

Original Paper

The Tianxia System: A Transcendence to the Liberal International Order

Yu Zhonghe^{1*}

¹ Shanghai University of Political Science and Law, School of Government Administration, Shanghai, China

* Yu Zhonghe, Corresponding Author

Received: April 11, 2023

Accepted: May 12, 2023

Online Published: May 19, 2023

doi:10.22158/ape.v6n2p107

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/ape.v6n2p107>

Abstract

The post-World War II Liberal International Order (LIO) promoted democracy, human rights, free trade, and a rules-based system. Yet it has been dominated by powerful countries, leading to limited representation and economic inequality in developing countries. In contrast, the Tianxia system is more inclusive. This study aims to make broader recommendations for addressing the confusion of the international system and the absence of global governance in the context of Sino-US competition. Using the method of comparative analysis, the Tianxia system and LIO are evaluated. The research shows that the Tianxia system surpasses the LIO to varying degrees in theory and practical experience, but it faces implementation challenges. This highlights the difficulty of a single country promoting the establishment of a world system. Therefore, the establishment of the Tianxia system is still incomplete, and more global forces are needed to jointly overcome the crisis of global governance.

Keywords

Tianxia system, Liberal international order, Global governance, International system, Sino-US relations

1. Introduction

The Liberal International Order (LIO) refers to the post-World War II system of international institutions, norms, and rules that promoted democracy, human rights, free trade, and a rules-based international system. It has its roots in institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund, as well as regional organizations such as the European Union and NATO. Despite its role in shaping the international system over the past few decades, it has been dominated by a small group of powerful states, notably the United States and

Western Europe, that use their economic and military power to shape the international system to their advantage. This has led to a lack of representation and voice in many developing countries, especially in the decision-making processes of international institutions. Its emphasis on liberal economic policies such as free trade and deregulation has led to economic inequality and social unrest in many countries, especially developing countries. This has led to calls for a more equitable and inclusive approach to global governance that takes into account the needs and interests of all countries and peoples.

In this context, Zhao Tingyang's 2005 book *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of World Institutions* has been widely cited and discussed in academic circles, rekindling interest in traditional Chinese philosophy and its potential application to contemporary global issues. Moreover, the concept has been incorporated into official Chinese foreign policy discourse, with Chinese leaders and policymakers citing it in speeches and policy documents. Zhao Tingyang's view of the world system has had a profound impact on political theory, international relations, East Asian studies and other fields. Based on traditional Chinese philosophy, the Tianxia system considers all individuals and nations to be equal members of a global community. It argues that the current Westphalian state system, which emphasizes the principle of the sovereign state, is insufficient to address contemporary global challenges such as climate change, economic inequality, and geopolitical conflict. Instead, the Tianxia system provides a more inclusive and sustainable framework for global governance based on mutual respect and cooperation among all countries and peoples. The concept of the Tianxia system has had a major impact in the academic and intellectual circles, and has become an important point of reference for discussing the future of global governance and international order.

2. Presentation of the Question

There is much discussion today about international issues, including lack of global cooperation, ineffective multilateral institutions, the rise of populism and nationalism, environmental degradation, cybersecurity threats, global health crises, America's role in the world, the rise of China, science and technology The impact on society, etc., all of which can be attributed to the failure of global governance. In this context, with the rise of China, the reform proposals for global governance proposed by the Chinese government and scholars have gradually received the attention of all parties in the world. Meanwhile, scholars have turned their criticisms on the Liberal International Order (LIO). This section includes a literature review, an elaboration of the research background, and a formulation of the research question.

The crisis of liberal internationalism is largely due to the development of the West itself and the weakening of the centrist and progressive alliances behind the postwar liberal order. It highlights growing economic inequality and stagnation in advanced industrial democracies, leading to the perception that liberal internationalism favors the rich and powerful over the working and middle classes. Emphasizing the West's own development as the main driver of the crisis, scholars suggest that liberal internationalism needs to be reconnected with the West's pursuit of social and economic

progress in order to regain support (Note 1). Regarding the understanding of the crisis of the liberal international order, some scholars have put forward different views. They believe that there are two forces that are dissatisfied with the status quo of the LIO. One is dissatisfaction with the economy, mainly within Western countries, driven by Western populist politicians and their voters; the second is dissatisfaction with the LIO status hierarchy, mainly in semi-peripheral areas, driven by highly competitive authoritarian governments and their support. Promoted by, for example, Russia. (Note 2)

On the one hand, the United States, as the core of the LIO, has made many achievements in the relationship between the United States and the LIO. The liberal international order dominated by the United States has endowed the United States with significant prestige benefits and promoted the globalization of American national interests. However, the advent of neoliberal globalization has disrupted the connection of a significant portion of the American working class with the nation's leaders. As a result, the Trump presidency has irreparably damaged the liberal order, and new domestic and international community agreements are necessary to reinvigorate U.S. global leadership. (Note 3)

On the other hand, the world is also concerned about China's role in the international order and its impact on the existing liberal international order dominated by the United States. Although many Western scholars believe that China poses a challenge to LIO and is currently the biggest threat to LIO; at the same time, some scholars have conducted in-depth research on China's intentions and actions and have shown that China may only be engaged in strategic competition with the United States. It did not show the meaning of challenge, but only expressed dissatisfaction with the hegemonic behavior of the United States in LIO. China is currently challenging the liberal international order, but not necessarily overturning it, and the specific actions and institutions China has established, such as the AIIB, challenge the existing order led by the United States to a certain extent. (Note 4) China is seeking to maintain and even expand the liberal character of the current order. In other words, seeking selective and gradual adjustments to the existing order while undermining its hegemonic character rather than seeking to overthrow it, the study goes on to suggest is China's vision for a future international order. (Note 5) For the future of LIO, pessimistic scholars believe that the liberal order faces challenges due to internal income distribution and institutional problems, but the decline of the order is not inevitable, and even doomed to fail. However, in addition to affirming LIO's own flaws, they also seem to be targeting China in the context of Sino-US competition, believing that China is the factor for LIO's decline. Facing the current crisis-ridden LIO status quo, the academic circles have launched intense discussions on the possibility of changes in the global order in the future. There are two main points of contention. The first argues that no other system can provide the prosperity and freedom that a liberal order can. Liberal states need internal reforms to address growing inequality and wealth distribution, and propose a developed welfare state to address internal challenges. Reforming globalization, or re-globalization, is critical to addressing geopolitical challenges from China and other countries that the United States sees as illiberal (Note 6). The second focuses on how China's growing power and influence will reshape world politics and what alternative versions of the international order may

emerge. (Note 7) For example, a new multipolar world will emerge. In the multipolar world, there will be three real orders, one dominated by China, one dominated by the United States, and a weak international order that promotes cooperation between them. (Note 8) In the context of the lack of global governance and the fragmentation of the international order, the Tianxia system has once again attracted the attention of the world. Some scholars have argued that discussing the rise of Tianxia discourse should be taken as an example of soft power, because Tianxia presents specific national cultures as generally desirable values, and China's role in the world is to promote these values. (Note 9) Tianxia originated from the Utopian ideological tradition in Chinese political culture that seeks to solve the problems of unity and division, order and chaos. Tianxia provides a heuristic tool for understanding how Chinese elites view their role in the world, and it reflects the common feeling among Chinese that it is China's turn to create a civilized and harmonious world (Note 10). Some people also observe the "Tianxia" system from the perspective of political theory, that is, Tianxia replaces the anarchic structure of the current international system with a hierarchical order. (Note 11) Scholars supporting this interpretation also argue that a Sinocentric hierarchical order could lead to greater internal stability in the region, but that the potential to regulate this order could have negative consequences. (Note 12) Other related research also discusses the conceptual basis of the Tianxia system and its consistency with the narrative of China's peaceful rise. (Note 13)

Overall, while academic discussion of the challenges facing the Liberal International Order (LIO) has expanded significantly in recent years, the focus of the discussion remains on the impact of China's rise on the existing U.S.-dominated LIO. While some scholars believe that China poses the greatest threat to the LIO and challenges its norms and values, others believe that China seeks to maintain or even expand the degree of freedom of the existing order through selective adjustments, while weakening the hegemony of the United States. Although the existing literature explores a series of alternative versions of the international order, such as the new multipolar world dominated by China and the United States, the Tianxia system contributed by Chinese scholars, etc., the dynamics of these alternative versions and their comparison with each other are still lacking. Therefore, this article addresses the question of what is the relationship between the Tianxia system and the liberal international order, whether the two are in a competitive relationship, complementary or otherwise. The research goal is to provide suggestions for the disorder of the international system and the lack of global governance in the context of Sino-US competition.

In addition to the introduction and this section, this paper consists of three parts. The third part is the introduction of the Tianxia system and the liberal international order; the fourth is to establish a theoretical framework for the Tianxia system to surpass the liberal international order in a theoretical and practical sense, including philosophy and historical criticism respectively, to support the Tianxia proposed in this research system transcendence. On the basis of summarizing the research, the conclusion part puts forward the competitive vision of global governance of the world system and the liberal international order coexisting and gradually completing transcendence under the competition

and institutional conflicts between China and the United States. Finally, further limitations and directions for future research are pointed out.

3. The Tianxia System and the Liberal International Order

This section introduces two different perspectives on governance based on world politics and order. The Tianxia system proposed by Zhao Tingyang emphasizes the importance of a well-governed world system, that is, the collective interests of the world are given priority, and enemies are turned into friends. In contrast, the Liberal International Order (LIO) focuses on establishing clear principles, rules, and institutions to define relations among states, with particular emphasis on promoting democracy, human rights, economic interdependence, and political integration.

3.1 Tianxia System

3.1.1 Concept and Historical Background

The core concept of “Tianxia” contains three meanings at the same time: first, the entire land of the world. It is roughly equivalent to the “earth” in the basic structure of “heaven, earth, and man” in Chinese ontology; second, all the people in the world. In the context of ontology, it is roughly equivalent to “human” in “heaven, earth, and human”, and in the context of politics and society, it is equivalent to “people”. And the hearts of the people in the world are the spiritual meaning of the world; third, a world system. This is the most theoretical meaning of the concept of Tianxia, which means the way the world is governed or the conditions for the existence of the world. A chaotic political existence is actually an invalid existence. Only a well-governed world is a qualified and effective world. Therefore, a world with a world system is qualified to be defined as a “world”, otherwise it will be an “invalid world”. If we say that in the concept of Tianxia, the land of Tianxia is its material, and the heart of Tianxia is its value, then the system of Tianxia is its form of existence. (Note 14)

Zhao Tingyang proposed the Tianxia system in order to form a theoretical and historical comparison with the imperial model and make it a concept that can transcend international politics and construct world politics. The Tianxia system is not an empire, but an anti-imperialist world political system. The Tianxia system tries to recommend a world system in order to overcome various disasters caused by world anarchy and make it possible for the world collective rational actions aimed at developing the world’s public interests. The Tianxia system in this study refers to the third interpretation, a world system. (Note 15)

3.1.2 Main Features and Principles

The tianxia system has obvious Chinese epistemological color—political epistemology, that is, how to govern tianxia; priority and transcendence, since the world system is the general necessary condition and guarantee of the secondary political system, it has a theoretical Or logical priority (priority). Although world society and world institutions have not really existed in practice, their logical priority already implies their apriority; No contradiction, and any given political system, whether it be democratic or autocratic, must be generalizable at any political level. (Note 16) The principle of the

Tianxia system is to turn enemies into friends. The knowledge of “who is the enemy and who is the friend” may be the foundation of political science for Carl Schmidt, but this kind of knowledge is not so much the fundamental knowledge for Chinese political theory. It is an initial question, because the task assumed by Chinese political theory is to find a way to “turn enemies into friends” rather than to acquire the knowledge to “distinguish between friends and enemies”. (Note 17)

3.2 Liberal International Order

3.2.1 Concept and Historical Background

There are many discussions in academic circles about the concept of international order. The general international order refers to the clear principles, rules and institutions that define the relationship between countries that are parties to the order. Scholars have identified various types of security arrangements, including hegemony, balance of power, collective security, coordination, and security communities, which can be termed international security orders. These security orders vary according to the degree of competition and cooperation among states and the degree to which power and coercion play a central role. In addition to security orders, economic relations such as economic interdependence and regime types such as democracy may also be defining features of international order. Most analyzes of international order focus on great powers and emphasize the benefits of state acceptance of norms and institutions. However, some analyzes highlight the contentious nature of norms and institutions, which they attribute to the unequal distribution of global power and the influence of the most powerful states in shaping order. These analyzes place greater emphasis on issues of justice, global inequality, and poverty, and emphasize their importance to the legitimacy of the international order. (Note 18)

The discussion of international order in the United States usually refers to the Liberal International Order (LIO), which was first established by the United States after World War II. LIO's institutions include NATO, the US-Japan alliance, the open trading system managed through the Bretton Woods institutions and the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the United Nations, which stipulates a central role for national sovereignty and limits on the use of military force. Most analyzes mainly take the US perspective and tend to ignore that China and Russia have never fully embraced the LIO above all its commitment to democracy and individual human rights. Since the end of the Cold War, the term LIO has been used more broadly to include norms to defend and promote democracy, state obligations to combat terrorism and reduce climate change, norms that require the protection of human rights, economic growth in developing countries, Limitations on weapons of destruction and regional trade agreements and forums. However, disagreement about the value of international order to U.S. policy may stem from differing interpretations of what “order” means. (Note 19)

3.2.2 The Composition Mechanism of LIO

LIO theorists generally consider five factors—democracy, hierarchy based on legitimate authority, institutional constraints, economic interdependence, and political convergence—as the mechanisms that constitute LIO.

Democracy is an essential component of the liberal international order because it promotes stability, cooperation, and human rights. Democracies are transparent, accountable, and less likely to engage in corruption or abuse of power. Democracy also promotes the rule of law and human rights, reducing the likelihood of abuse or repression. However, democracy is not a panacea and can still lead to conflict or repression. Nonetheless, it provides the necessary framework for managing international relations and promoting stability and prosperity among nations.

A hierarchy based on legitimate authority is the mechanism by which the liberal international order produces orderly outcomes by establishing frameworks for cooperation and promoting interstate stability and security. This approach recognizes that not all countries are created equal and seeks to create a framework for decision-making and leadership that reflects differences. It helps foster cooperation and reduce the likelihood of conflict, and provides a clear framework for managing power and influence in the international system. However, it can also create tension and conflict between states, and the criteria for determining legitimate powers can be subject to interpretation and debate.

Institutional constraints are the networks of institutions and organizations that promote cooperation and stability among states in the liberal international order. It provides a platform for negotiation and dialogue, promotes the rule of law and protects the rights of nations and individuals. However, it is not a panacea and may be slow to adapt or subject to political influence. Nonetheless, it provides a steady underpinning for managing the complexities of international relations and promoting stability and prosperity among nations.

Economic interdependence refers to the interconnection of national economies through trade, investment, and cross-border flows of goods and services. It is an important mechanism for promoting cooperation, stability, and prosperity among nations in the context of a liberal international order based on the principles of free trade, open markets, and economic cooperation. Economic interdependence can create webs of economic relations among nations, help build trust and cooperation, and can also facilitate the spread of liberal economic values and principles. However, economic interdependence also poses risks and challenges, such as vulnerabilities and dependencies that other states or non-state actors can exploit, as well as economic inequality and social dislocation.

Political convergence is the process by which different political systems move towards a common set of values and principles. It is closely related to a liberal international order based on the principles of liberalism, democracy, and a free market economy. Political convergence can help strengthen the liberal international order by promoting greater cooperation and trust among states, and by easing some of the tensions and conflicts that arise from states with different political systems and values. However, there are limits to how much convergence can be achieved, and some countries may resist convergence.

Both of the above governance methods have their advantages and disadvantages. The Tianxia system recognizes the importance of the collective interests of the world and aims to overcome various disasters caused by the anarchy of the world. At the same time, it may be criticized for downplaying the role of individual countries and their sovereignty. On the other hand, the LIO emphasizes the promotion

of democratic values, economic interdependence, and human rights, which could lead to a more just and stable world order. However, it has been criticized for being dominated by Western values and interests and not fully embracing the diversity of the world.

Collectively, these two approaches represent different perspectives on world politics and order, and a constructive dialogue between them can lead to a more inclusive and effective world system.

4. The Transcendence of the Tianxia System over the Liberal International Order

Proving that one concept is superior to another in terms of academic theory requires rigorous analysis and comparison of the two concepts. This involves conducting thorough research, examining the rationale and assumptions of each concept, and evaluating them for empirical evidence and practical application. This requires a theoretical and historical explanation of the relevant concepts. To establish that a concept outperforms another, it must be shown that it meets or exceeds the comparison criterion to a greater extent than the other concept. In order to demonstrate the transcendence of the Tianxia system over the liberal international order in this study, it is necessary to first identify the key features of these two concepts and define comparison criteria, and then make comparisons. The comparison standard can be based on various factors, and the comparison standard in this study is set to compare the definition, attribute, function or effect of the concept.

4.1 Academic Comparison

4.1.1 Definition Comparison

According to the above, LIO is mainly a special international system established by the United States after World War II, absorbing American allies and countries that believe in American political ideology. Its structure includes the US military alliance, the US-led international financial and trade bodies and the United Nations. This inevitably led to the hierarchical status of LIO with the United States as the absolute core and other nation-states as members. In LIO, countries still live under the “Hobbesian legal system”, and the relationship between countries is still mainly dealt with, especially the relationship with the United States. Global governance must be carried out under the coordination of major powers. On the other hand, the Tianxia system is a world system. In the Tianxia system, “Tianxia” is the highest political analysis unit, followed by the state, and finally the family; in the LIO, the nation-state is already the largest political analysis unit. Just because the vision of Western political philosophy does not go beyond the level of the nation-state, it is naturally impossible to give a governance plan to solve world problems.

4.1.2 Comparison of Core Principles

The academic research and interpretation of LIO is still from the perspective of international politics. Whether it is LIO or other international systems, they still cannot escape the assumptions and values of traditional Western international politics, that is, the assumption of anarchy and the supremacy of individual rights in Western freedom. doctrine values. In this regard, Zhao Tingyang believes that international politics is ineffective in dealing with world politics. International politics is nothing but an

ineffective game consisting of hostile strategies such as deterrence, sanctions, intervention, balancing, cold war, and war, and cannot resolve any deep conflicts. To this day, the world is still a non-world in the “primitive state”, not far from the Hobbesian state of nature, full of antagonism, hostility and clash of civilizations, in which the anarchic world meets the well-organized The country is extremely uncoordinated. This is a world of failure that lacks worldliness. The Tianxia system intends to build a political world that can effectively solve world-scale problems and deal with risks in technology, economy, climate, and civilization. (Note 20) If individual rights are supreme and unrivaled, it is logically impossible to achieve a consistent political world as a whole, and there will be no world system for the interests of the world. The world must be divided, and there must be “enemies”. Enemies also make enemies. This profound sense of “politics of division” can be seen in many phenomena, from pagan awareness of racism, from the hot war to the cold war, from colonialism to human rights interference, from economic and military hegemony to cultural hegemony, and even in Star Wars The inexplicable urge to seek out the enemy can also be seen in fantasies such as To pit oneself against others, to pit believers against pagans, to pit the West against the East, to pit the “free world” against autocratic society, and to pit everything that is not against each other is the basic political consciousness of the West.. Such a political consciousness has no world, and especially cannot be responsible for the world. (Note 21)

The logical premise of the Tianxia system is China’s political epistemology—governing the Tianxia. To govern Tianxia—the world—the world system needs to be established, that is, the Tianxia system cited in this study. Therefore, the assumption of the Tianxia system—the establishment of a world system raises the horizon from the level of the LIO’s international system to the level of the world system, providing conditions and guarantees for the international system. The value principle of the Tianxia system is derived from Chinese ethics, that is, knowledge should not only show what is true, but must also show what is good, if knowledge cannot show what is good, then truth has no value. The task of Chinese political philosophy is to find ways to turn enemies into friends. The given facts recognized by Chinese political theory and Western political theory seem to be similar, that is, they both recognize the basic premise that “resources are scarce, so people fight for power and profit”, but the solutions they choose are completely different: the choice of the West is to clarify their respective inescapable Infringed rights, if justice is threatened by powerful forces, then try to create a balance of power; China’s choice is to clarify mutual reciprocal obligations (the so-called rectification of names), and try to create an institutional arrangement that makes the benefits of reciprocal obligations greater than individual freedom the benefits of. In short, what the West cares about is how legal competition is possible, and what China cares about is how harmonious coexistence is possible. (Note 22)

4.2 History Check

The historical comparison is mainly to analyze the actual effect of LIO and Tianxia system through some empirical evidence and to support the viewpoint of this research. First of all, LIO will bring peace, as the democratic peace theory asserts that democracies tend to avoid conflict with each other. However, some

scholars have found after careful study that the causal logic supporting this theory lacks a convincing explanation for the observed mutual democratic pacifism. Democracies have not consistently externalized their norms for resolving domestic conflicts, elected leaders are not inherently accountable to peaceful interests, democracies are not necessarily slow to mobilize or immune to surprise attacks, and open political competition does not guarantee information Disclosure prevents conflicts. Evidence suggests that peace among democracies may not be solely due to their democratic nature, prompting further exploration of other factors that contribute to this phenomenon. (Note 23) Second, a hierarchy based on legitimacy can replace anarchy and prevent the international community from falling into the “Hobbesian state of nature”. David Lake proposes a different understanding of hierarchy based on the concept of “relational authority”, saying: “In the relational approach, authority is understood as an exchange relationship established between the ruling state and the subordinate state In essence, the former provides a social order in exchange for the obedience and legitimacy of the latter. (Note 24) However, once the United States fails to provide the required order for other countries in the system, the United States will lose its legitimacy and authority, which will bring great instability to its hierarchy, let alone replace anarchy. The real situation may be that the order exists when the United States is strong, and the order collapses when the United States is weak. Therefore, in order to prevent the collapse of the order, other members must firmly maintain the hierarchical status of the United States. In fact, the hegemonic thinking of the United States is at work. Third, realism holds that economic interdependence among states reduces the likelihood of conflict. It argues that countries prioritize economic prosperity and that trade plays a vital role in achieving this. The text further assumes that higher levels of economic interdependence lead to increased costs associated with trade disruptions, which in turn provide incentives for countries to avoid embroiled in war. (Note 25) If the Sino-US trade conflict is because China is not fully accepted by LIO, then the trade conflict between the United States and its allies, whether it is the US-Germany trade conflict or the US-Japan trade conflict, can show that economic dependence is more important than national interests lower.

Starting from the consistency and transitivity of the political system, the Tianxia system believes that in the structure of Western political theories, the core theory is the internal affairs theory, and the international theory is the subsidiary theory. There are obvious inconsistencies and even contradictions between the two levels of internal affairs theory and international theory. The purpose of internal affairs theory is the idea of cooperation about social governance, but when it comes to international theory, it has become a philosophy of struggle about the issue of friends and enemies. Second, if democracy cannot be further extended to become a global democracy, then it will prove that it is not the universal institution it claims to be but a limited range of strategies, and therefore has no legitimate authority. Furthermore, the Tianxia system states that if it is to be theoretically consistent and thus stand up to theoretical challenge, it must be universalizable at any political level, that is, be universally applicable to all political units. (Note 26) In practice, China adheres to the concept of “serving the people and developing harmoniously between man and nature” domestically, and has improved the environmental problems caused by the

rapid development in the early years. After the outbreak of the new crown pneumonia epidemic, China upholds the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind, and calls on all countries to help each other and cooperate in the fight against the epidemic. In May 2020, China took the lead in proposing to make the new crown vaccine a global public product. According to Chinese reports, as of May 2022, China has provided 153 countries and 15 international organizations with 4.6 billion pieces of protective clothing, 18 billion test kits, more than 430 billion masks, and 2.2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines. supplies. (Note 27) Over the past decades of reform and opening up, China has continuously explored targeted poverty alleviation methods, lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, and historically solved the problem of absolute poverty that has plagued the Chinese nation for thousands of years. In terms of eradicating poverty, addressing climate change, eliminating global governance deficits, maintaining world peace and security, and other challenges faced by all mankind, China has continuously contributed wisdom and proposed “Chinese solutions.” History has repeatedly verified that mankind is a community of shared destiny, and “common values can lead to common development.”

5. Summary

The Tianxia system, rooted in Chinese philosophical and historical perspectives, highlights the system’s emphasis on universality and transitivity across all political units at different levels. According to the Tianxia system, the world must be recognized as a political entity before a complete political system can be established. This requires the development of a global system of institutions, the world system being the highest form of political power. Zhao Tingyang pointed out that for a political system to have ethical legitimacy, it must conform to the general will of all the people.

On the other hand, the LIO, championed by the US and its allies, promotes the principles of democracy, human rights, and a market economy as the basis for global governance. This article uncovers new insights into the limitations and challenges of each approach by examining the fact that these two systems currently coexist and seek to accomplish competing visions of global governance. They may be engaging in a process of negotiation, learning and adaptation, drawing on each other’s strengths and trying to create a more inclusive and effective global governance framework. The competitive nature of this process means that both the Tianxia system and the liberal international order seek to expand their influence and promote their respective principles and values on the global stage.

In general, the Tianxia system and the liberal international order are generally considered to be two competing models of global governance related to the competition between China and the United States. Through research, this paper finds that the Tianxia System is not just a global governance model that competes with LIO, nor is it a repair, supplement, or revised copy of LIO, but a transcendence of LIO from academic theory to historical experience. The ability to achieve the consistency and transmission of domestic governance and international governance is a manifestation of a political system that is sound in theory and effective in practice. However, even if what China is currently doing is in line with the vision of establishing a world system proposed in the Tianxia system, after all, it is difficult for a

single country's power to promote the perfection and consolidation of the world system. Therefore, the political design of the Tianxia system as an assumption but not fully realized in reality cannot fully prove the complete transcendence of LIO in practice.

Notes

Note 1. Ikenberry, G. J. (2018). The end of liberal international order? *International Affairs*, 94(1), 7-23. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix241>

Note 2. Adler-Nissen, R., & Zarakol, A. (2021). Struggles for recognition: The liberal international order and the merger of its discontents. *International Organization*, 75(2), 611-634. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000454>

Note 3. Stokes, D. (2018). Trump, American hegemony and the future of the liberal international order. *International Affairs*, 94(1), 133-150. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix238>

Note 4. Kim, S. H., & Kim, S. (2022). China's contestation of the liberal international order. *The Pacific Review*, 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2022.2063367>

Note 5. Xinbo, W. (2018). China in search of a liberal partnership international order. *International affairs*, 94(5), 995-1018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy141>

Note 6. Paul, T. V. (2021). Globalization, deglobalization and reglobalization: Adapting liberal international order. *International Affairs*, 97(5), 1599-1620. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab072>

Note 7. Weiss, J. C., & Wallace, J. L. (2021). Domestic politics, China's rise, and the future of the liberal international order. *International Organization*, 75(2), 635-664. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081832000048X>

Note 8. Mearsheimer, J. J. (2019). Bound to fail: The rise and fall of the liberal international order. *International security*, 43(4), 7-50. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342

Note 9. Callahan, W. A. (2007). Tianxia, empire and the world: Soft power and China's foreign policy discourse in the 21st century. *British Inter-University China Centre Working Paper Series*, 1(2).

Note 10. Şahin, M. (2021). Tianxia (All-Under-Heaven): An alternative system or a rose by another name? *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 10(2), 183-196. <https://doi.org/10.20991/allazimuth.874967>

Note 11. Cha, T. (2018). Competing visions of a postmodern world order: the Philadelphian system versus the Tianxia system. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 31(5), 392-414. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2018.1536113>

Note 12. Chang, C. (2011). Tianxia system on a snail's horns. *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, 12(1), 28-42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649373.2011.532940>

Note 13. Mirza, M. N., & Khan, F. Z. (2020). Systemic transformations and Chinese image of the world order: transcending Great Wall through Neo-Confucianism and Tianxia systems. *Asia Pacific*, 38, 22-38. <https://doi.org/10.47781/asia-pacific.vol38.Iss0.3127>

Note 14. Tingyang, Z. (2011). Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of World Institutions.

Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, p. 83.

Note 15. Ibid, reprint preface

Note 16. Ibid, pp. 101-107.

Note 17. Ibid, pp. 100-146. <https://doi.org/10.3917/imin.017.0100>

Note 18. Schweller, R. L. (2001). The problem of international order revisited: A review essay. *International Security*, 26(1), 161-186. <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753212886>

Allison, G. (2018). The myth of the liberal order: From historical accident to conventional wisdom. *Foreign Affairs*, 97(4), 124-133. Retrieved from <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2018-06-14/myth-liberal-order>

Porter, P. (2018). *A world imagined: Nostalgia and liberal order* (Policy Analysis No. 843). CATO Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/world-imagined-nostalgia-liberal-order>

Note 19. Ikenberry, G. J. (2001). *After victory: Institutions, strategic restraint, and the rebuilding of order after major wars*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400823963>

Schweller, R. L. (2001). The problem of international order revisited: A review essay. *International Security*, 26(1), 169-173. <https://doi.org/10.1162/016228801753212886>

Finnemore, M. (2003). *The purpose of intervention: Changing beliefs about the use of force*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Kupchan, C. A. (2014). Unpacking hegemony: The social foundations of hierarchical order. In G. J. Ikenberry (Ed.), *Power, order, and change in world politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139680738.003>

Note 20. Excerpted from “Berlin Debate: The Ontological Argument and Questions of the Tianxia System”, November 4, 2019, at a seminar on the German version of Zhao Tingyang’s “Contemporary Tianxia” (Suhrkamp Publishing House) held at the Philosophy Department of the Free University of Berlin. Zhao Tingyang’s opening speech: “One Constitutional Tianxia” mentioned the above.

Note 21. Tingyang, Z. (2011). In *Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of World Institutions* (p. 195). Beijing: Renmin University of China Press.

Note 22. Ibid, p. 87.

Note 23. Rosato, S. (2003). The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory. *American Political Science Review*, 97(4). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055403000893>

Note 24. Lake, D. A. (2018). International Legitimacy Lost? Rule and Resistance When America Is First. *Perspectives on Politics*, 16(1), 6-21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592717003085>

Note 25. Kenneth, N. W. (1979). *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Random House, 1979, pp. 129-160).

Note 26. Tingyang, Z. (2011). *Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of World Institutions* (pp. 94-101). Beijing: Renmin University of China Press.

Note 27. <https://www.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/xwzx/gnxw/252495.htm>