes that the Chinese Ecumenic Age/the *Tianxia* period starts from the East Zhou Dynasty around 800 B.C. besides, his general analysis on *Tianxia* reflected in "The Chinese Ecumene."<sup>13</sup>

As for Zhao, *Tianxia* is "a theory;" it refers to "a world of worldness" or "the worldlization of the world if understanding the world as a process of a dynamic generation." Moreover, "the Tianxia System" is an "order of being," "an order to internalize the world" or "internalization of the world," "The concept of Tianxia expects a world system that the world becomes the political subject, an order of coexistence taking the whole world as the political unit."<sup>14</sup>

Besides, Zhao claims that the concept of *Tianxia* also contains a kind of political ontology. It can be called an "ontology of coexistence," which is the ontological basis for establishing the political order. For Zhao, if there is no way to construct a universal shared order of coexistence, it is impossible to overcome oppositions, conflicts, and wars, let alone establish a common life for humankind.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Zhao's "Tianxia System" also has a triadic structure. Zhao argues that "*Tianxia* is a concept of the world with a trinity structure, namely, a concept of the world superimposed by three layers of worlds with different implications." "In the geographical sense,

<sup>11</sup> 赵汀阳,《天下的当代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.12; 128.

<sup>12</sup> CW, 17: 342.

<sup>13</sup> CW, 17: 343; 354; 356.

<sup>14</sup> 赵汀阳,《天下的当代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.2, 136.

<sup>15</sup> 赵汀阳,《天下的当代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.2, 128.

*Tianxia* refers to all the land under heaven, namely, the entire world." "In the sense of social psychology, *Tianxia* refers to the common choice of all people in the world, namely, people's hearts." "In the political sense, *Tianxia* refers to the world political system."<sup>16</sup>

**(3) The methodology to study *Tianxia*.** Voegelin's methodology on *Tianxia* follows the hermeneutical paradigm of "The Ecumenic Age" and the principles of the theory of order analyzed before. Zhao's methodology follows the rational argument from Kant to Rawls and Habermas; additionally, he employs the game theory to demonstrate the ontological priority of the "Tianxia System," which is an apparent feature of his argument.

**(4) The Structure of *Tianxia*.** Considering that Voegelin's study on *Tianxia*, as an eastern empirical source, subjects to his analytical paradigm of "The Ecumenic Age," the structure of *Tianxia*/the Eastern Ecumenic Age contains three interactive elements: ecumenic empire, spiritual outburst, and historiography.<sup>17</sup> As Voegelin demonstrates in his studies on China, all three elements of the structure of *Tianxia* exist in China, among which the historiography is the most active.

In Voegelin's viewpoint, compared with the ambiguity of the imperial dynastic changes,<sup>18</sup> the incompleteness of spiritual breakthroughs, the flowering of historiography had more profound roles in China, which were represented by Confucianism and Ssu-ma Ch'en (Sīmǎ Qiān), respectively. Voegelin classifies Sima Qian with Herodotus, Thucydides, Polybius, Livy, the Israelite historians; he also argues that the Chinese history is similar to that of Israelite in the respect that both Chinese and Israelite, respectively, regarded themselves as the sole carrier of "the history of civilized mankind."<sup>19</sup>

Zhao has a relatively comprehensive description of his "Tianxia System." He employs the Rawlsian "lexical order" in the argument of justice. The difference is that Rawls' ordering is to show that the former item prior to/important than the latter, while Zhao's ordering is to indicate that the former item logically precedes the latter, namely, the former implies the latter, and the latter fulfills the former, while each item is of equal importance.

<sup>16</sup> 赵汀阳,《天下的当代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.60-62.

<sup>17</sup> As is analyzed before, Voegelin's intention of his theory of order is to detect the structure in reality in the history of human existence, meanwhile, as Voegelin argues that "only the triad of ecumenic empire, spiritual outburst, and historiography expresses equivalently the structure in reality that had been compactly expressed by the *oikoumene-okeanos* symbolism." Hence, to detect the structure in different socio-political community in the Ecumenic age, is to analyze the three elements and their interaction, which also can be applied to Voegelin's study on "Tianxia."

<sup>18</sup> CW, 17: 356-357.

<sup>19</sup> CW, 17 :354.

1. *Tian Dao* (天道), "the ways of nature."<sup>20</sup> It is a concept of natural theology or metaphysics. "Tian Dao" does not need to be proven, for it has fully manifested itself in the state of existence of all things. Moreover, "the way of nature" is not the object of science, not "the laws of nature" defined by science, but "the way of auto-harmonizing" of nature, which is regarded as a criterion for the pattern of human existence.

1.1 *Pei Tian* (配天), "match the Tian." It means *Ren Dao* (the way of humanity) that is subordinate to the "Tian Dao" must meet the latter. "Match the Tian" means that nature is the scale of freedom; all things on earth are the measures of the man<sup>21</sup>, which is the connotation of the *Tian Yi* (天意), the will of Tian.

1.2 *Sheng Sheng* (生生), "Let all beings be in becoming." (p.68, 108, 237.) The condition for all existence to exist is coexistence. Zhao claims that "existence presupposes coexistence" (p.265.)

1.3 *Wu Wai* (无外), "All-Inclusiveness." (p. 25, 45, 75.). It is a necessary condition for human coexistence. Namely, the essential condition for universal human security or permanent peace is "all-inclusiveness," which means the internalization of the world—namely, making the world an all-inclusive world with only internality without externalities. "Tianxia System" will become an all-inclusive guardianship system and maintain the universal order of the world. The ideal of the all-inclusive world is to reach the state of all people belonging to one family (*Si Hai Yi Jia*, 四海一家), namely, *Tianxia* is shared by all to achieve the nature of family.

2. "关系理性," "relational-rationality." (p. 36.) Namely, the basic norm of *Ren Dao* (the way of humanity). Since the *Ren Dao* is subject to *Tian Dao*, then it must be the first consideration to maintain the universal security of everyone.

2.1 "相互伤害最小化" (Mutual Damage Minimization). It is a direct application of the principle of *Shengsheng*. It is also a necessary condition for the coexistence relationship. It satisfies the rational choice of maximum risk avoidance and is the most radical rational principle.

2.2 "相互利益最大化" (Mutual Interests Maximization). It expresses the strategy of *De* (virtue) and *He* (harmony), namely, the strategy of universal interest and mutual interests. If

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<sup>20</sup> 赵汀阳, 《天下的当代性》 (2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.271. The translation of all terminologies in quotation marks are made by Zhao himself. In order to understand Zhao's intention more accurately, the English translation and interpretation of the traditional Chinese terminologies involved here all adopt Zhao's interpretation. If there is no translation from Zhao, the author of this dissertation will provide a basic translation and mark it with underline to show the difference. Moreover, it should be pointed out that there are some differences between Zhao's interpretation and classic interpretation.

<sup>21</sup> This is the opposite of Protagla's famous quote "Man is the measure of all things: of things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not."

"Mutual Damage Minimization" is a "negative" rational principle, then "Mutual Interests Maximization" is a "positive" rational principle. It has priority over "Self-interest Maximization." The principle is implemented as follows:

2.2.1 "孔子改善," the "Confucian Improvement" (p.117-118.). The fundamental implication of "Mutual Interests Maximization" stems from the Confucian principle of "established iff let established; improved iff let improved" (己欲立而立人, 己欲达而达人).<sup>22</sup> In the sense of political economy, the primary meaning of Confucian Improvement is: if a system is universally rightful, and iff such a system can guarantee that as long as the general interest of the society acquires the "Pareto Improvement," each individual's interests must also achieve the "Pareto Improvement" without exception.

2.2.2 "损补之道," "the way to supplement the deficiency." It stems from the natural balance adjustment principle of Laozi, namely, "It is the Way of Tian to diminish superabundance, and to supplement deficiency."<sup>23</sup> Zhao compares Laozi's idea of the balance of *Tian Dao* and Rawlsian equality. He argues that the Laozi' principle above has some similarities with Rawls' principle of "difference principle," but the reason is different. The Rawlsian principle is based on equality, while the Laozi principle is based on the balance of ontology.

2.2.3 "相互拯救," "Mutual Salvation." It is the most positive goal in the principle of "Mutual Interests Maximization." Zhao claims that although it is ideal, it is not without reality. "Mutual Salvation" is a fully-realized *De/Virtue*. If the full virtue is realized, the world will be close to the concept of the state of all people belong to one family (Si Hai Yi Jia, 四海一家).

3. "兼容普遍主义," "Compatible Universalism." It is another legacy of contemporary significance in the ancient "*Tianxia System.*" Zhao contends that there are divergences and even conflicts among multiple cultural values in the world, which is a given fact. Unlike monotheistic universalism, he argues that the compatible universalism understands the universal value as "applied to every relation," namely, the universal value can only be defined by "relation" but not "individual." Universal value defined by the compatible Universalism can avoid paradoxes. Thus:

<sup>22</sup>This is Zhao's translation in the 2016 Chinese edition, p, 117. The common English translation of the Confucian phrase is "wishing to be established himself, also seeks to establish others; wishing to be enlarged himself, also seeks to enlarge others." Details please see: James Legge (translator), "The Analects of Confucius," Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/pre-qin-and-han/zh?searchu=%E5%B7%B1%E6%AC%B2%E7%AB%8B%E8%80%8C%E7%AB%8B%E4%BA%BA%E5%B7%B1%E6%AC%B2%E9%81%94%E8%80%8C%E9%81%94%E4%BA%BA&en=on>

<sup>23</sup> James Legge (translator), "Dao De Jing"/ "Tao Te Ching," Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/dao-de-jing/ens?filter=83228&searchmode=showall>

3.1 “凡是能够以对称关系去定义的价值就是普遍价值,” “Any value that can be defined with symmetric relation is a universal value.” The universal value defined by the symmetric relation must be able to be universally recognized, which is a logical proof of the universal value with relation.

3.2 “凡是不能以对称关系去定义的价值就是特殊价值,” “Any value that cannot be defined with symmetric relation is a special value.”

In conclusion, Zhao claims that the future is unpredictable, so the dictionary of the “*Tianxia System*” also keeps its openness.<sup>24</sup>

**(5) The assessment of the Chinese spiritual thoughts.** As analyzed previously, the Voegelinian criterion to evaluate different order modes is “leap in being.” For Voegelin, the most prominent feature of the Chinese spiritual breakthrough is its incompleteness in the “leap in being.”

On the other hand, Zhao's criterion is concerned with the existence of human beings. He argues that the ancient Chinese *Tianxia* idea provides an alternative for the present world, not in the ethical sense but the ontological condition for universal order.<sup>25</sup> As he argues that “if Chinese political philosophy has an advantage, it is purely a theoretical advantage in methodology, and has nothing to do with morality.” The theoretical advantage is that the political system imagined in Chinese political philosophy can guarantee a consistent political game of the same structure from the grassroots units, through the state to *Tianxia*; thus, the political system has a consistent continuity, and the rules and values defined therein are universally valid and credible.<sup>26</sup>

**(6) The Fate of *Tianxia* (*Tianxia* and *Guo*).** In Voegelin's viewpoint, the coexistence and struggles of the two order modes represented by *Tianxia* and *Guo* are the most apparent and fierce struggles in the Chinese Ecumenic Age, starting from the dynasty of East Zhou. As Voegelin claims that “*In the aggregate, there have developed two sets of symbols: To the series t'ien-hsia (Tianxia), wen, tê (De, Virtue), wang, there corresponds the series Kuo (Guo, State), wu (Power), li (Force), Po (Ba, Hegemonies).*” Eventually, the differentiation and struggles of the two symbolic systems ended in the victory of force/power, which was represented by the political actions of Qin Shi Huang Di's unification of China in 221 B.C., namely, as Voegelin states it “the principle of force, represented by the Kuo, had swallowed up the ecumene and its

<sup>24</sup> 赵汀阳, 《天下的当代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.42-44, 269-278.

<sup>25</sup> 赵汀阳, 《天下的当代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.42-44, 284.

<sup>26</sup> 赵汀阳, 《天下体系》(2011)/Tingyang Zhao: The Tianxia System, 2011, p. 16.



order." Consequently, "The empire was an inflated kuo without spiritual legitimacy." Since then, Chinese dynasties had been committed to providing "spiritual substance" for the political power, which was not partially solved until the rise of neo-Confucian orthodoxy in the Song dynasty.<sup>27</sup>

Consistent with Voegelin's viewpoint, Zhao also argues that the establishment of the Qin Empire as a centralized sovereignty state means the end of the "*Tianxia* System." Moreover, Zhao argues that the evolution of Chinese politics is unique: Politics started in world politics (Zhou dynasty), degenerated into international politics (Spring and Autumn and the Warring States), and finally evolved into national politics (from the Qin dynasty to Qing dynasty).<sup>28</sup> To a certain extent, both Voegelin and Zhao claims that the struggle between *Tianxia* and *Guo* has occupied a prominent position in Chinese history, at least in the period of East Zhou.

In Zhao's opinion, the fact that the Zhou dynasty creates the "*Tianxia* System" provided a historical basis for his theory of the "*Tianxia* System," Zhou dynasty can be called a representative of a sound political system. However, his interpretation of Zhou is problematic. For instance, he argues that Zhou created the "*Tianxia* System" for the need to construct a valid political order in the historical context of "The small rules the huge," "The single rules the numerous."<sup>29</sup> However, that was not the case. Although the historicity needs to be confirmed by more archaeological sources, it is clear that the Zhou state was powerful instead of "small" and "single." Briefly, at the time of Di Yi of Shang, the royal family of Shang and the Zhou family were connected by marriage. At the time of King Zhou of Shang, the successor of Di Yi and the last king, the Zhou state was one of the three most powerful vassals of the Shang Dynasty. When King Zhou of Shang was stuck in internal and external issues, especially when he sent a large army to attack the Eastern Yi, King Wu of Zhou suddenly started a war/rebellion against the royal court and immediately marched to the royal capital. In the decisive battle in 1046 B.C., the Battle of Muye, King Wu of Zhou had excellent soldiers (Three hundred chariots, three thousand elite warriors, and four thousand five hundred soldiers), and he was the leader of the alliance (at least eight states were recorded) against the Shang dynasty.<sup>30</sup> The above

<sup>27</sup> CW, 17: 362; 370.

<sup>28</sup> 赵汀阳,《天下的当代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.125.

<sup>29</sup> 赵汀阳,《天下的当代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.50-59; 118-120.

<sup>30</sup> (1)《易經》泰卦六五爻辭曰：「帝乙歸妹，以祉，元吉。」；《詩經·大雅·大明》：「大邦有子，俔天之妹。文定厥祥，親迎於渭。造舟為梁，不顯其光。」；(2)《今本竹書紀年·帝辛》：「元年己亥，王即位，居殷。命九侯、周侯、邶侯。」(3)《左传》稱：“紂克东夷而損其身”。(4)《逸周書·世俘》(5)《史記·周本紀》說：“武王率戎車三百，虎賁三千人，甲士四萬五千人，以東伐紂。”《呂氏春秋·貴因》篇說：“武王選車三百，虎賁三千，朝要甲子之前，而紂為禽”。(6)《尚書·周書·牧誓》：「時甲子

historical records show that Zhou was neither "The small" nor "The single" in the process of successfully fighting/rebelling against the Shang dynasty and creating the "Tianxia System."

Besides, Zhao believes that the Zhou dynasty did not die of corruption but the "noble loophole of the good order."<sup>31</sup> "The decline of the Zhou dynasty was probably due to the failure to fulfill the high standards of De. Thus, it can be said that the key to Zhou's success also is its undoing." The end of the "Tianxia System"/ the Zhou dynasty is not the system's failure, but the result of "an idea is ahead of its time."<sup>32</sup> In short, all arguments concerning the decline of the Zhou dynasty above simplified the problem and are theoretically untenable. It does not make sense to claim that Zhou's failure is not the failure of the *Tianxia* system, because, historically, the system died together with Zhou and never appear in Chinese history.

**(7) The intention.** Presumably, when Voegelin and Zhao conduct the comparison between the ancient Chinese and Western order patterns, they possess different theoretical intentions. On the one hand, considering Voegelin's primary academic effects is to search for order experience by analyzing its symbols in the empirical world. It is logical and understandable that Voegelin intends to cover as many order patterns as possible when he extends the search for the order of humankind in history; China provides not only an indispensable but independent practice of searching for the order of existence. Besides, it is also necessary to cover Chinese *Tianxia* as a crucial empirical equivalence of the Western *ecumene* when Voegelin tries to develop the new analytical paradigm of "The Ecumenic Age."

On the other hand, briefly, Zhao is not satisfied with the extant nation-state system and the corresponding international system. The new "Tianxia System" intends to overcome the problems in the modern ages. As Zhao argues it "in order to save the world free from the domination of the hegemonic system and to save the world from possible future high-tech wars or the total despotism of the technical system, we need to make a new 'Tianxia System,' a world order that belongs to everyone in the world, thus surpassing the logic of hegemony since modern times." Also, Zhao possesses a vision of the "Tianxia System," as he states it:

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味爽，王朝至于商郊牧野，乃誓。……及庸，蜀、羌、髳、微、盧、彭、濮人。」(7) 楊寬 (1999 年)：《西周史》第一編：第三章〈周的開拓和克商〉，第三節〈武王克商〉，第 77 頁-第 35 頁。(8) 《呂氏春秋·貴因》說：“武王至鮑水（孟津附近），天雨雪，日夜不休，武王疾行不輟。軍師皆諫曰：‘卒病，請休之。’” (9) 《史記·殷本紀》曰：“甲子日，紂兵敗。紂走入（朝歌），登鹿台，衣其寶玉衣，赴火而死”。《逸周書·世俘》曰：“甲子夕，紂取天智玉琰五，環身以自焚”。(10) 顧頡剛《紂惡七十事的发生次第》。(11) 郭沫若《殷契粹編》。

<sup>31</sup> 趙汀陽，《天下的當代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, 119.

<sup>32</sup> 趙汀陽，《天下的當代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p. 119, 122-123, 127.

*"The new Tianxia System is to solve the problems of the present world, so it cannot be a replica of the ancient Tianxia System. The new Tianxia System is not a myth of universal human happiness, but only a system that seeks universal human security and shared benefits. It is by no means a new system that rules the world, but an **inclusive** guardianship system of the world. It attempts to guard the world, taking the coexistential way as a way of existence, give up the **exclusive** way of existence since modern times, thus avoiding the thorough failure of human destiny."*<sup>33</sup>

As is shown above, Zhao primarily intends to offer a possible alternative solution for the problems he proposed in his analysis. However, criticism of the basic structure of modern politics and the international political system, as well as related criticisms of issues such as democracy, is almost as old as its birth. To evaluate Zhao's alternative, we can start from two directions.<sup>34</sup> First, to check whether his criticism can stand up. Second, to analyze whether the alternative plan is valuable.

On the one hand, Zhao's comparison between the Western and Chinese political system is simplified and over-interpreted, which makes the criticism of the west suspicious.<sup>35</sup> Rather than saying it is a comparison between China and the West, it is better to say that it is an encounter between the ancient Chinese legacy and the modern socio-political situation worldwide that is dominant and shaped by the Anglo-American political system.

On the other hand, Zhao argues that his alternative "Tianxia System" is based on the political practice of the Zhou Dynasty, as have been pointed out by scholars that Zhao's analysis of ancient Chinese thoughts and system is suspectable. Zhao's alternative is more like a "托古改制" (pretexting the classical sources for transforming the existing system).<sup>36</sup> As for why Chinese thinkers always refer to the classical sources, Voegelin offers an insightful opinion that *"the epiphany of noetic experience of which I spoke above does not happen. Therefore the legitimization of the concept of order and revelation must result from an appeal to the classical sources and their reinterpretation."*<sup>37</sup>

Even though Zhao's criticism of the modern extant political system is not new, his interpretation of Chinese history and classics are also questioned; we can still analyze the validity of the new "Tianxia System" to see if it correctly interprets the phenomena concerning

<sup>33</sup> 赵汀阳, 《天下的当代性》 (2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.269-270.

<sup>34</sup> For representative critical analyses, please refer to the following work: 赵汀阳, 《天下体系》 (2011)/Tingyang Zhao: The Tianxia System, 2011, p.111-271.

<sup>35</sup> 赵汀阳, 《天下体系》 (2011)/Tingyang Zhao: The Tianxia System, 2011, p.194-199; 259-269.

<sup>36</sup> 赵汀阳, 《天下体系》 (2011)/Tingyang Zhao: The Tianxia System, 2011, p.161-171.

<sup>37</sup> CW, 30: 477.

human existence in the new socio-political situation. The "Tianxia System" is an alternative political institution that takes the world as an object; it indeed intends to improve the interest of each individual. Many scholars appreciate Zhao's reinterpretation of *Tianxia* as a solution for the problems in the contemporary world, yet, some claim that his solution is still incomplete, inherent many theoretical problems, which is more like a Chinese Utopia.<sup>38</sup>

Another issue worth noting is that in a new socio-political condition of human existence, Zhao's new theoretical attempt does not seem to care about individual personality. As a holistic/collective worldview and methodology, it does not involve individuals as a person, but as a rational machine part based on interests; thus, individual openness and dignity are still obscure. Moreover, it has the risk of ignoring the possibilities and problems of self-expression and self-identity of each existing unit, be it an individual or a member state in the prior world system.

The crux of the problem is that the analytical paradigms and principles of the "Tianxia System" are flawed. Firstly, the methodological holism/collectivism is questionable. Although Zhao criticizes the problems of the Western rational system, his plan does not seem to replace it but to push the collective rationality to the extreme. "Tianxia System" looks more like an extreme rational transformation of Rousseau's romantic plan for humankind.

Secondly, Zhao's attitude toward the Hypothesis of Rational Economic Man is also confusing. He criticizes the Hypothesis to show the deficiency of the western political system, but he substantially relies on it in his argument, although he changes the individual rationality to "relational rationality." (Leave the priority between the two kinds of rationalities aside, both share the same assumption: as the object of scientific observation, rational man, their relations, and interests are predictable, observable and countable.) Zhao's argument does not correct the narrowness/wrongness of the Hypothesis and its scientism vision; instead, it grafts Confucius' thoughts to the Prisoner's Dilemma, Nash equilibrium, Pareto Optimality and other concepts of the game theory to optimize Rawls's plan. In short, Zhao's plan does not reverse the trends of simplification, closure, and objectification of human existence but promote it to some extent.

Furthermore, Zhao's "Tianxia System" looks like an alternative to the severe problems in the present world. However, it is more like an effort to solve the anxiety of the Chinese self-identify/ the subjectivity or sovereignty of Chinese culture in a new socio-political situation by constructing a new order for humankind as the ancient Chinese did. For instance, Zhao argues

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<sup>38</sup> Feng Zhang, *The Tianxia System: World Order In A Chinese Utopia*, a Review on *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of a World Institution* By Zhao Tingyang, *global asia* Vol.4, No. 4, p.108-112. Cheng YUAN, Springer Science+Business Media B.V., part of Springer Nature 2017, Zhao, Tingyang: *A Possible World of All-under-the-Heaven System: The World Order in the Past and for the Future*.

that the philosophical basis of sovereignty is subjectivity; both individual rights and national sovereignty are subjective. On the other hand, he did not discuss the situation that the modern society ignores the sovereignty of the world, which is the core purpose of his "*Tianxia System*" and the logical result of his argument in the context. Instead, Zhao starts to criticize that modern society does not confirm cultural sovereignty, which is a significant issue as he claims. This kind of stray from the point frequently appear in his argument, which can/should be regarded as a true reflection of, at least, parts of his intentions: that is, he claims for the sovereignty/objectivity of Chinese culture.<sup>39</sup>

A substantial piece of evidence that can reflect his intentions is the Introduction of the 2011 edition of *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the philosophy of World Institution*. When Zhao mentioned the reason of the *Tianxia* study, he starts with the economic rise of China and talks a lot about how to understand China (the meaning of "Rethink China," or "Reconstruct China"), the rise of China and its responsibility for the world.<sup>40</sup> Hence, it is reasonable to argue that Zhao's intention belongs to generations of Chinese intellectuals mentioned before who believe that it is their responsibility to deal with the incompatibility between the conditioned modern socio-political world and the Chinese legacy after the encounter of *Huaxia* culture/civilization with modern western powers in the Ming/Qing dynasty, specifically, the defeat of the latter.

In summary, a shared world system is probably necessary for the issue manifested in the present globalization and the increasing development of hi-technology. However, if it does not rely on humans as a multi-level creature and the autonomy of member states, it is impractical and unjustifiable.

### 3. Further Issues related to the Chinese *Tianxia* mania

The argument concerning the superiority of ancient Chinese thoughts and political practice in comparing China and the West mentioned above has moved in a new direction in recent years. Some scholars intend to construct a history of the world/human history (the history of humanity) in which China occupies a prominent position. The arguments concerning the history of the world and the role of China have become hot topics, such as "the Chinese moment of world history,"<sup>41</sup> "New *Tianxia*-ism,"<sup>42</sup> "China and the World in the Next 10 Years," "Free

<sup>39</sup> 赵汀阳,《天下的当代性》(2016)/Tingyang Zhao: A Possible World of All-under-heaven System, CITIC Press Group, 2016, p.241.

<sup>40</sup> 赵汀阳,《天下体系》(2011)/Tingyang Zhao: The *Tianxia System*, 2011, p.1-10.

<sup>41</sup> "世界历史的中国时刻"研讨会,北京航空航天大学,2012,12,15.(Annual Meeting of "Chinese Moments in World History" held in Beihang University) (<http://www.opentimes.cn/Abstract/1858.html>).

<sup>42</sup> 许纪霖,新天下主义:世界历史中的中国时刻, Jilin Xu, New *Tianxia*-ism, Chinese Moment in World History. ([http://www.shehui.pku.edu.cn/upload/editor/file/20180829/20180829111508\\_4966.pdf](http://www.shehui.pku.edu.cn/upload/editor/file/20180829/20180829111508_4966.pdf)) ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j\\_RalkWpsWM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_RalkWpsWM))

Space" of European Civilization and Modern China."<sup>43</sup> The intellectual phenomena mentioned above probably follow and are motivated by the economic rise of China. Scholars in mainland China are making a new self-understanding concerning the World as a global community and the Chinese contribution. Although they do not involve Voegelin's research, their self-understanding of the *Tianxia* supplement Voegelin's research on the Chinese Ecumene as a modern Chinese alternative; more importantly, they become the object of the Voegelinian analysis.

It is conceivable that shortly, the academia of mainland China will have a more substantial interest in studying Voegelin's argument concerning the Ecumenic Ages and the Chinese Ecumene. As for the evaluation of these studies, we need to wait for more profound and mature works. Although the above considerations mixed with factors of pragmatic political conflicts and power desire, this phenomenon itself reflects that the existing image of the world is losing its persuasiveness, emerging political systems, for example, China, are in the position of challengers. The question is whether the emerging power proposes a Sino-centric universal system replaces the Eurocentric? Alternatively, does it abandon the previous provincialism and build universal humankind based on the recapturing of the reality and the experiencing of existence.

**In conclusion**, the rise of the *Tianxia* discussion has different characteristics and causes in different periods. Critically investigating each case is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we can still clearly see the common ground reflected in these studies: the self-identity crisis of Chinese as a socio-political community in a new socio-political condition. Such a problem did not become dominant for ancient Chinese because, for thousands of years, the deformed *Tianxia* system has been dominant in the area of East Asia until its defeat by another entirely heterogeneous deformed ecumenic system.

On the other hand, it is neither ethical nor practically possible to neglect the ancient Chinese self-understanding of existence entirely, but how to elucidate the spiritual/socio-political form of ancient Chinese based on the common ground of human existence in the new existential condition is a problem that remains to be solved.

Voegelin's China study subordinate to his analytical paradigm of "The Ecumenic Age" that is one of the most crucial theoretical instrument in his analysis of order patterns in socio-political situations in the history of human existence. As a hermeneutic-empirical paradigm, Voegelin's endless search for order in history seems to provide a possible solution to the

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<sup>43</sup> Xiaofeng Liu, "Free Space" of European Civilization and Modern China: Reading Schmitt's *Der Nomos der Erde*." National Academy of Development and Strategy, RUC (RUC Perspectives), 2018, Issue Vol. 4 (Total Issue Vol. 20)

problem emerges above. It is also a critical attempt to fulfill self-understanding and mutual-understanding among different order patterns in history, on which humans on earth in the new condition will be able to think about the common existential order.