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# A Political World Philosophy in terms of All-under-heaven (Tian-xia)<sup>1</sup>

*Zhao Tingyang*

## 1. A non-world or a failed world

Our supposed *world* is still a non-world. This side of creation, our globe, has not yet become a world of oneness, but remains a Hobbesian *chaos*, since there is no truly coherent world society governed by a universally-accepted political institution. Politically abandoned, the world we live in, in a geographical sense, is the only one we have. A lack of political unity means that a universal political identity is still nowhere to be found. Such a world is impossible unless it is organized and controlled by a worldwide institution, itself based upon a global political philosophy.

People have tried in vain to unify the world, either by means of worldwide empires or alliances between nations (fundamentally unsuccessful due to the unsolved problem of stable cooperation), or of the Kantian idea of *perpetual peace*, or (from a Chinese perspective) *universal harmony between all peoples*.<sup>2</sup> Instead of habitually-mentioned historical mishaps and limitations, the failure of such attempts should be ascribed to the lack of a global political philosophy. The political concept of 'nation' is familiar to all, since we all know what needs to be done for the nation-state. However, it is not so for the political notion of 'world', since people are unaware of what should be done for the latter. The key problem today is that of a *failed world* as opposed to that of so-called *failed states*. No country could possibly be successful in a failed world.

An interesting question put forward by Martin Wight (1966: 17) was 'why is there no international theory?' Forty years later, it is relevant to the issue discussed here. Wight argued that instead of suitable international theories, there were but so-called 'political theories' based merely on the domestic politics of states, and embellished with inadequate *parerga* concerning the international 'balance of power'. He implied that people did not really know what internationality was. I think that Wight would have changed his mind, had he known of the Chinese philosophy of world politics,

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with the concept 'all-under-heaven' focusing more on 'worldness' than *internationality*. His question could perhaps be rewritten as: 'why is there no world theory?' so as to fit in with the new context of globalization. Over the last few decades, the term 'world politics' has become increasingly popular, and is understood as meaning something more than just 'international politics'. This change was late in coming, but nevertheless significant, even though its understanding of politics is not so original. World politics is still interpreted within the framework of internationality, and the idea of 'worldness' is still lacking. A world theory is impossible until the world's universal wellbeing takes priority over that of the nation-state.

A modern *world system* is far from just an *institutional system of the world*. A world system is always imperialistic dominance, as Wallerstein points out in *The Modern World System*. In other words, one or a group of powerful nation-states wields political, economic and cultural domination over less powerful ones. It could be said that a world system is essentially imperialistic in terms of *dominance*, having evolved from the concept of empire in terms of rule by power. Now, imperialism has definitely proven not to be a solution to the problems of world politics, since it is imposed on the world, rather than being *of and for the world*, or *by the world*. What the world needs is an institutionalized system to promote universal wellbeing, and not just the interests of some dominating nations.

Hardt and Negri (2000) impressively argue that the emerging new empire is a global one which, through globalization and the non-acceptance of limits and boundaries, inherits and reshapes ancient empires such as Rome. However, we have to understand that the complicated new empire not only inherits ancient ideals, but also modern imperialism and the Christian ideology of cultural universalism. The American empire is trying to reshape the concept, leading to all types of dangerous possibilities, making it a paradox whereby wars are launched in the name of peace, and freedom is destroyed in the name of liberty.<sup>3</sup> This is the wrong direction for the world to go in.

Even if an empire rules the whole world, it does not create a world as such. Ruling the world does not mean possessing it, as is argued in Chinese political philosophy. It merely means having hold of the land, in a geographical sense, rather than the 'hearts' of all peoples. The ruler thus never obtains the world in a spiritual sense. The world exists only when people want it to. In other words, the world *is* only when so justified; and to be justified, a political system of universal 'harmony' needs to be developed, so as to successfully solve the problem of universal cooperation between all peoples.

Globalization is leading us to an unclear new era without well-prepared new concepts. It maintains the interests of nation-states, and instead of promoting universal wellbeing actually enhances international conflicts. As a result, it doesn't create a world entity. If it continues to be misled by such American-made illusions as the 'clash of civilizations', 'rogue states' or 'failed states', concepts which illegally legitimize America's disastrous leadership in the world, the result will be a *failed world*, which is much worse than simply *failed states*.

History has often gone astray, thus defeating our good intentions. However, the failure to create a world entity is basically due to political ignorance of the idea of *mundus qua mundus*, a lack of political philosophy from the viewpoint of the world as a whole, as opposed to that of nation-states. Unfortunately, popular ideologies

nowadays consist either of universalism (in fact, aggressive imperialism serving the national interests of the most developed countries), or pluralism (basically speaking, resistant nationalism to protect the local interests of less developed nations). Such a context thwarts Nash's equilibrium, impeding any possible improvements in world peace, common interests and mutual development. It only reflects philosophies of the world in terms of national interests, rather than *for* the world on behalf of universal wellbeing.

The difference between philosophy *for* the world and philosophy *of* the world is very relevant to the justification of a world-view. Anybody can have a world philosophy in accordance with his own horizons. Likewise, any nation can have a world philosophy in keeping with national interests. However, we need a world philosophy which speaks on behalf of the world. The world is absent because of our refusal to see it from its own perspective. The failure of world politics is essentially the failure of philosophy. The question is therefore how to take care of the world *for the world*?

As a result, this is a good opportunity to discuss the Chinese philosophical world concept of 'all-under-heaven' (Tian-xia, 天下), which originated 3,000 years ago but is still largely unknown in Western countries. The theory was not fully developed in ancient China, but still possesses great potential. In this paper I argue that a renewed theory of all-under-heaven might be helpful for finding a solution to the chaotic situation of the world we live in. Furthermore, I offer a new framework for the philosophical analysis of political problems.

## **2. World issues as the starting point for politics**

There is an old story about the invention of the all-under-heaven system. Approximately 3,000 years ago, the Zhou Dynasty supplanted the Shang, by means of a military campaign. The dynasty was to last 800 years. This constituted a political revolution, establishing Chinese politics in a very different way, compared to the Greek *polis*. In much the same way as in Europe prior to the Greek polis, politics (literally 'justified order' in Chinese) didn't exist in China before the Zhou. There was only rule by force. However, whereas in Greece politics started with the problem of the polis, the Zhou invention 'all-under-heaven' meant that its Chinese counterpart began with a world perspective. It might appear unusual for this to happen in the early days of civilization, since it would seem too avant-garde. However, this is indeed what happened.

An unusual situation was responsible for this. The story is as follows. The Shang had for centuries been the leaders of a tribal alliance. The last Shang king was extremely strong but very cruel, and enjoyed nothing but wars and killing. A small tribe known as the Zhou rebelled with great courage, supported by several other tribes, and finally destroyed the huge Shang army. Now at the head of all of the other tribes, the Zhou were confronted with the problem of governance: how to lead all tribes and enjoy their continuous support, while some were much larger in population and potentially stronger. At the time, there were about 1,000 tribes in China, which were different culturally and even ethnically. The population of the Zhou tribe is estimated to have been less than 70,000, very small in comparison to other tribes,

especially the Shang, with a population of more than one million. The problem of how to control larger entities made global (as opposed to local) politics a priority.

The brilliant Zhou leaders, especially the first one, the Duke of Zhou, came up with some major political ideas: (1) successful solutions to the problems of world politics should resort to a universally-accepted system and not force; (2) a universal system is politically justified if it consists of a political institution which benefits the people of all nations, and produces the greatest common wellbeing in the world; (3) a universal system works if it creates harmony between all nations and cultures. In accordance with these principles, the Zhou created a universal system, by means of the concept 'all-under-heaven'.

### **3. The ancient institutional design of all-under-heaven**

The 'all-under-heaven' system is theoretically an open concept, with possibilities for a world system. The Zhou were the first and only ones to put it into practice. This does not mean that this ancient Chinese concept is applicable anyway and at any time, since it is too old for the world of our times. However, certain points deserve to be thought through and could probably be helpful for the future.

The Zhou's concept of 'all-under-heaven' is as follows:<sup>4</sup>

1. It is a monarchical system, including certain aristocratic elements.
2. It is an open network, consisting of a general world government and sub-states. The number of sub-states depends on the diversity of cultures, nations or geographical conditions. The sub-states pertain to a general political system, in the same way that sub-sets pertain to a greater set. Designed for the whole world, the all-under-heaven system is open to all nations. Any nation can participate, or be associated, if it is at peace with the nations included in the system.
3. The world government is in charge of universal institutions, laws and world order; it is responsible for the common wellbeing of the world, upholding world justice and peace; it arbitrates international conflicts among sub-states; it controls shared resources such as rivers, lakes, minerals or materials; it has the authority to examine and recognize the political legitimacy of sub-states, to supervise the social and political conditions of sub-states, to lead punitive expeditions when a sub-state breaks universal law or order. However, the world government loses its legitimacy if it betrays justice or abuses its responsibilities, and revolution is then justified.
4. The sub-states are independent in their domestic economy, culture, social norms and values; that is, independent in almost all forms of life except their political legitimacy and obligations. The sub-states are legitimated when politically recognized by the world government, and obliged to make certain contributions, in proportion to their production and natural resources, to the common wealth of the world, aid in the event of disasters, and water control.
5. An institutionally-established balance plays a key role in maintaining long-term cooperation. The world government directly rules a land called King-land, about twice the size of a large sub-state, and about four times that of a medium-sized sub-state. The military force controlled by the world government is greater than those of large, medium-sized and small sub-states, with a ratio of 6 to 3, 6 to 2 and 6 to 1 divi-

sions respectively.<sup>5</sup> There are limits to the advantages of the world government over the sub-states, either in terms of resources or military power. The same applies in the case of larger and smaller sub-states. As a result, a dominating superpower is nearly impossible, while revolution is a potential but real threat preventing the world government from becoming oppressive.

6. Another important policy is that people have the freedom to migrate to, and work in, any state they like. This implies a *world* and not *nationalistic* philosophy.

The system, characterized by its global perspective and the principle of harmony amongst all nations, created long-term peace which lasted for centuries in China, thought to be the whole world as a result of the limited geographical knowledge at that time. The spirit of all-under-heaven had such a great influence on Chinese politics that even today the latter could not be correctly understood without some knowledge of it. This is despite the fact that it ceased to be a political goal in 221 BC, when the first emperor of China annexed other states and established the Qin Empire, thereby distorting the concept. The decline of the Zhou system is also illustrative. Absurdly, it waned because it was too good to exist. The 'all-under-heaven' world government's limited power, institutionally designed in favor of the independence and interests of the sub-states, proved incapable of coping with the ambitions of the latter's stronger elements.<sup>6</sup> This paradoxical problem of institutional design foretold the difficulties met in world cooperation, challenging us to renew the all-under-heaven concept, so as to establish a better system for the future of the world.

#### **4. A philosophical renewal of all-under-heaven**

The key Chinese term 'all-under-heaven' is a dense concept meaning 'world'. It has three meanings: (1) the Earth or all lands under the sky; (2) a common choice made by all peoples in the world, or a universal agreement in the 'hearts' of all peoples; (3) a political system for the world with a global institution to ensure universal order. This semantic trinity indicates that a physical world is far from being a human one. A humanized world *is* unless otherwise *defined* as being political by a worldwide institution reflecting the universally-accepted feelings of all peoples.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the natural world will not be *our world* unless constituted as 'all-under-heaven' with a world institution.

With the all-under-heaven concept the world is understood as consisting of the physical world (land), the psychological world (the general sentiment of peoples) and the institutional world (a world institution). It is thus a very dense concept, by which *metaphysics as political philosophy* replaces *metaphysics as ontology*. The Earth is thus still a non-world, for it does not yet have a world institution representing all peoples and fully accomplishing a worldwide *eidōs*.

The concept establishes a global perspective as opposed to local or national ones. Viewing the world as a whole is an epistemological principle first used by Laozi (580–500 BC). He says: 'the best way to understand everything is to view a person from the viewpoint of a person, a family from the viewpoint of a family, a village from the viewpoint of a village, a state from the viewpoint of a state, and all-under-

heaven from the viewpoint of all-under-heaven'.<sup>8</sup> This reflects a *political epistemology* rather than a scientific one.

In Chinese philosophy, the world has always been considered as more of a political body than a scientific object. As a matter of fact, the latter was rarely discussed in traditional Chinese philosophy, since the Chinese way of thinking took social matters more seriously, leaving Nature to poetry. The preference for political knowledge dominated Chinese minds so much that little interest was given the natural world. Politically-oriented epistemology was based on the idea that the world consists of *things* and *facts*, but only facts (understood as *what-has-been-done*<sup>9</sup>) have an influence upon our lives. Therefore, the problem of facts is the most relevant one, whereas things are merely *what they are*, beyond our control. In other words, Nature *is* but society *is made to be*, and the only thing of importance is that which can be *done*. A world of facts is thus essentially political or ethical. A Duke once asked Confucius (551–479 BC) what the most important thing was in the human world. Confucius replied: 'politics'.<sup>10</sup>

Chinese political philosophy, combined with ethics, was thus an alternative to metaphysics, changing the question of being into: *to be is to do*. *Doing* replaces *being*, in as much as things only become meaningful when they concern facts. Chinese philosophy deals more with the problems of relations and the heart, whereas Western philosophy concentrates more on the truth and the mind. For instance, in Chinese philosophy 'truth' typically depends upon certain 'relations'. In fact, nothing can be defined if not in terms of 'relations'. For example, we find somebody *friendly* when we treat him in a friendly manner; in other circumstances, we might have the opposite idea of him if we treat him wrongly. As a result, relations, and not 'essence', define what something is. The metaphysics of relations strongly encourages the idea of an *all-under-heaven* world political system as consisting of harmony between all peoples.

## 5. Nothing and nobody excluded

One of the most important principles of 'all-under-heaven' is necessarily the 'exclusion of nothing and nobody' or the 'inclusion of all peoples and all lands'.<sup>11</sup> According to this principle, nobody can be excluded or pushed aside, since no one is essentially incompatible with the others. Nothing is considered as being 'foreign' or 'pagan'.

According to this theory, a country or state has no chance of avoiding disorder if the world is in a state of confusion or anarchy; conflicts would even be inevitable amongst countries where order prevails. The external order of a political entity is always the necessary condition for its internal order. Consequently, its external problems are even more serious than its internal troubles. A political system can claim to be in a state of universal and perpetual peace only when the notion of externality no longer exists; in other words, when nothing and nobody is excluded. As Lu Buwei (?–235BC), a prime minister of the Qin period, says: 'no state can be safe if the world is in disorder; no family can survive if the state is thrown into turmoil; one has no dwelling place when one's family is ruined'.<sup>12</sup> In order to enjoy universal and perpetual peace, a complete and efficient political system should be as extensive as

possible, thereby contributing to a worldwide political system in which all are included and protected, and in which nobody is treated as an outsider.

The idea of there being no outsiders goes hand-in-hand with that of there being no 'pagans'. If this were not the case, then some groups could be discriminated against, under the pretext of their being incompatible with others. An interesting ancient argument declares that heaven is universal, and always fair and impartial. As a result, the principle of 'all-under-heaven' should be fair to all peoples: 'all-under-heaven is meant to be of all and for all, and never of and for anybody in particular'.<sup>13</sup> This could explain the Chinese rejection of the domination of any particular religion and any notion of a 'chosen people'. It is considered unjustified to identify some people as being 'pagans'. Everyone is born to share all-under-heaven, and nobody should be treated as an outsider.

The central idea of 'all-under-heaven' is to reconstitute the world along the lines of the family, thereby transforming the world into a home for all peoples, as it should be. An old story reflects this idea: a man in the state of Jing once lost his bow, but was not obsessed with getting it back, saying: 'One man of Jing lost it, and another man of Jing has found it. That is not at all a problem.' Confucius heard of this and said: 'It would be better not to mention the state of Jing. Let's just say that one man lost it and another found it.' Laozi goes further: 'The best thing is to not even mention a man, and just say that something was lost and found.'<sup>14</sup>

In line with the principle of the inclusion of all peoples, the creation of a 'world-for-all-peoples' is arguably now a fundamental political necessity. Of course, this world does not yet exist, but it should be an objective.

## **6. The priority of a world institution**

'All-under-heaven' insists upon the necessity of a world institution. As already argued, disorder in the world inevitably involves all countries. According to the theory, the notion of 'state' is incorporated into that of 'world', and 'local politics' into that of 'world politics'. In contrast to Western political thinking, the world is regarded as being the general political framework, of which the state and international dimensions are but branches. The world as a whole, and not the state, is the key philosophical issue. A world institution ensuring world order is therefore considered to be a top priority.

As already mentioned, the Zhou Dynasty chose the world, and not the state, as the starting point for political thinking. The world as a whole was the uppermost political entity, with leadership over all lower political units. This was considered the condition for order amongst all inferior units, such as nation-states or any other political community, and has always been at the heart of Chinese political concepts. It consists of a hierarchy between *all-under-heaven*, *states* and then *families*, as opposed to *nation-states*, *communities* and *individuals* in the West.

The Western political system would thus seem to be philosophically incomplete, at least from the Chinese viewpoint of the division of political bodies into all-under-heaven, states and families. The absence of a world institution as the highest political entity is dangerously incomplete in that there is no one to take care of the world.

The Western invention of modern nation-states has by now been almost universally adopted. The absence of a supreme political authority explains our failure to eliminate international conflicts, which are unlikely to be settled through the United Nations or any other existing international organization, since such organizations are not above nation-states. International organizations are supposed to deal with problems in terms of interrelations, being nothing more than auxiliary bodies confined by, and pertaining to, the nation-state system, in which only national interests, and not universal ones, matter. They are incapable of overcoming any serious conflict in the world, since international perspectives are always limited by national concerns. Basically speaking, 'internationality' is a specious and misleading concept. It is 'worldness', and not 'internationality', which, within the framework of analysis and methodology, recognizes the real problems of world politics. The concept of internationality is not suitable for dealing with worldwide political problems; worse still, it could even eclipse the real issues which need to be reorganized and solved.

Following the preeminence of national and international perspectives, a *world viewpoint* should now become the universally-accepted framework for political thinking. Political philosophy, or political science, will never be complete unless the perspective of the world as a whole is introduced into it. Only then will the problems of world politics be fully understood. The all-under-heaven theory is designed to rethink the problems of the world, such as those of world order and governance, conflicts and cooperation, war, peace and cultural clashes; all of which have been usually misconstrued by international theories.

International perspectives, as well as the ideology of nation-states, have been derived from the spirit of the Treaties of Westphalia, according to which no political horizon is of greater importance than that of nation-states, leading to nothing more than bargaining between national interests and a nervous balance of power. Instead of being based upon the ideal of cooperation, they involve nothing else but strategies aimed at maximizing national interests, and a necessary (though reluctantly accepted) equilibrium between such interests. The advantage of the all-under-heaven worldwide theory comes from the very scope of its perspective, being above national interests, and inviting us to consider a much wider context, in which the most complicated of problems can be identified and solved.

## 7. From political transposition to ethical transposition

Inconsistencies existing between domestic and international perspectives greatly reduce the effectiveness and potential of nation-centered political theories. For instance, domestic democracy is always taken for granted, whereas international democracy is considered unacceptable and practically impossible by most liberalists. The truth is that domestic democracy can enhance imperialist hegemony over the world; international democracy does just the opposite. Such a theoretical contradiction harms the universality of political theories, when political institutions are not considered universally transposable.

A political institution is irrefutable if it can be applied universally; that is to say, if it is applicable to all political units and transposable to all political levels or sys-

tems. If this is not the case, it loses legitimacy owing to excessive partiality. Even such an admirable institution as democracy can be proved to be politically flawed if it cannot be implemented internationally, instead of just nationally. This is one reason why the United States is losing its political standing in the world, playing different political games in domestic and international arenas.

On the other hand, Chinese political philosophy searches for the completeness of a political system, believing that an institution is good if and only if it can be applied on all political levels, from the most basic to the highest, and from local to worldwide dimensions, thereby leading to a universal political system. This is at least the case of its theoretical goal of reducing conflicts and contradictions on all political levels, from the world to states and families, so as to create a 'political continuum' in which any single political dimension can be structurally transposed onto others. The world, states and families thus need to be consistent in their way of governance, so as to be nothing else but different manifestations of one universal institution.

It is argued that political governance must be effectively transposable from the highest to the lowest levels, since smaller political societies are always conditioned by greater ones. This means that the order and peace of larger political societies is always the necessary guarantee for that of smaller ones. Mozi (468–376 BC) argued that disorder in the world is caused by conflicting interests and opinions; order can only be brought about by political leadership. The world is too big to be managed by only the highest form of government. It should hence be divided into many sub-states and other smaller units, so that good governance may follow when a political institution is transposed 'from superior to inferior levels, rather than vice-versa'. This is thus a descending order from 'all-under-heaven' to nation-states to families. Since, as a result of conflicting interests and opinions, a conjunction of family units does not necessarily lead to a peaceful society, the combination of nation-states does not automatically ensure a peaceful world.<sup>15</sup> Mozi's theory implies distrust of international 'union' to solve the problem of conflicts.

It is further argued that the political legitimacy of a universal political institution should reflect ethical rightness; that is, political legitimacy is justified if it corresponds to ethical rightness. As a result, Chinese philosophies have always insisted upon ethical transposition as a support for political transposition. In contrast to political transposition, ethical transposition is held to develop in an ascending order, from families to states and then to 'all-under-heaven'. This is because ethics should be rooted in the basic forms of life. The notion of 'family' is thought to be the natural basis and strongest evidence of human love, harmony, mutual concern and obligations, a concentrated model of 'the very essence of humanity'.<sup>16</sup> It was consequently seen as an ethical archetype to be universally promoted on all political levels. Governing a state, and even 'all-under-heaven', in just the same way one runs a family is a widely-recognized Confucian principle.<sup>17</sup> What is implied here is that world peace is impossible if world governance does not follow the family model.

Political transposition, conducted downwards from 'all-under-heaven' to the nation-state and then to the family, and ethics, operating the other way around, result in a relationship of mutual justification between the two. This indicates the existence of a political meta-principle. In other words, a political system is valid if and only if it simultaneously constitutes a suitable ethical system. This could be a standard for

political justification, leading to fundamental doubts about Western political thinking. Briefly speaking, the Western metaphysical presupposition of the existence of absolute individuals inevitably results in conflict (imagined by Hobbes) between each and every person. This logically leads to Carl Schmitt's concept of politics as being between enemies, a very honest representation of Western political thinking. If this concept ensues, then cooperation will be always difficult, limited and forever unstable; being an *insoluble*, it is unfortunately almost impossible for it to go beyond Nash's equilibrium. Western political logic going from individuals to nation-states, and even to imperialist systems, is a refusal of the world which will finally backfire if it is universally imitated by all nations. The key point is: an idea or a strategy is proved to be flawed if it backfires, being self-defeated when universally imitated.

The all-under-heaven system is likely to be successful when universally imitated, at least in theoretical situations. It proposes politics of harmony for a world in which relations prevail *far and near* among nations, as opposed to hostility differentiating between the self and others. In a world with no enemies, or *hostis* (Schmitt, 1996: 28), harmony becomes possible. This is perhaps the only way to create a world of all peoples.

### 8. The strategy of harmony and Confucian Improvement

In the first chapter of the *Shangshu*, the following is said to be the greatest political goal: 'to create harmony between all nations and peoples'. These are most probably the earliest words on harmony. A world of harmony appeals much more than one of conflict (or, as I see it, a 'non-world'). Harmony just happens to be the best form of cooperation.

In Chinese theory, harmony is the necessary ontological condition for different things to exist and develop, usually defined as reciprocal dependence, reciprocal improvement or the perfect fitting for different things, as opposed to the *sameness* of things. Though more complicated, harmony as opposed to sameness is basically speaking a question of multiplicity rather than oneness. This definition of harmony goes back to a significant debate held around the year 530 BC.

According to the *Zuozhuan* (*Commentary of Zuo*), a Duke once said that he appreciated most of all those who held the same opinions as himself, since sameness meant harmony. However, his prime minister Yanzi (?–500 BC) insisted on there being an essential difference between harmony and sameness: harmony should be mutual improvement amongst different things, leading to welcome cooperation, whereas sameness reduced possibilities to only one thing. He explained: 'Harmony is like well-prepared soup . . . The same thing applies to the relationship between a lord and his minister . . . If soup were made only of water and some more water, who could bear to eat it? And if music were played with no differences, who could bear to listen to it? That is why mere conformity is not suitable at all.'<sup>18</sup>

In another debate, harmony was further argued to be the necessary condition for things to exist and be of any value. A historian named Shi Bo gave his argument in another ancient book, the *Guoyu* (*Discourses of the states*): 'Harmony makes things flourish, whereas sameness makes them perish . . . Monotonous sounds are unbear-

able to hear, uniformity leads to there being no culture, the same flavors have no effect, and sameness has no value.<sup>19</sup> It is hence said: 'Harmony protects things from decline.'<sup>20</sup> Music is one of the best examples of how harmony is created, as stated in the *Zuozhuan*: 'Clear and indistinct, great and small, long and short, lively and solemn, joyful and sorrowful, hard and soft, quick and slow, high and low, emerging and fading, compact and airy: the sounds mutually fulfill each other.'<sup>21</sup>

Harmony as a principle of co-existence can be better understood in Chinese metaphysics. As stated above, Chinese philosophy involves metaphysics of *relations* rather than ontology of *being*. The problem of a being as a thing 'in itself' is strange for Chinese philosophy, since nothing can be *a thing as such* unless it is defined in terms of its relations with other things. This means that relations, rather than things, need to be meaningfully examined. From the viewpoint of relationships, it is unreasonable to say 'a thing is *as it is*', for a thing is never *as it is* by itself; it is *made as such and such* in certain relations in which it is involved. Rather than being a real presence, a 'thing' is merely a linguistic invention to facilitate representation. Relations are thus the ontological condition for a thing to be present as such; so much so that *existence* presupposes *co-existence*, and co-existence determines existence. This philosophical logic is vital for a clear understanding of harmony as a principle for relations between things.

A small but certainly not trivial difference between cooperation and harmony leads us to an important question. The principle of cooperation could be seen as being '*live-and-let-live*', whereas harmony is a stronger principle meaning *live-if-let-live* and *improve-if-let-improve*.<sup>22</sup> The strategy of harmony thus means more than mere cooperation. A harmonious game seeks harmonious play more than fair play. In any given game with no other alternatives, fair play is the best thing that can be expected. However, admirable fairness could conceal a slight but nevertheless serious injustice in the game itself: play could be injustice if not all of the players agree with aspects of the game, such as its goals and rules. People want not only fair play but also the right to choose a better game than that decided by a dominating power. Harmonious play might be the way to create a consensual game. The Chinese metaphysical concern with relations changes the goals of a game, which is subsequently supposed to develop harmonious relations between all players and to maximize their common good, rather than to maximize the interests of individual players.

We thus come to the key point of strategies aimed at harmony: (1) given any two players X and Y, harmony is a reciprocal equilibrium in which X and Y share their fortune to such an extent that X benefits if Y also benefits, and loses if Y loses; (2) X attains fulfillment if Y attains fulfillment, to such an extent that the promotion of Y's fulfillment becomes X's dominating strategy, so as to promote his own fulfillment, and vice versa. In short, a strategy aimed at harmony creates a game of necessary and inevitable mutual accomplishment. The mutually-benefiting formula of harmony means a much better social situation than Pareto's fulfillment, unless Pareto's happens to coincide with harmonious fulfillment. Out of respect for Confucius and his important contribution to the theory of harmony, I would like to call the two strategies of harmony the *Confucian equilibrium* and *Confucian Improvement* respectively.

## 9. Relevance to contemporary problems

In the contemporary context, the all-under-heaven model might remind us of the United Nations, since both are supposed to solve international problems and keep peace and order in the world. Unfortunately, their essential differences are much deeper than their similarities. The UN is not a world institution with substantial power to govern the world, but only an organization for negotiating and bargaining each nation's interests. As a result, it can never lead to any real agreements, since everyone is defined as being a rational selfish creature intent only upon maximizing its own interests. In order to reconcile divergences, the UN has made great efforts to validate rational dialogue as a means of doing away with unreasonable conflicts. However, this has certainly not been as successful as expected. There is no doubt that rational dialogue has led to a decrease in wars; but not to a reduction in conflicts. And worse still, the UN has no substantial power, and is hence unable to resist a superpower's dominance over the world.

Underlying the UN model are ideals of international democracy and rational communication; roughly speaking, a continuation of the great Greek tradition of *agora*. However, it is a pity that the UN is only *an agora without a polis*. It has therefore become a serious problem. Unless it is institutionally well-organized, an agora can become chaotic and confused. It is obvious that the UN is far from being a perfect world agora, since the world as a political body is absent. Contrary to popular illusion, we have not yet found the best concept of democracy. As a matter of fact, democracy could be distorted by power, money and marketing, misled by strategic votes (as Arrow's theorem has proved), and even absurdly be used to bring about such terrible disasters as those brought upon the world by Nazi Germany. Much to our disappointment, democracy does not necessarily entail, neither theoretically nor practically, justice, goodness and peace. As for rational communication or dialogue, these also suffer from serious difficulties. Communication functioning in an ideal situation (such as that of Habermas' project) might lead to reciprocal understanding, but not necessarily to reciprocal *acceptance*. This is because understanding cannot guarantee acceptance. The project of rational communication thus fails to produce agreement, since it cannot pass over the problem of acceptance. The truth is that there is no necessary transition from the mutual understanding of *minds* to the mutual acceptance of *hearts*. We also need to be aware that the problem of the *other* is actually a problem of other hearts rather than other minds, since hearts are not open to concession.<sup>23</sup>

Let us come back to the problem of the United Nations. In terms of social relations, an international society is similar to an individualist one, and it therefore inherits all of the latter's problems. An international society is also often more badly governed, owing to its state of anarchy. In fact, as can be observed, a superpower can easily invalidate such an international organization as the UN. The problem is that the UN is only a joint organization, and is far from being a world government with a world institution. It is only supposed to be a place where the interests of nation-states (far removed from those of the world as a whole) are negotiated. As result, it appears to enhance and not weaken the nation-state system, as Giddens (1985: ch. 10) points out. An agora without a polis was impossible. In much the same way, a world organization without a world institution is an illusion.

The question of a world institution for the future has become somewhat relevant, since, as has often been pointed out, globalization is deconstructing the system of nation-states. During the process of globalization, it is possible that one or several nation-states transform themselves into new empires. An example of this is the recent invention of an American 'empire', which has inherited characteristics of modern imperialism, shifting from colonial rule to domination over the world by means of hegemony or, as the Americans prefer to call it, 'American leadership'. With the aid of globalization, in which it finds the greatest possibility of universalizing its power, this 'omni-empire' seeks to dominate not only politically and economically but also culturally and through the control of knowledge. However, it would seem that some Americans want even more. Just as Joseph Nye (2003) said, the problem of the American empire might better be called an 'imperial understretch' rather than the often-decried 'imperial overstretch'; and he called upon the United States to enhance its 'soft power' as a complement to its 'hard power' (Nye, 2002). This omni-empire desires to be not only the winner but also the rule-maker of all games. The world would become totally disordered if any player were also the rule-maker of the games it was playing. The American empire will never lead the world to a cheerful 'end of history' but rather to the death of the world itself, since the best strategy for frustrated and desperate countries is to break the world order by any means available, including making use of the hazardous opportunities offered by globalization.

The world is disoriented. This is a problem of our times. Globalization seems to be taking us from the era of nation-states to an unclear new age. However, one thing is clear: globalization has deeply involved all nations, societies and cultures, to such an extent that nothing is left unaffected. This is why a *world institution* will be a key issue for the future. As already argued, the world *is not* if there is no world institution responsible for order and peace. The physical world was created, but a humanized world still remains to be made. The *rebirth of the world* in terms of 'all-under-heaven' requires world-orientated political reform, so as to follow a philosophical turn towards a new world-view and a new framework for political analysis, whereby all *problems in the world* will be re-interpreted as *problems of the world*. This is the reason for discussing the concept of all-under-heaven in this paper, as a means of rethinking current political problems and, perhaps, as a reference point for the designation of a world institution. In my opinion, a suitable world could be based on two key concepts, *agora* and *all-under-heaven*, where Greek and Chinese traditions meet in harmony. Of course, both of these concepts should be renewed or rewritten in keeping with contemporary ways.

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## Notes

1. My theory of all-under-heaven, published in Chinese papers in 2003 and as a book in 2005, has been the subject of many reviews and debates in China. I would like to express my sincere thanks for all comments and criticism. The present paper is a newly-written and improved presentation of the theory.

2. Shangshu (尚书, Book of Documents), Chapter 1 (Documents of King Yao); this is one of the oldest Chinese books, dating from approximately 3,000 years ago, recording the words and anecdotes of the great kings of yesteryear.
3. The American choice of 'preemptive attacks' proclaimed a new age of military imperialism and world disorder. Cf. The National Security Strategy of the United States of America. The White House, September 2002.
4. Cf. Shang-shu (尚书, Book of Documents), Zhou-li (尚书 Institutions of Zhou) and Liji (礼记. Book of Rites).
5. Zhou-li (Institutions of Zhou, chapter 4 周礼\夏官司马)?Zuo-zhuan (Commentary of Zuo, 14th year of the reign of Duke Xian, 周礼\夏官司马, 14年 see also Chen Fuliang (1137–1203): The Military Systems of Past Dynasties (陳傅良：歷代兵制).
6. The argument is by Li Si, the prime minister of the Qin empire; in Sima Qian (145–86 BC): *Shiji, the First Emperor of Qin* (史記\秦始皇本紀).
7. As Xunzi (313–238 BC) points out: 'the world as all-under-heaven does not imply people giving up their land by force, but to have an institution which is universally accepted by all people'. *Xunzi*, chapter 11(荀子/王霸).
8. Laozi Daodejing, Chapter 54 (道德經/54章：'以身觀身，以家觀家，以鄉觀鄉，以邦觀邦，以天下觀天下').
9. The Chinese concept shi (事) is defined as 'what has been done', and is very close to the Western word factum. See Huainanzi: What has to be followed is the Way, and what have to be done are facts 淮南子/汜論：“所由曰道，所爲曰事”。
10. Liji (Book of Rites), chapter 27 (禮記\哀公問).
11. Shijing (Book of Songs) Xiao Ya, Bei Shan, 詩經\小雅\北山; see also Cai Yong 蔡邕 Duduan, Book 1 獨斷/卷上; Sima Guang 司馬光 Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government, Book 27 資治通鑑/卷27/漢紀19.
12. *Lüshi Chunqiu*, Vol. 13 (呂氏春秋\卷13\論大).
13. *Lüshi Chunqiu*, Vol. 1 (呂氏春秋\卷一\貴公).
14. *Lüshi Chunqiu*, Vol. 1 (呂氏春秋\卷一\貴公).
15. *Mozi*, Vol. 3 (墨子/尚同).
16. *Liji, Dazhuan* 禮記\大傳.
17. *The Great Learning* (大學; see also *Mozi* 墨子/尚同下).
18. *Zuozhuan*, 20th year of the reign of Duke Zhao. 左传/昭公20年：'公曰：和与同异乎？对曰：异。和如羹焉... 君臣亦然...若以水济水，谁能食之？若琴瑟之专一，谁能听之？同之不可也如是'
19. *Guoyu (Discourses of the states, Discourses of Zheng)*.
20. Liji, chapter 19. 国语/郑语：“夫和实生物，同则不继... 声一无听，物一无文，味一无果，物一不讲”。
21. *Zuozhuan*, 20th year of the reign of Duke Zhao. 左传/昭公20年：“清浊，大小，短长，疾徐，哀乐，刚柔，迟速，高下，出入，周疏，以相济也”
22. This is an extended version of a Confucian golden rule (*Analec*s, ch. 6).
23. My criticism on Habermas' theory of communication can be found in Zhao Tingyang (2003).

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