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## THE PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM OF THE ALL-UNDER-HEAVEN IN THE WORLD DISCOURSE OF GEOPOLITICAL SCIENCE

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In modern geopolitical science, attempts to systematically explain the establishment of a new world order, carried out by researchers from China as a country that not only claims economic world hegemony, but also offers a new model of international relations, attract increasing attention. Using the example of a comparative analysis of the Chinese philosophical model of systemic globalization with leading Western systemic models of globalization, a reconstruction of the world discourse of geopolitical science has been carried out. Currently, the world is not only experiencing economic, political, or military competition between leading geopolitical players – we are talking about a world discourse on the most successful systemic conceptualization of international relations. The purpose of this paper consists in an attempt to compare the Chinese version of the All-Under-Heaven system with leading Western versions of the systemic approach in geopolitics – neoliberalism, conservatism, and social systems theory. Zhao Tingyang's concept of the All-Under-Heaven system is chosen as one of the most recognized in modern Chinese philosophy of globalization. The concept of trust as a social virtue and the theory of the end of history, created by Francis Fukuyama, presents a neoliberal model of globalization. Immanuel Wallerstein's world-system theory is considered to be a critical attempt to conceptualize a conservative model of globalization. Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory presents a functional approach to explaining globalization as a special way of ensuring social communication. The strengths and

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weaknesses of Western systemic models of globalization are identified, as well as the prospects for the development of the concept of the All-Under-Heaven system in the direction of conceptual rapprochement with Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory. The prospects for the modern understanding of the traditional Confucian idea of the All-Under-Heaven are outlined.

**Keywords:** philosophical system of the All-Under-Heaven; modern Chinese philosophy; international relations; systemic models of globalization; neoliberalism; world-system theory; social systems theory

### ***Introduction***

The rapid global changes that have been continuously occurring in recent decades cannot always be satisfactorily explained by the existing models of the world offered by modern geopolitical science. Neoliberalism, conservatism, and social systems theory offer the most authoritative among Western models. At the same time, the rise of the global East and the protracted crisis that the global West has entered are increasingly drawing attention to new models of globalization offered by countries claiming world leadership. Perhaps the most authoritative and promising among the Eastern models is the model that has already received significant recognition in China – the philosophical system of the All-Under-Heaven (*tianxia tixi* 天下体系), which combines the traditional Chinese philosophical concept of the All-Under-Heaven (*tianxia* 天下) with modern pragmatic ideas of a systemic approach in Chinese geopolitics.

The purpose of this paper is an attempt to compare the Chinese version of the All-Under-Heaven System with the leading Western versions of the systemic approach in geopolitics – neoliberalism, conservatism and social systems theory.

Attempts to systematically conceptualize ways to curb global social turbulence had their bright representatives who created authoritative geopolitical theories based on certain philosophical approaches. Thus, in the field of neoliberalism, the theories of the end of history and the concept of trust of the American theorist Francis Fukuyama [Fukuyama 1992; 1995] had an important ideological and methodological significance for the systemic understanding of globalization. Also, important concretization of this attempt was given, in particular, by the works of Canadian political philosophers Charles Taylor [Taylor 1992] and William Kymlicka [Kymlicka 1995]. A systematic conceptualization of the conservative approach to understanding international relations (IR) was proposed by the American philosopher and researcher of political and economic history Immanuel Wallerstein [Wallerstein 1998]. His post-Marxist ideas were somewhat critical of the development of world capitalism, but they were influenced by the works of classics of conservative thought, such as [Morgenthau 1946], and its long-standing critics, such as Henry Emery [Emery 1915], and also influenced the views of other modern researchers of conservatism [Korab-Karpowicz 2023; Tytarchuk 2024]. Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory is a well-known attempt to explain the processes of globalization as the self-organization of social communication on functional grounds [Albert, Hilkermeier 2014; Luhmann 1987]. An important methodological role in the study of certain ideas of modern science in the countries of the global East is played by philosophical studies of the culture of scientific work [Kubalskyi, Boichenko 2024a; 2024b].

A successful version of the systematic study of the global world as the All-Under-Heaven was proposed by Zhao Tingyang (赵汀阳), a member of the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Social Sciences of the People's Republic of China, in a number of his works [Zhao Tingyang 2005; 2006; 2009; 2016]. Despite the obvious significance of communist ideology for the formation of modern Chinese ideas about the world, as well as the relentless social and technical modernization of China [Ouyang et al. 2024], which does not always proceed without problems [Byler 2022], the renaissance of Confucian ideas is attracting increasing attention among Chinese researchers [Li Chenyang 2020; Prooi 2016], against the background of which the attempt to interpret Chinese concepts of globalization as a variant of Westernization is receiving increasing criticism [Hobova 2022].

### ***Zhao Tingyang's Global Harmony of the All-Under-Heaven System***

One of the most influential researchers of globalization in China in recent decades, who carries out a broad synthesis of traditional and modern Chinese ideas about the geopolitical world, is Zhao Tingyang. Ukrainian philosopher Viktor Kiktenko, in his analytical study of Zhao Tingyang's concept of the All-Under-Heaven, revealed the essential features of modern Chinese philosophical and geopolitical ideas about globalization using the argumentation of this Chinese philosopher.

The concept of the System of the All-Under-Heaven appears in Zhao Tingyang's understanding as a systemic concept of a global whole. However, Viktor Kiktenko subtly notes that Zhao Tingyang "writes about the 'world' as the whole world as we know it today, but, of course, this does not correspond to the historical use of *tianxia*, which meant the 'Chinese world' " [Kiktenko 2019, 15]. Thus, Zhao Tingyang uses a traditional Chinese term to denote new geopolitical realities, which inevitably changes the meaning of this term, although Zhao Tingyang seeks to preserve the political value that this term traditionally denoted. Indeed, attempts to attribute excessive Westernization to modern Chinese philosophy are increasingly viewed by researchers as unjustified and even excessive [Hobova 2022].

Victor Kiktenko perfectly argues that

compared to the Western idea of "the world", the Chinese concept of *tianxia* is a philosophical, not a scientific idea. That is, it is a comprehensive policy that does not divide humanity along political, religious, cultural, and ethnic lines, which is the opposite of Western political philosophy, based in its analysis on the nation-state and, accordingly, an understanding of the world geographically, not politically [Kiktenko 2019, 15].

Zhao Tingyang interprets the metaphor of "All-Under-Heaven" as a category of political philosophy, which has a worldview and methodological significance for geopolitical science. First of all, it is self-evident that All-Under-Heaven is a geographical concept that literally denotes everything that exists under heaven as a territory, that is, *di* 地 (earth). This is a basic element in the system of interaction of heaven and earth as yin-yang elements of the book of changes "I Ching". In Taoist and Confucian philosophy, a person is added to these two elements and a traditional triad is formed: heaven (*tian* 天) – earth (*di* 地) – man (*ren* 人). On this indisputable basis, a natural aspiration of the people (*minxin* 民心) is formed, which gains supremacy over a purely geographical approach and is based on the way of existence of those who, to a greater or lesser extent, realize themselves as inhabitants of All-Under-Heaven. Finally, the most perfect is the kind of growth towards the All-Under-Heaven that does not simply acknowledge its existence, but views it as an ethical principle, according to which all who inhabit the All-Under-Heaven consciously perceive each other as members of one family. Zhao Tingyang quite rightly connects this approach with the Confucian ideal of "great unity" (*datong* 大同), and in the modern geopolitical reception of Confucianism and its global projection, Zhao Tingyang considers this ethical principle as the best basis for the formation of a "world government" [Zhao Tingyang 2005, 41–42]. A similar renaissance of Confucianism in modern Chinese philosophy is also noted by other researchers [Li Chenyang 2020; Prooi 2016], so it is not surprising that Zhao Tingyang's views have found wide recognition not only in modern Chinese philosophy, but also in modern Chinese science.

It can be assumed that Zhao Tingyang's philosophy seeks to overcome the dualistic worldview inherent in the West and the geopolitical model of constant interstate confrontation derived from it, proposing instead a smooth transition to a geopolitical system of harmony (*he* 和): "Beyond the concepts of war and peace, 'harmony' seeks to intelligently resolve conflicts and stable security by building truly reliable relationships of mutual benefit in a strategic perspective, as well as mutual recognition of each other's values" [Zhao Tingyang 2006, 48]. According to Viktor Kiktenko, this Chinese philosopher

“assigns a special role in this process to China, which should become a new type of great power, responsible for the whole world, but different from the previous empires” [Kiktenko 2019, 12]. An important contrast between the Chinese view of globalization and the Western view is the opposition between nation-states as the main subject of geopolitics in the Western worldview and the truly global vision of the world, which is supposedly offered by Chinese philosophy and geopolitics. According to Zhao Tingyang, it is China that has a vision of world politics (*shijie zhenfu* 世界政府) as a whole, while Western geopolitical theory and practice are primarily concerned with state politics (*guojia zhengfu* 国家政府), and to a certain extent, depending on it, also with international politics (*guoji zhengzhi* 国际政治) [Zhao Tingyang 2005, 21].

It is worth noting that, according to Viktor Kiktenko, “Zhao Tingyang’s philosophy is still based on the Western methodology of constructivism and comparativism to carry out a comparative analysis of modern world politics and the traditional Chinese political system” [Kiktenko 2019, 12]. However, this statement by Viktor Kiktenko requires further specification: although, indeed, Zhao Tingyang writes specifically about the system of the All-Under-Heaven, and not only about the All-Under-Heaven, as was the case in traditional Chinese philosophy, however, the system in Western philosophy and geopolitics is understood very differently by different researchers. If we compare it, for example, with the three main Western systemic concepts, such as Francis Fukuyama’s neoliberal global world theory, Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-system theory, and Niklas Luhmann’s social systems theory – Zhao Tingyang’s concept of the All-Under-Heaven is more realistic than the economic utopia of the first, however, it even more clearly contradicts the second, but perhaps resonates with the third concept.

### ***Utopianism of Francis Fukuyama’s Concept of the Neoliberal Global Economy***

The inevitable periodic global economic crises – the crisis of the Dotcom economy (“Dotcom bubble”) in 1998, the global financial crisis in 2008 and the contemporary shifting in global war as a hidden new economic crisis – have shown that the neoliberal idea of the global economy as an arena of honest entrepreneurial competition between global economic players has turned out to be unrealistic. Fukuyama’s idea that the global victory of liberalism over totalitarian ideologies will open a wide path to unbridled economic development and heavenly well-being in the coming decades [Fukuyama 1992] has not come true at all, but it has come true much less than expected, and its prospects have certainly been overestimated. Rapid economic development, including in the global East, quickly encountered non-market obstacles, which key global economic players have increasingly begun to establish. The neoliberal market was eager to promote consumer markets, but it was too jealous of the desire to create new markets for supply.

All this fundamentally undermined the neoliberal concept of a global consensus for world peace and the establishment of equal international relations based on strengthening trust. This global consensus envisaged the extension to international relations of Fukuyama’s concept of trust as a social virtue, which underlies the new national social contract for every successful modern state [Fukuyama 1995]. Trust in interstate relations should be based on trust within each country in particular – this was the idea of the neoliberal concept of global peace. However, in real life, as early as the late 1990s, cooperation began to cease and trust to disappear when the 1998 crisis turned out to be a crisis of trust within the world’s leading democracies – primarily the USA: when fraud in stock market transactions became apparent. Later, the situation worsened even more, as the old key global economic players began to lose out in fair competition to young contenders such as China and India – but also to others, less large and visible, but no less active and enterprising.



However, the neoliberal project began to lose its appeal not only in economic terms. The multicultural world of the Canadian romantics Charles Taylor [Taylor 1992] and Will Kymlicka [Kymlicka 1995], who developed Fukuyama's neoliberal ideas in their local application, turned out to be politically achievable, legally possible and socially attractive, but unable to protect itself – neither economically nor socially [Lee Min Goo 2014]. Cultural diversity generates economic creativity and stimulates economic activity, but it cannot become the basis of sustainable social justice, and even less can it ensure equal rights in economic struggle. Neoliberal efforts to establish certain quotas, subsidies, and other preferences for cultural minorities (as practical embodiments of the famous DEI principle – diversity, equality, inclusion) yield little economic return, but provoke wild distortions of the rules of fair economic competition.

Against this background, modern Chinese practices of political restraint of the rapid development of cultural diversity, bordering on state prohibitions on the unlimited struggle for cultural identity (Tibet, Uyghur region) show much higher economic efficiency [Ouyang et al. 2024] – no matter how losing they may look from the point of view of democratic criteria for evaluating the political system of modern China [Byler 2022]. All this also adds authority to Chinese philosophy as a philosophy of the modern world [Li Chenyang 2022].

Moreover, the People's Republic of China at one time fully accepted the neoliberal rules of the game and for the last three decades has been developing its own economy and promoting its state interests in the international arena primarily as economic interests, adhering to the rules of free market competition. The actions of the United States on the international stage in recent decades are precisely a direct denial of the principles of neoliberalism and an open appeal to the principles of national protectionism and the introduction of non-market political restrictions on international economic activity, such as tariffs, quotas, etc. All this is more consistent with the concept of the hierarchical structure of the world system created by Immanuel Wallerstein.

### ***Zhao Tingyang's All-Under-Heaven System Versus Immanuel Wallerstein's World System***

It is obvious that the idea of integrity as opposed to centralization, which is fundamental for Zhao Tingyang, is much less consistent with Immanuel Wallerstein's concept of the world system: for Wallerstein, the world always tends towards centralization and the establishment of stability through the hierarchical construction of the system of international relations. Whether we are talking about the more ancient world of empires or the modern world of economics, in each case it is about domination and the struggle for hegemony. For Wallerstein, there is no doubt that the desire to gain a privileged position and further maintain it is the basis for building a system of world relations [Wallerstein 1998, 82–88].

For Wallerstein, the basis of the global market is a non-market pattern – the world system is a structure of systems: “They are born; they live long lives according to some rules; and at some point they come into crisis, bifurcate, and transform themselves into something else” [Wallerstein 1998, 88]. Wallerstein writes about systems entirely in the spirit of the theory of evolution – and in the global world different systems compete with each other in a mode of struggle for survival, in which morality is not the basis of rationality. Rational is to preserve one's dominant status by all possible means, because dominance gives non-market advantages in market competition.

Wallerstein's discourse of the world of systems is not a moral discourse and not a competition according to the rules of fair play: it is a struggle for survival and for privileges, and not the defense of principles and the protection of values.

If the camp of the privileged contains a wide range of immediate and even long-term interests within their camp, so does the camp of their opponents. And of course, compared

to the privileged, the oppressed have less current power, less current organization, less current wealth at their disposal to pursue any global political battle [Wallerstein 1998, 87].

This position of Wallerstein takes us back from neoliberal fantasies of fair competition to the cruel world of Realpolitik [Emery 1915], where on the global stage everyone is an enemy to everyone else (*homo homini lupus est*), rather than a partner in economic competition.

***Niklas Luhmann's Social Systems Approach as a Possible Functional Answer to the Challenge of Zhao Tingyang's All-Under-Heaven System***

It is worth noting that despite the fact that Niklas Luhmann created his theory of social systems as a global theory (each social system functions only as a global one), Luhmann, unlike Fukuyama or Wallerstein, does not have a special work on the theory of international relations. As the editor of a book devoted to the problem of international relations from the point of view of Luhmann's concept notes, "just as there is no monolithic bloc of 'IR theory' on the one side, so there is no static Luhmannian theory of society" [Albert, Hilkermeier 2014, 3]. On the other hand, Luhmann offered an explanation of the logic of the functioning of global social systems that leaves no doubt about his understanding of the possibility of building international relations: they can be all the more effective the more geopolitical players adhere to the rules of functioning of global social systems. The specificity of Luhmann's approach is that he does not consider regional claims to build a global social system (such as Pax Romana, Pax Britannica, Pax Sovietica, Pax Americana, or even All-Under-Heaven system) as truly functionally justified. Instead, for Luhmann, only specialized social systems can be truly functionally successful on a global scale – global economy, global law, global politics, global ethics, global science, etc. Only a global scale can confirm the universality and lack of alternative rules for the functioning of each of these systems – and for Luhmann, the opposite is true: they inevitably acquire a global scale precisely as a result of the universal logic of their functioning. He analyzes this logic in detail in his main work, *Social Systems* [Luhmann 1987].

Thus, Luhmann also a priori assumes the existence of a global social world as a whole, and all attempts to fragment it and defend particular interests inevitably create risks and challenges for the functioning of this whole. However, for Luhmann's concept, these risks and challenges are also part of the functioning of this whole, namely, a means of developing the immunity of the system and increasing its resistance (see: [Luhmann 1987, 488–550]).

The logic of the functioning of international relations from the point of view of Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems is that not only the main, but all geopolitical players adhere to the rules of social communication: for each global social system these are its own internal rules for this system. For the economic system – economic, for the legal system – legal, for the political system – political, for the ethical system – ethical, for the scientific system – scientific, etc. The task is not to try to solve the problems of one global social system by using the means of another global social system, but to adhere to the purity of applying the rules of a certain system only to this system itself.

These Luhmann's ideas could quite possibly provide a direction for finding clear answers where questions arise regarding the utopian nature of the concept of Zhao Tingyang's All-Under-Heaven system, namely the question of excessive rejection of Western systemic models of globalization, the functional grounds of morally "pure globalism" as a non-hierarchical harmonious global world, the idealization of the organismic approach, etc. [Kiktenko 2019, 14–17]. Luhmann proposes instead the self-organization of social communication at the international level (in each global system in particular), and therefore the separation of ethical issues from political and economic ones. Global society appears to Luhmann not as a special organism, but as a higher level of autopoiesis, at which

social coordination occurs with the participation of consciousness, but only as a component of the functioning of social systems.

### Discussion

Obviously, Zhao Tingyang's All-Under-Heaven system, in its evolution, offers solutions that bring it closer to the logic of self-reproduction of global social systems proposed by Niklas Luhmann. Thus, according to V. Kiktenko, in his work *Investigation of the Bad World: Political Philosophy as the First Philosophy* [Zhao Tingyang 2009, 91] Zhao Tingyang offers the following vision of the global world according to the tianxia model: "Due to its universal nature, tianxia can unite all countries and peoples, rejecting the dominance of any religion and any concept of a 'chosen people', and the world is proposed as a family, that is, common to all people" [Kiktenko 2019, 17]. Also in the work *A Possible World of the All-Under-Heaven System: World Order in the Past and Future* he goes even further, increasingly departing from the letter of the Chinese tradition and giving its spirit an increasingly universal formulation [Zhao Tingyang 2016].

Zhao Tingyang's All-Under-Heaven system does not offer such well-thought-out and structured principles for building a global world as Luhmann does in his theory of social systems. At the same time, comparing Zhao Tingyang's All-Under-Heaven system with the neoliberal concept of Francis Fukuyama and the conservative concept of the world of systems of Immanuel Wallerstein, we must admit that Zhao Tingyang's All-Under-Heaven system in its evolution is increasingly gravitating towards the logic of self-reproduction of global social systems proposed by Niklas Luhmann. However, this does not mean so much a "westernization" of the All-Under-Heaven system concept as a counter-convergence of Chinese and Western concepts of building harmonious global social relations on functional principles.

### Novelty

Zhao Tingyang's All-Under-Heaven system rejects the ostensible but insincere and unrealistic equality of international relations based on trust as a social virtue, interpreted in the neoliberal spirit of Francis Fukuyama. Instead, Zhao Tingyang proposes to recognize the diversity of the world on the basis of peaceful coexistence on the principles of tianxia. On the other hand, Zhao Tingyang's All-Under-Heaven system does not recognize the amorality of Realpolitik, which justifies the "right of the strong". Therefore, the concept of All-Under-Heaven system cannot be adequately interpreted from the standpoint of the conservative recognition of the world hierarchy of systems, which was proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein in his concept of the world system. The concept of tianxia does not recognize privileges in the sense of global dominance.

### Conclusion

It still remains a promising task for social philosophy to comprehend the Confucian concept of "The Will of Heaven" from the perspective of tianxia and the theory of social systems. Such an understanding will open up opportunities for addressing the key issue of switching from functioning according to the rules of one global social system to functioning according to the rules of another global social system. It is this aspect that has important theoretical and practical significance for the new theory of global international relations to become realistic.

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**Філософська система Піднебесної**

**у світовому дискурсі геополітичної науки**

У сучасній геополітичній науці дедалі більше уваги привертають спроби системного пояснення встановлення нового світового порядку, які здійснюють дослідники з Китаю як країни, яка не лише претендує на економічну світову гегемонію, а й пропонує нову модель



міжнародних відносин. На прикладі порівняльного аналізу китайської філософської моделі системної глобалізації з провідними західними системними моделями глобалізації здійснено реконструкцію світового дискурсу геополітичної науки. Нині у світі відбувається не тільки економічне, політичне чи військове змагання між провідними геополітичними гравцями – йдеться про світовий дискурс щодо найбільш вдалої системної концептуалізації міжнародних відносин. Метою цієї статті є спроба порівняти китайську версію системи Піднебесної з провідними західними версіями системного підходу в геополітиці – неолібералізмом, консерватизмом та теорією соціальних систем. Концепцію системи Піднебесної Чжао Тін'яна обрано як одну з найбільш визнаних у сучасній китайській філософії глобалізації. Концепція довіри як соціальної чесноти та теорія кінця історії, створені Френсісом Фукуямою, репрезентують неоліберальну модель глобалізації. Теорію світу систем Іммануеля Валлерстайна розглянуто як критичну спробу концептуалізувати консервативну модель глобалізації. Теорія соціальних систем Нікласа Лумана являє собою функціональний підхід до пояснення глобалізації як особливого способу забезпечення соціальної комунікації. Виявлено сильні і слабкі місця західних системних моделей глобалізації, а також перспективи розвитку концепції системи Піднебесної в напрямі концептуального зближення з теорією соціальних систем Нікласа Лумана. Намічено перспективи сучасного осмислення традиційної конфуціанської ідеї Піднебесної.

**Ключові слова:** філософська система Піднебесної; сучасна китайська філософія; міжнародні відносини; системні моделі глобалізації; неолібералізм; світ-системна теорія; теорія соціальних систем

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