Empire, Tianxia and Great Unity: A historical examination and future vision of China’s international communication

Lei Zhang and Zhengrong Hu
Communication University of China, China

Abstract
A theoretical imagination of the world order and global landscape is necessary for China’s international communication. ‘Empire – nation state’, the dominant structure in the contemporary world entails the logic of imperialism. However, the perspective of ‘the world’ (Tianxia; 天下) in ancient China introduced alternative theoretical challenges. Chinese scholars have been devoted to developing a vision of a society of ‘Great Unity’ (Datong; 大同) over the past century. Based on historical examination, this article aims to explore new approaches of China’s international communication.

Keywords
Empire, Great Unity, imperialism, international communication, Tianxia

As the economic power and international status of China continue to advance, external communication and soft power building have gained ever-greater importance among the country’s national strategies. The National Outline for Cultural Development and Planning during the 11th Five-Year Plan issued in 2006 clearly stipulated the cultural strategy of ‘going out’. The implementation of the strategy saw the setting up of branches of Chinese media abroad, the showing of clips promoting the Chinese national image in New York’s Times Square, the founding of Confucius schools, the export of cultural products such as films to the rest of the world and exchange programmes for culture and education.

Nevertheless, the strategy comes with a double challenge. First, the ‘going out’ of culture and media is no smooth sailing. The authors came across an exchange student from Africa, who bluntly pointed out that if China sought recognition from Africa, the country must be able to...
distinguish itself from the Western colonisers. Wang Hui (2012) mentioned that China had done a lot in Africa. However, people in Africa had absolutely no idea what sort of order China hoped to achieve in Africa and in the world and what exactly it was that they wanted? Second, when the emphasis is solely placed ‘going out’ and overlooks the exploration of thinking and logics, it is likely to lead to power struggle among nations and yet another round of the usual international competition.

The authors believe the ‘going out’ of Chinese culture and media has breathed new life into external communication. It will continue to face new challenges and must offer a theoretical vision of world order and a global picture. Going through and examining the history of the key logic of China’s external communication, the paper reflected on the ‘empire’ or old imperialism logic that continues to exist among contemporary national struggles before reviewing China’s historical resources, where observation was carried out from the perspective of Tianxia. Eventually, the reliability and explainability of the ideology of the ‘Great Unity’ in modern times were explored to offer ideology and inspiration.

‘Empire’ logic and imperialism

Empire may be defined as a monarchy system of government. From a historical context and academic history perspective, however, the connotation of the word has far surpassed its definition. History wise, the world had seen no shortage of empires: ancient Rome, the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Empire and the Golden Horde were all once prosperous. In China, even before Qin Shi Huang proclaimed himself emperor, the governmental system of ‘all the lands under heaven are King’s land’ was long in practice, which continued until the replacement of the Qing dynasty by the Republic of China. These ‘pre-modern’ empires had two key characteristics: first, the power remained in the hands of the emperor or the equal. Second, the desire for territorial expansion remained insatiable. Punitive expeditions were basically how empires communicated with the outside world, while geographical positions afforded natural defences and led to the formation of different civilisations, which gave rise to the foundation of epistemology of the East and the West. Meanwhile, expansive lands and their population in Africa, Latin America and Oceania remained forgotten on the edge of the world.

Worldwide, empire has become a modern concept and led to the logic of an international order that is interconnected to the rise of capitalism, colonialism and nationalism. As capitalists desperately seek to expand, the occupation of new land and labour goods means colonialism becomes inevitable. The British Empire between the 18th and the 19th centuries serves as a classical example: the building of ‘the empire on which the sun never sets’ stretched across Australia, Hong Kong, India, Africa, the British Isles and America. It gave rise to the modern concept of ‘empire’, which possesses three features: the power remains in the hands of few minorities and social classes, the territory goes beyond ethnical boundaries, and inequality such as colonialism. Modern empires seem to be an extension of the ancient ones but are in fact products of capitalism’s global colonialism.

To cross geographical barriers, the broadly defined communication, which covers transport and dissemination, continues to innovate tools and systems that break free the limitations of time and space and build infrastructure for modern empires. For instance, the British government decreed in 1845 the standard gauge to be 4 feet 8½ inches, which went on to become an international standard; Greenwich Mean Time became the international time standard; and English has become the lingua franca in international business and politics. Only with ‘standardised gauge and writing system’
may ‘law be enforced’ is a point shared among modern colonists and Qin Shi Huang. Zhao Yuezhi (2011) remarked that a British colonial governor in Australia referred to telegraph as ‘a great imperial binding force’ (p. 144), while the forerunner of BBC World Service was known as BBC Empire Service in 1932. James Carey (1992) elaborated how telegraph changed the trading system and became the new tool of capitalists for speculation and moneymaking. A universal pricing system was thus built, whose dissemination was a part of the endeavour of colonialism. Telegraph turned capital profit point from time to space and separated transport and communication, which enabled capital to control a wide territory.

It was exactly the powerful weapon of colonialism that brought about its strong reactant: nationalism and the raise of nation states. Inequality between colonies and suzerains gave rise to calls for independence in North and Latin America between the end of the 18th century and early 19th century, during which time a series of non-imperial republic countries were created. According to Anderson (1983/2006), that was the genesis of modern nation states and nationalism. All the dynasties and empires basically came to an end or disappeared from the scene after the First World War, while nation states became the unit of modern international politics. Anderson believed nations were ‘imagined communities’ whose existence in a social organism required, at first, change in epistemology. That is, the perception of time turned to horizontal history from oracle time. The combination of capitalism, printing technology and the fatality of human-language diversity then prompted the formation of a community based on a certain worldly language.

Although nation states replaced empires to become the main bodies in international politics in early 20th century, the logic of an empire has, however, never died down. Some newly founded nation states continued ‘imperialism’ of ancient empires, while the other, newly liberated from colonialism, became depended on or went up against imperialism. A few European countries acquired hegemony in the world, and such global system entailed inequality and marginalisation. Despite the rising and falling of power of countries, phenomena such as competition and rivalry, interference or assimilation and territory occupation or economic control remained commonplace. Such logic is a mutation of the ‘free competition’ of capitalism and ‘survival of the fittest’ of Darwinism in the Tianxia system. It is also a product that resulted from global civilisations being run over by ‘homogenous and hollow time’. Lenin (1917) regarded ‘imperialism’ as a phase being monopolised by capitalism and global monopolisation being the core characteristic of financial capital.

In fact, imperialism still haunts Tianxia. Christine Fuchs, pioneer in critical communication studies in Europe, believed Lenin’s theory to be valid even today. The global financial crisis triggered by the US subprime mortgage crisis in 2008 showcased the contemporary façade of capital: global infiltration, extreme monopolisation and unequal financial dependency. Harvey (2003) once quoted Giovanni Arrighi in his analysis; he believed the power of an empire might be divided into territorial and capital logics, and one of them occupied a leading position during a certain historical phase. The Second World War led to the collapse of territorial occupation but rebuilt the dependency on a capitalist economy, which gave rise to ‘new imperialism’, a mutation brought about by new liberalism.

A decentralised global imperial system was proposed in Empire (2000) by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, whereby a world ruling system was built with the United States, some supranational unions and monopoly-finance capital placed in the top. The order of such empire coincides with globalisation, which confirmed the criticism thereof. That is, globalisation is in essence a version of ‘Americanisation’. Since 9/11 in 2001, the United States has once again confirmed its global hegemony by taking advantage of the call for anti-terrorism. On the one hand, it has
immediately resorted to military power to defend ‘global order’ as centred around itself, while, on the other hand, directing international opinion. However, contemporary US hegemony is no longer simply a military expedition of the imperial era but rather a cultural vanguard. Hollywood films, multinational media corporations, Internet speculators and popular merchandise all directly or indirectly serve as the vanguard of capitalist expansion and the main force that exports values. ‘Soft power’, as coined by Joseph Samuel Nye Jr., still follows the logic of imperialism.

This is exactly the ‘cultural imperialism’ or ‘media imperialism’ fiercely criticised by many leftist scholars. As Schiller pointed out in Mass Communications and American Empire (1969) that mass communication had to date emerged as a pillar of American imperialism. Information ‘made in America’ was disseminated across the globe, playing the role of the nerve centre of America’s national power and expansionism (Schiller, 2006, p. 142).

In short, the logic of an empire or old imperialism remains the leading content of the current world system, with communication, media and culture being the new battlefields. As Zhao (2011) put it,

The emergence of the modern form of world communication might have brought about the utopian vision of the great world unity; the process, however, remained a basic component in the global expansion of Western colonialism and capitalism as a socioeconomic system (Mattelart, 2000). Today, following some national liberation movements and the rise of post-colonial nation states, world order might have been incorporated into a new empire, where ‘outside’ no longer existed. This was due to all the regions being drawn into the empire logic and borders fell away, while world political and economic powers could no longer regard the incorporation of the ‘outside’ into its colony as a goal as during the colonial times. (pp. 143–144)

**Tianxia system of ancient China**

The nearly three centuries of Western history have formed comparatively clear venation, that is, the direct succession of the empire logic as embedded in the international political system of ‘empire – nation state’. However, Chinese history posed challenges to such analysis of empires: Was ancient China a classical representation of an empire with an insatiable appetite for both internal and external colonies? In what sense did China become (or not become) a ‘nation state’? Has China built some national traditions that are distinctly different from the West? Building on such basis, how did the external communication of ancient China differ in concepts and practice from modern international communication?

These are no easy questions. ‘China’ is not a fixed concept; it comprises complex regionality and cultural communities that continuously grow and contract throughout history. The face of its civilisation changes and accumulates and hides among different narratives. The review of ‘history’ from any time point is actually the reconstruction of history.

In The Elaboration of Chinese History, Liang Qichao divided China into three phases: last-generation history, middle-age history and early modern history. The first began ‘from the imperial times to the Qin’s unification of states’, the second began ‘from Qin’s unification to the Qianlong Emperor of the Qing dynasty’, while the last began ‘from the last year of the reign of the Qianlong Emperor to today’. Liang’s division criterion was based on China’s relations with Tianxia, and the three phases reflect China’s China, Asia’s China and World’s China. To quote Ge (2011), the first two phases were ‘a self-centred visionary era’, while the last was ‘a reflective era’, with the West serving as a reference.

During the last-generation historical period, only China existed and there was no world. But the concept of ‘China’ did not refer to an independent country but rather a region. Be it the
In archaeological studies of ancient ware or the linguistic analysis of the origin of words, the word ‘China’ seemed to contain multiple meanings and may refer to the Central Plains, the capital, or the imperial government (Hong, 2006; Yang, 2009). It often referred to the Nine Provinces and was a synonym for Huaxia, Zhonghua and the Divine Land, and an antonym for ‘the four seas’ or ‘Siyi’. The chapter Land Explanation of Erya defines the four seas as the wild tribes, Jiuyi, Badi, Qirong, Liuman. Tribes outside of the Central Plains were referred to as Dongyi, Xirong, Nanman and Beidi, and shared the distinct characteristic of being ‘uncivilised’ and were commonly described as ‘people beyond the pale of civilisation’. However, this did not mean the path of these tribes and Huaxia did not cross or the Nine Provinces were monolithic. People of Huaxia lacked the idea of ‘Tianxia’ and could vaguely differentiate between ‘self’ and ‘others’, not to mention a clear awareness of nationality. The chapter Yan Hui in the Analects stated, ‘within the four seas all men are brothers’. The chapter Great Learning in the Book of Rites explained that those of the ancient times wishing to extend the way to the whole world must first govern their states well; to govern a state well, they would have to rationally manage their family clans; to be able to rationally manage family clans would require personal probity; [...] personal probity directs rational management of family clans; the ability to manage family clans rationally may then be further developed to facilitate proper state governance; well-governed states ultimately lead to world peace. The ‘differential mode of association’ as put forward by Fei Xiaotong offers the most suitable explanation. ‘Person – family clans – states – world’ constitute a sequence, arranging different ethnic groups based on cultural closeness, a structure of concentric circles is thus formed. Such a structure is political – but more so a cultural structure. The eventual ideal is what Confucius referred to as the ‘Great Unity of Tianxia’.

Since the period was marked by the lack of ‘outside’, the modern sense of ‘external communication’ or ‘international communication’ has no place here. During the Spring and Autumn period or the Warring States period, ancient Chinese states communicated, promoted and persuaded, which required diplomatese and public communication. However, the competitiveness and difference were not so glaring, it was simply information communication within the same culture. Li Si’s Petition against the Expulsion of Guest Officers as found in the Records of the Grand Historian offered a glimpse of the situation then. Qin recruited men from different states, including those from the neighbouring states of Song, Jin and Wei, and those from outside of the Central Plains, such as Xirong. Referring to treasure, beauties and music, Li remarked the popularity of music from Zheng and Wei in Qin, which illustrated the commonality of cultural communication. He finished off with the point: ‘As he embraces the people, the virtue of an aspiring individual seeking to build an empire is thus highlighted’. The land is therefore united and the people unified, which will bring about year-round prosperity and blessing from both heaven and earth. That is how the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors remained invincible. In other words, the distinction between states and between the Central Plains and the Siyi was not clear-cut. The key was the ability to illustrate ‘illustrious virtue’ before one was able to undertake what was necessary to become an emperor. All in all, communication was frequent among states during the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period; an integrating trend was even emerging save for some political struggles within the cultural community.

After Qin united the six states during middle-age historical period, ‘Tianxia’ expanded and changed. Observing through the structure of concentric circles from the inside out, the communal concept of ‘China’ was showing clearer borders. A symbolic border was built during the Qin dynasty, when the Great Wall was constructed to keep out the nomads in the north. Borders were established among the Song dynasty, Liao, Jin and Western Xia. The Great Wall was consolidated and geographical advantages exploited during the Ming dynasty. Political powers all around rose
and fell along with the dynasties in the Central Plains, be it controlling, paying tribute, expedition, trade or even invasions of the Central Plains by foreign tribes. Countries such as the Korean Peninsula, Japan, Siam and the Ryukyu Kingdom remained on the outskirts of the Chinese civilisation. The relations between the Kingdom of Joseon and the Ming dynasty during the 14th and 15th centuries was considered a classical case of tributary, which led to the creation of a community of East Asian civilisation. Further afield, India, Persia and even Europe were included in China’s perception of Tianxia through the dual channel of intermittent communication and continued imagination (Jung, 2006).

‘Imagination’ is critical to the understanding of ‘Tianxia’ concept of China during its long and profound history. China believed itself to be ‘the centre of Tianxia’ and possessed the best etiquette and culture. ‘Roping in countries afield through kindness’ and mollification were adopted as the basic strategies, whereby foreign countries only needed to pay tribute and required no direct domination. Through his analysis of the three resources based on which ancient China pictured foreign lands, legends, Portraits of Periodical Offering and travel logs, Ge (2011) dissected the formation and essence of such imagination. He then elaborated such world concept through his analysis of the map and pointed out the imagination continued to be challenged after the middle period of the Tang Dynasty, followed by a drastic change that took place during the Song dynasty, as Ge (2011) notes,

The change was of great significance. In the history of ideas, the Sino-barbarian dichotomy and the tributary system of ancient China were turned from actual strategies into an imagined order; in an imagined world, from a commanding position in a real system into self-consolation; in the political history, from a grand and arrogant imperial nation into an equal diplomatic strategy; in thinking history, from the mainstream ideology of scholar-officials on Tianxia and China and Siyi and from universalism of all under Heaven is the king’s land into nationalism of self imagination. (p. 47)

Imagination is constructed by communication. External communication was more open before the Song dynasty, such as Zhang Qian’s mission to the Western Regions during the Han dynasty and Xuanzang’s journey to the West and Jianzhen’s missionary trips to the East during the Tang dynasty. They were events of communication tinged with political colours and meaningful public cultural exchanges, which involved diplomacy while also focusing on cultural and religious activities. Such communication was also facilitated by trade, immigration, marriage alliance and expeditions, just as Li Qi wrote in his poem: Ever more remains are buried in the wilds year after year, vainly in exchange for grapes. Rivalry relations existed between the imperial government in the Central Plains and the surrounding countries during the Song dynasty, greatly limiting cultural communication. Emperors of the Song dynasty repeatedly prohibited the introduction of books, apart from texts related to the Nine Classics, to the market of Liao dynasty, particularly books related to current affairs. As Liu (2006) remarked: Emperor Shenzong of Song decreed during the first year of Yuanfeng (1078 AD) that apart from texts related to the Nine Classics, individuals found selling any books to northerners or foreigners would be punishable by 3 years behind bars, while the inducer would receive a reduced sentence. All the parties would be banished to the next state or by a thousand li, should the circumstances be grave. Informants would be rewarded. The same treatment was imparted on the people of Jiaozhi and Goguryeo. Nevertheless, cultural communication remained unbroken. Lv (2012) stated that cultures were communicative, but the routes tended to be winded.

The Qing dynasty was another drastic period of transition. After the Manchu conquest of China, the introduction of new clothes symbolised the makeover of the traditional culture of the Central
Plains. This led to the collapse of the community of East Asian culture and the tributary system. Western power had completely shattered the ‘world imagination’ of China, which pulled the ancient tradition out of existing time and space concepts and threw it into the international system of modern capitalism. Thus began the phase of ‘world’s China’ in early modern history. East and West, tradition and modern constitute the fundamental issues of modern China.

In short, Chinese tradition and history constructed an international order, or a vision of international order, that differs from the logic of modern empires. We shall attempt to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the section.

First, ancient ‘China’ did adopt imperialism, but it was not an expansive empire as in the modern sense. As earlier stated, China had a long imperial tradition and the urge for foreign expansion and colonies as Wu (2012) explained. Nevertheless, essential difference distinguished it from modern empires as driven by capitals.

Second, if nation states that arose from Europe and independent colonies after the First World War were indeed products of capitalism, then China had long established a clear national consciousness as early as the Song dynasty. If the Western nation states were a ‘community of imagination’, then the imagination of China seems to have a far longer history and solider foundation. If the former were political, then China is a cultural community.

Third, this has led a fundamental difference between China’s vision of ‘international relations’ (we would settle for the term for the time being) and that of the West. The most critical of which are ‘Tianxia view’ and the ‘tributary system’. The civilisation community that China built with its vessel states was no equal foreign diplomacy or pure imperial rule or colonialism (Ru & Gong, 2009). Jung (2006) explained the tributary system might have been an international order centred around China, but its maintenance was not solely dependent on the unilateral compulsion or favour from China. It was partaken by individual stakeholders and relied on the joint effort of surrounding countries.

Fourth, the external communication of ancient China was no mind control of cultural imperialism or the draw of cultural soft power. It was more like a cultural ripple effect, among which was interaction, assimilation, resistance and integration. Its effect on surrounding areas was like that of ‘overflowing’ water.

Western great powers arrived in East Asia in the 19th century and pulled China from ‘East Asia’s China’ into ‘Tianxia’, which brought about a new round of national construction in China and the adjustment of behaviour to partake in international order. Nevertheless, ancient China left behind rich thinking resources, which, when combined with modern thinking and actual practice, may introduce a more imaginative ideology of international order.

The Great Unity of Tianxia: re-visioning Tianxia

‘Saving the nation’ had been a critical theme in modern China. From a grand imperial nation to a backward country under attack, from being the centre of the world to the inability to find a footing in the world, the stark contrast propelled modern Chinese thinkers to continuously explore new paths. From the Hundred Days’ Reform, the Self-Strengthening Movement to the Xinhai Revolution and the Socialist Revolution, a prominent characteristic was the use of the West as reference to reset up ‘others’ for China. However, China’s vision for world order had never deviated from historical traditions, which had actually been integrated with modern thinking for theoretical deduction.

Notable figures from the Hundred Days’ Reform such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao were examples of modernised traditional Chinese intellectuals. Kang wrote *A Book of Great Harmony*
during his exile between 1901 and 1902, which drew from the Confucius thinking of ‘the great unity’ of ‘Tianxia as one’. He created a utopia based on the theoretical framework of the three phases (troubled times, peaceful times, great peace) of historical development. He even proposed a world of great unity, whereby the borders were removed: ‘Tianxia as one without nations … whereupon states do not exist, emperors do not exist, everyone loves one another, everyone is equal, Tianxia is one, and that is great unity. Such unity is the system of a world with great peace’. Kang’s argument may be good and covered the 5000 years of Chinese history, but his thinking was built upon the Confucius thinking of the sound practice of Tao in every aspect and influenced by Social Darwinism. Consequently, he put forward the principle of ‘survival of the fittest’, whereby a ‘civilised country’ would take out a ‘barbaric country’, which then rendered it a ‘vulgar theory of historical revolution’ (Li, 1955). As Mao Zedong explained, ‘Kang wrote A Book of Great Harmony. He did not and could not have found a path to great unity’ (Mao, 1991). Similarly, Liang also mentioned ‘a nation of cosmopolitanism’ and advocated that

we may not only be aware of a nation and not a world. We should exploit the talent and gift of every individual in the nation to the fullest as with the help of the nation to greatly contribute to the civilisation of mankind in the world. This will be the trend in every country.

Unfortunately, Liang’s argument held no substance.

Sun Yat-sen, a revolutionary, might have chosen a path that differed from those of the Hundred Days’ Reform, but his preference for Confucius’s ‘Tianxia as one’ was no different from them. He had repeatedly referred to the concept in his speeches and writing, which had come to become one of his core ideas for the founding of a nation. For instance, during his Three Principles of the People speech in 1924, Sun stated, ‘Unite a world based on existing moral and peace to create governance of great unity’. His idea of a world of great unity was closely interrelated to the three principles: nationalism, democracy and people’s welfare. The achievement of national equality, human equality and wealth equality was the achievement of a society of great unity. His thinking melded the view of bourgeois republic democracy, Confucius morality and even socialism to reflect a certain harmony but also nationalism. During his speech to the troops on December 1921, he remarked,

Upon the success of the revolution, the treasure left behind by our forefathers throughout history shall be exploited. The nation shall endeavour to provide for the four major needs of the people: food, clothing shelter and transport, so as to strive for the happiness of the public. Meanwhile, the young will be taught, the strong will be used, the old will be cared. The Confucius ideal of Tianxia as one may really be achieved to create a new republic of China that is solemn and grand, and ride above Europe and America. (Quoted from Huang, 2006)

If ‘the great unity of Tianxia’ is a utopia, then it has a lot in common with another ‘utopia’: communism. Mao published People’s democratic dictatorship on 30 June 1946 and also mentioned ‘the great unity’:

For the working class, the working people and the Communist Part, it is not about what is being toppled. It is actually about hard work that creates conditions for the natural annihilation of social class, national power and political parties, thus advancing mankind into the realm of great unity.

He believed Kang had failed to find the real path to great unity, which was only possible ‘through the people’s republic that reaches socialism and communism to achieve the annihilation of social
class and the great unity of Tianxia’. This demanded the implementation of socialist revolution and reform at home, and ‘uniting the nations and people in Tianxia that treat us equally in our joint struggle’ abroad. Following the founding of the nation, the slogans on Tian’anmen Gate tower were finalised as ‘Long Live People’s Republic of China’ and ‘Long Live the Great Unity of Tianxia People’, which reflect the international-order view of a socialist country. Such view has infiltrated the core policies and diplomatic strategies of the country. The ideal of the great unity of socialism is embedded in the concepts of ‘communist ideals’ to ‘harmonious society’ and the ‘Chinese dream’. The unique ‘one country, two systems’ China adopted for Hong Kong and Macau suggests the extension of ‘Tianxia ideal’, which surpasses the basic framework of nation state and inspires solution to the conflict on the Korean Peninsula (Zheng, 2006).

Of course, the idea of ‘Tianxia as one’ is not unique to China, similar argument was found among individuals such as Marcus Aurelius, Immanuel Kant, Ulrich Beck and countries including the ‘utopia’ of ancient Greece and ‘one world’ of India. To a certain extent, ‘the great unity’ and ‘cosmopolitanism’ are two of a kind. However, the unique historical traditions of China may offer international politics unique thinking resources and an alternative practice.

Contemporary Chinese thinking reflects a lot on theories. The ‘Tianxia system’ theory of T. Zhao (2003, 2011) explains the most critical meaning of ‘Tianxia’ is that of ethics and political science. It is an ideal of one world, and imagines a political unit that surpasses a nation and offers a value gauge that differs from a nation or state. Wang (2012) goes back to the discourse of Wu Wenzao and Fei Xiaotong on the Chinese nation and proposes the theory of ‘surpass the new warring states’, through a point of view of the uniqueness of the Chinese nation. Fei’s (2000) expression ‘appreciate the culture/values of others as one’s own, and Tianxia will become a harmonious whole’ shares the basic principle as that of ‘harmony without sameness’, which may be considered a programmatic principle of a new international order.

A new vision is thus provided for China’s external communication. For example, C. Li (2011), Former President of Xinhua News Agency, published an article titled Toward a New World Media Order in the Wall Street Journal, in which he emphasised ‘In our interdependent world, the human community needs a set of more civilized rules to govern international mass communication’. Li also proposed the construction of a mechanism for media communication and negotiation known as a ‘media U.N.’, which surpasses the design of nation state.

**Conclusion**

The external communication of contemporary China necessitates strategic demands, as an immense number of books on the strategy, means, technique and effect are already on offer. However, a more fundamental vision of Tianxia order may offer a sounder foundation. The basic structure of ‘empire – nation state’ requires reflection, while the embedded logic of the struggle of imperialism is sorely responsible for the world war and conflict. The ‘great unity of Tianxia’ of ancient China has the potential to offer an alternative world vision.

In the vocabulary of the social mass, ‘Chinese Century’ is often compared with the prosperous period of Han and Tang dynasties. The time has changed, and contemporary political, economic and cultural systems different greatly from those of a thousand years ago. The thinking resources of the Chinese Century are far more complex than those revealed by the logic of an ancient society. How to ‘Three Shared Unities’ (Gan, 2007), while searching for the core logic that enables China to stand among world nations based on the integration of thinking resources, should be the connotation embedded in the subject of China’s search for the ‘confident in our chosen path’. Moreover, China’s external communication may be thus inspired.
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**Author biographies**

**Lei Zhang** is Professor of Communication of the National Centre for Communication Innovation Studies at CUC. His major research interests include cultural studies, ethnographic studies of Internet, and theories of international communications. His works include *Anxiety and Hope: A media sociological study of urban poverty in Beijing* (2008), and so on.

**Zhengrong Hu** is President of Communication University of China (CUC), Professor of Communication, and Director of the National Centre for Communication Innovation Studies at CUC. His research areas include media policy, international communication, new media, political economy of communication, and so on. He was the Chair of China Communication Association (2006–2011), research fellow at Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University (2005) and Leverhulme visiting professor (2006) at University of Westminster. He has published widely including the *Annual Report of China’s International Communication* (since 2014) and *Global Media Industries* (since 2011).