

Exploring Dong Zhongshu's TianXia Worldview through the Principles of Benevolence and Righteousness

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Abstract

This study reveals Dong Zhongshu's worldview of Tianxia (天下) through an investigation of the principles of benevolence and righteousness from the Spring and Autumn Annals. Thus, this study employs a qualitative research methodology to clarify the theory of ruling the world with benevolence and righteousness. Literature research and classic interpretation methods were used to examine his thoughts on benevolence and his worldview of Tianxia. His perspective on benevolence and righteousness was from the Spring and Autumn Annals. In political practice, benevolence and righteousness are only standard. Dong Zhongshu developed the way of Kingship of Universal Benevolence (天下歸仁), in which the king starts by improving himself and then extends benevolent governance from nearby areas to larger territories until Tianxia. Tianxia is not the expansion of territory, let alone a political goal, but rather the application of Confucian Tianxia feelings in realistic politics. Dong Zhongshu's Tianxia worldview promotes the way of Kingship, which is consistent with humanity's most fundamental moral standards, and the concept of forming a community of human destiny and thus merits further investigation.

Keywords: Dong Zhongshu, Tianxia, Benevolence, Civilization, Barbarism.

Introduction

Building a world of lasting peace is the simple and genuine aspiration of all peoples. However, today's world faces unprecedentedly severe social, moral, and ecological crises that pose significant challenges to international order and human survival (Nussbaum, 2003; Wang, 2024). The root cause lies in the relationships among individuals and between humans and nature. Undeniably, focusing on hegemony and utilitarianism only leads to confrontation and forsakes benevolence and harmony. In an era where human interests are increasingly intertwined and security and danger are shared, good interpersonal relations, social order,

and moral norms are especially important. The issues of equal dialogue, exchange, and mutual understanding among civilizations are receiving increasing attention (Tang, 2011). Benevolence and righteousness constitute the core of Confucianism (Liang, 2021). The wisdom embedded in its outlook on life and nature provides a valuable approach for addressing these problems (Mou, 2006; Lou, 2017).

The Spring and Autumn Annals, as recorded in the Shi Ji, provide a concentrated manifestation of the perspective of propriety and righteousness (Sima, 1959). As an expert of the Gongyang Studies of Spring and Autumn Annals (春秋公羊學), Dong Zhongshu provided principles of benevolence and righteousness that must have manifested their principle and spirit in the Spring and Autumn Annals (Queen, 2010; Cao, 2002; Zhou, 1987). Social governance is about managing people. To rule and be ruled seems to constitute a political relationship, but this is actually a relationship between the self and others (Zhou, 2001; Wang, 2023; Xu, 2010). For society to be governed well, the first thing to address is the relationship between human beings, and the kernels of humanity are benevolence and righteousness (Jiang, 2023). Dong Zhongshu advocated that benevolence pertains to loving others, whereas righteousness involves rectifying oneself (Su, 1992). With the help of the Ci (辭), in the Spring and Autumn Annals, he presented the profound truths of the Confucian theory of the greatness of the way of Kingship and benevolence and righteousness (Yu, 2013). He also fully developed the distinguishing Yi and Xia (夷夏之辨) (Zeng, 2022; Huang, 2003). Moreover, he had the social conditions to realize the way of Kingship and the benevolence and righteousness of the Spring and Autumn Annals. This not only manifested the greatness of the way of Kingship but also embodied Dong Zhongshu's political viewpoints and thoughts about governing the world with benevolence and righteousness (Sima, 1959; Ban, 1999; Wang, 1995).

This study first analyzes how Dong Zhongshu's thoughts on benevolence and righteousness differ and apply to the relationship between the self and others. Misplacing benevolence and righteousness can lead to disorder, emphasizing the need to extend benevolence to broader and more distant spaces to truly embody kingship over Tianxia. The second part explores the historical events and figures recorded in the Spring and Autumn Annals, investigating the ethical principles of benevolence and righteousness and the spirit of the way of Kingship. In the Spring and Autumn Annals, Ci is used to praise or criticize individuals, reflecting their ethical judgments. The third part discusses the differentiation of benevolence and righteousness in terms of far-near (遠近) and inner-outer (內外), exploring the issue of "distinguishing Yi and Xia", as depicted in the Spring and Autumn Annals. Far-near and inner-outer not only pertain to temporal, spatial, or geographical aspects but also involve Confucian concepts such as cultural development and ritual education. Finally, this article summarizes Dong Zhongshu's worldview of Tianxia. He hoped that kings would begin governance with benevolence in nearby areas, extend benevolence throughout Tianxia, and design a top-down and inner-outer political strategy and path of "Universal Benevolence" for the Han dynasty. This reflects his political viewpoints and thoughts about governing Tianxia with benevolence and righteousness.

This study underscores the vital role of virtues such as benevolence and righteousness in managing interpersonal relationships and self-regulation. It provides scholars with novel perspectives and methodologies for investigating contemporary ethical issues and holds significant academic value. Additionally, the study focuses on enhancing leaders' moral

standards and self-discipline, offering valuable insights into contemporary political leadership and governance practices. Furthermore, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how morality and reason can bolster effective governance and facilitate dispute resolution.

Literature Review

The Spring and Autumn Studies (春秋學) is a significant aspect of Dong Zhongshu's thinking (Liang, 2021; Feng, 2017). The majority of relevant research findings are currently focused on China, with others originating from Sinological circles around East Asia, including Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. However, there are relatively few research findings from Europe, America, and other countries. Sarah A. Queen's *From Chronicle to Canon: The hermeneutics of the spring and autumn, according to Dong Zhongshu*, Michael Loewe's *Dong Zhongshu, a Confucian Heritage and the Chunqiu Fanlu (春秋繁露)*, and Japanese scholar Sigezawa Tosio (重澤俊朗)'s *Biography of Dong Family in Spring and Autumn*, are notable international references (Queen, 2010; Loewe, 2017). These research findings span a long period of more than a century, beginning in the late nineteenth century. The contents of these works include a wide range of topics, each with its own unique qualities.

The term Tianxia initially denotes geographical space, which is often mentioned alongside "four seas" (四海) and "beyond the seas" (海隅). Shangshu (尚書) noted that the August Heaven confers its mandate, and over all within the four seas, it appoints sovereigns. The Book of Songs states that beneath the canopy of Tianxia, all are the king's land; within the four seas, all are the king's ministers (溥天之下，莫非王土。率土之濱，莫非王臣) (Mao & Zheng, 1999). When "Tianxia" is connected with the concepts of family and country, it often has political significance, reflecting the political and ethical recognition of royal authority and the unity of the realm (Liu, 1990; Cui, 2024; Zhao, 2005). Li Ji noted that when families and clans are settled, the state will be in great peace; when the state is in great peace, Tianxia will be in great peace (Kong, 1999). *Mencius* believed that the foundation of Tianxia lies in the state, the foundation of the state lies in the family, and the foundation of the family lies in oneself (Zhu, 1983).

Table 1

Literature review of this study

Topic	Keywords	Sources
Benevolence and Righteousness	benevolence; righteousness; heaven and man; inner; outer; <i>Zhengyi Mingdao</i> (正義明道); interpersonal relationship	Zhou, 1987; Cao, 2002; Chen, 2017; Li, 2006; Wang, 2004;
<i>distinguishing Yi and Xia</i>	world view; <i>Tianxia</i> ; internationalism; national governance; community; civilized state; value identification; political philosophy	Zhong, 1978; Zhou, 2021; Gan, 2018; Cui, (2024; Huang, 2003
	<i>Gongyang</i> ; <i>Ci</i> ; historical philosophy; near-far; inner-outer	Deng, 2018; Huang, 2019; Zeng, & Guo, 2017;
	<i>Yi Di</i> (夷夏); <i>Zhu Xia</i> ; the way of Kingship; great Unification; distinction; grand unity; <i>Jin</i> ; <i>Tui</i> .	Yu, 2014; Peng, 2021; Duan, 2020; Liu, 2022

Table 1 Shows that the literature review of this study is divided into two topics, "benevolence and righteousness" and "the distinguishing Yi and Xia". Zhou (1987); Cao (2002); Chen (2017); Li (2006); Wang (2004); and Yang (2021), noted that, in Dong Zhongshu's opinion, the Spring and Autumn Annals were principles of benevolence and righteousness. Chunqiu Fanlu was the "first book" to include interpretations of the Spring and Autumn Annals, and it reflects a deep regard for them throughout. Zhou (1987), suggested that Dong Zhongshu's philosophy is a good political philosophy, and Chen (2017), argued that Dong Zhongshu has a comprehensive theoretical and ethical knowledge of the relationship between benevolence and man. The ethical connotation of ren (仁, meaning benevolence) differs from the meaning of cultivation. The ethical ren points to others, whereas the cultivation ren points to oneself. This is the humanism of the other, which has previously been overlooked. Li (2006), discussed the thoughts of benevolence and righteousness in terms of the essence of the mind.

From the perspective of the development history of Confucianism, Zhong (1978); Zhou (2021); Gan (2018); Cui (2024); and Huang (2003), noted that when people are secure, Tianxia is secure. Mencius further emphasized that taking pleasure in the happiness of Tianxia is to be happy; feeling sorrow for the troubles of Tianxia is to be sorrowful. If one cannot do this, one has never been a king. It inspired subsequent scholars. Fan Zhongyan (范仲淹) said, first worry about the worries of Tianxia and then rejoice in its joys (先天下之憂而憂，後天下之樂而樂). Gu Yanwu (顧炎武) believed that the rise and fall of Tianxia, even the common

people, have a responsibility (天下興亡，匹夫有責). Gan (2018), noted that "Tianxia" extends from geographical location to political governance, family and state, and the concerns of the people, embodying the rich thought of governance rooted in the welfare of the people and humanistic sentiments. Dong Zhongshu believed that there are still places in Tianxia where peace has not been achieved because the way of kingship of Cultivation has not been fully implemented there.

Deng (2018); Huang (2019); and Zeng & Guo (2017), noted that Dong Zhongshu used the Spring and Autumn Annals to illustrate the path of benevolence and righteousness, as well as the distinguishing Yi and Xia. The Spring and Autumn Annals' distinction between the inside and outside should begin with the closest. Deng (2018), noted that there are two challenges in distinguishing Yi and Xia. First, benevolence and righteousness are employed to differentiate between Yi and Xia. Second, actions of benevolence and righteousness might cause a shift in the relationship between Yi and Xia.

From the perspective of the relationship between Yi and Xia, Yu (2014); Peng (2021); Duan (2020); and Liu (2022), discussed the worldview of Tianxia. Before the Spring and Autumn Period, Yi Di (夷狄) and Zhu Xia (諸夏) mostly referred to a geographical distinction. The term Hua Xia (華夏) appeared early in Shangshu and Zuo Zhuan (Kong & Kong, 1999) Liu, 1959). In the Spring and Autumn Annals, Confucius extensively and systematically studied how to manage the relationships between the state of Lu and Zhu Xia, as well as the relationships between Yi and Xia (Huang, 2003; Zhu & Wang, 2012). Gongyang scholars (公羊家) referred to "distinguishing Yi and Xia" and the "transformation of Yi and Xia" (夷夏之變). The core of the "distinguishing Yi and Xia" is not about the equal treatment of ethnic groups or races, nor is it simply about geographic distinctions based on kinship or distance (Duan, 2020; Han, 2019; Jia, 2020). It has always been a matter of cultural development and the advancement of ritual and music education. Therefore, this also extends to the "transformation of Yi and Xia".

Yu (2014), noted that the first premise of the Spring and Autumn Annals Ci, which recounts occurrences, is one of benevolence, righteousness, and the way of Kingship. In the age in which Dong Zhongshu lived, the conditions for combining royalty and politics existed. Lv (2013), suggested that it is based on the "Grand Unity"(大一統) and "Yi Xia" viewpoints as opposing sides of ideology. When benevolence and righteousness dominate, Tianxia is stabilized. Some scholars have explored Dong Zhongshu's perspective on benevolence and morality through the lens of political activity. Liu (2022), noted that by inheriting the world vision and sentiment of pre-Qin Confucianism, Dong Zhongshu spread the principles of benevolence and righteousness throughout the country and Tianxia. Dong Zhongshu not only argued philosophically but also devised a rationale for implementing charity and morality during the Han Dynasty.

Methodology

In this study, a qualitative research method that mainly consisted of literature research and classic interpretation was used. Specifically, a search for related literature on CNKI, Scopus, and Web of Science was conducted, and the studies that were found were compared and analyzed from different perspectives to explore Dong Zhongshu's worldview of Tianxia.

- i. Textual research methodologies were used to investigate the distinction between benevolence and righteousness.
- ii. Classical interpretation was used to explain the concept and spirit of benevolence in the Spring and Autumn Annals.
- iii. A comparative research method was used to determine the distinguishing Yi and Xia. On the basis of the points raised above, historical materials were used to investigate Dong Zhongshu's worldview of Tianxia.

Findings and Discussion

Dong Zhongshu designed the way forward for Tianxia with benevolence and righteousness at its core. He perfected the theoretical model of the unity of heavenly, humane, and kingly ways in traditional Chinese thought. His achievements ultimately achieved the return of Tianxia to benevolence, providing a theoretical and practical basis for social governance and the development of Confucianism. Undoubtedly, this marked a great innovation and progress in Confucianism, establishing the important position of Dong Zhongshu in the history of Chinese thought.

The Difference between Benevolence and Righteousness in Moral Practice

Dong Zhongshu broke through the pre-Qin Confucian ideology of benevolence and righteousness, which was based on blood relations and the patriarchal system Ge (2011); Wang (2004), and distinguished benevolence and righteousness for the first time. This was based on the distinctions between oneself and others, as well as those between the inner-outer and far-near worlds (Li, 2006). He noted that the two differ in subject, category, function, and other regards. The subject of benevolence is others rather than oneself. The domain of benevolence is outward and remote, extending to a wider range of others. In contrast, the subject of righteousness is oneself and inside and involves reflecting on and scrutinizing one's own inner self (Dong, 1991).

According to Dong Zhongshu, one should not confine oneself to self-love but should go beyond the self and care for others. The object and domain of benevolence and righteousness should be handled with care, especially for those who are in charge of the government. The results differ depending on the domain and object of the imposition.

Figure 1 shows that the object and domain of benevolence vary, as do the results. The narrower the domain of love is, the lower the realm, the more limited the cause of achievement, and the more unstable. The king loves the Four Yi (四夷, meaning Tianxia), the hegemon loves his country, the secure loves fiefdom, the dangerous loves the people around, and the demise loves him- or herself only. Although a person is Tianzi (天子, meaning the son of Heaven), if he or she only loves him- or herself, he or she is only a loner, with no ministers or people supporting him or her and no followers. He or she can only bring about his or her own destruction in the end (Dong, 1991). Love is a universal human emotion. Starting from love for others, one is about to benefit, help, and secure others. From the small to the large, from the near the far, it expands into love for all things in the world, like the ripples of water (Kang, 2007). If we only love ourselves, it is the lowest form of love.

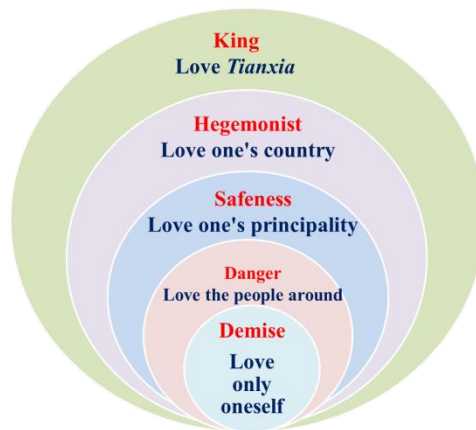


Figure 1: The object and domain of benevolence by *Dong Zhongshu*

The Spring and Autumn Annals recorded the demise of the State of Liang (梁) with only two words, "Liang perished". The book by Gongyang Zhuna (公羊傳) explains why the state of Liang was destroyed without an invasion (He, 2014). Like a fish decaying from the inside out, the state of Liang died on its own. As recorded in the Records of Shi Ji, the river broke its banks and could no longer be blocked, and the fish died and could not be restored (Sima, 1959). According to Zhuan (左傳), the monarch of Liang was so ambitious and extravagant that he repeatedly built cities, exhausting the people, who fled in all directions without waiting for other countries to attack, and Liang perished without a fight (Liu, 1959). This is what happens to kings who love themselves more than they love others.

Unlike benevolence, which has an ever-widening domain of application, the domain and object of righteousness are just the opposite; the object of application is myself, not others. The principle of righteousness is to correct the self, not to correct others. In the face of mistakes and faults, one should turn the blame on oneself and not on others. This involves maintaining strict discipline of oneself while being tolerant of others (Liu, 1990). If one puts the blame on others for one's mistakes and faults, even if one can help others correct their mistakes, it is still against the principle of righteousness. The first principle of righteousness is to correct oneself. If one's own behavior is not upright, even if one is able to correct others, one cannot be called righteous (Wang, 2015; Wang, 2022). As Dong Zhongshu noted, righteousness is correcting self, which is precisely the Confucian moral doctrine of self-discipline

Dong Zhongshu repeatedly emphasized that focusing on the distinction between benevolence and righteousness is very important in the relationship between others and oneself. Some people do not pay attention to this distinction and are satisfied with loving themselves only; they even use righteousness to make demands of others, which can easily lead to confusion in interpersonal relationships and even the order of Tianxia. Once there is chaos, it is inevitably caused by using the wrong object for the application of benevolence and righteousness and mishandling it (Dong, 1991). Therefore, the establishment and transmission of benevolence and righteousness must be accomplished in the process of human interaction (Huang, 2019). The judgment of benevolence and righteousness is not based on the standard of the self but involves others or a category, a group, or a nation and even involves everyone in Tianxia.

The Principles and Spirit of Benevolence and Righteousness in Spring and Autumn Annals

Dong Zhongshu believed that what Confucius wanted to express in composing the Spring and Autumn Annals was the truth of benevolence and righteousness. It shows the king's great righteousness by observing the rights and wrongs in the incidents that occurred and deriving principles of compassion and righteousness from them (Liu, 2007; Wang, 2004). Thus, the spirit of the Spring and Autumn Annals manifested by Dong Zhongshu must be based on the theory of benevolence and righteousness (Queen, 2010).

Dong Zhongshu compared similar things and explored their spirit of benevolence and righteousness (Zeng & Guo, 2017). For example, he compared the actions of Zhai Zhong (蔡仲) and Pang Choufu (逢丑父). Zhai Zhong was a minister of the State Zheng (鄭). After the death of Duke Zhunag of Zheng (鄭莊公), Zhai Zhong advocated the establishment of Duke Hu (公子忽), the eldest son of Duke Zhuang, as the ruler. However, the state of Song (宋) wanted the establishment Duke Tu (公子突), the second son of Duke Zhuang. The Song nation seized Zhai Zhong to coerce him. In this situation, if he agreed to Song's request, not only could Duke Hu avoid death, but the state of Zheng could also be saved. Thus, Zhai Zhong agreed with Song's request. Pang Choufu was a minister of the Qi state. In 598 B.C., Qi and Jin fought a large battle in An (鞏之戰), and the army of Qi was defeated. Pang Choufu looked very similar to Duke Qing of Qi (齊頃公), so to save Duke Qing, he switched clothes and seats with Duke Qing so that Duke Qing could escape. However, he himself was captured and killed by the state of Jin. Although both of these individuals were trying to save their king, Dong Zhongshu's evaluation of them was very different. He thought that Zhai Zhong's behavior continued the state of Zheng, and his motive and result were both good, in line with the principle of righteousness. Pang Choufu, on the other hand, did not conform to the principle of righteousness (Su, 1992).

Both of them used deception to keep the king alive, which is superficially similar, but the reasoning is different. Herein lies the reason why right and wrong are so difficult to determine, says Dong Zhongshu. By placing his ruler in a situation of behavior that was highly esteemed by men so that the king of the state could gain his life without losing his esteem, Zhai Zhong's practice, although contrary to the provision of the scriptures, had a good result (Zhong, 1978). Therefore, the Spring and Autumn Annals regarded him as virtuous. Pang Choufu, on the other hand, although he also preserved the life of the king and even sacrificed his own life, his behavior made the king live in great shame and humiliation. He made the Duke Qing of Qi fugitive, despised mostly by the gentlemen and laughed at by the whole world. Therefore, the Spring and Autumn Annals denounced him. The people did not know righteousness or understand the reasoning behind it, so the Spring and Autumn Annals recorded the matter for everyone to understand. When a country falls, the king must defend his country with the determination to die, not just think about running for his life. Righteousness is higher than life. Dong Zhongshu believed that heaven gave humans life so that they could do what was right, not what was shameful, unlike birds and beasts, which wanted only to survive and profit (Su, 1992).

The Spring and Autumn Annals also recorded a practice of destroying the rites in war, which was criticized in Gongyang Zhuan but highly praised by Dong Zhongshu. In the fifteenth year of Duke Xuan of Lu (魯宣公), Duke Zhuang of Chu (楚莊王) surrounded the state of Song

for nine months. The situation in the besieged city of Song was extremely miserable, and the people had no clothes and no food to the point that they decided to swap their children to eat, and burned the bones to make fires (易子而食，析骸而炊). Hua Yuan (華元), a general of Song, snuck through the siege in the middle of the night and met Sima Zifan (司馬子反), a general of the state of Chu. Hua Yuan told Sima Zifan about the misery of the people of Song. Sima Zifan was shocked. He then told Hua Yuan that the army of Chu had only seven days of food left and that if he could endure for a few more days, the Chu army could retreat, and they entered into a retreat pact. According to the principle of the Spring and Autumn Annals, a minister could not sign a treaty with the enemy without the consent of the king or inform the enemy about the military situation. This was a clear violation of the etiquette of the king and the ministers. However, Dong Zhongshu not only defended Sima Zifan's innocence but also praised him, saying that he took the practice of benevolence and righteousness as his own responsibility, without any modesty (當仁不讓). Sima Zifan could not bear to let the people of a whole country starve. His emotion was a natural outpouring, in line with the common sense of human beings. Practicing the benevolence from the heart is the most beautiful, as noted (為仁者自然為美) (Dong, 1991). In that moment, he was no longer a minister of the state of Chu but an ordinary man, showing the most real and natural emotions. The righteousness of Gongyang Zhuan, which stood for the disputes of interest among the vassal states, was small righteousness, and small righteousness had to give way to great righteousness. Dong Zhongshu, beyond the words of the Spring and Autumn Annals, interpreted the meaning of the benevolence that man loves others from the height of benevolence. The Chu people are human beings, the Song people are also human beings, and in terms of life, their values are equal. He said that everything that is most precious and noble is worth loving and that life is the noblest of values and is a great righteousness.

The Difference between Near-Far and Inner-Outer Based on Benevolence and Righteousness and the Distinguishing Yi And Xia

The distinction between the inner-outer and the distinguishing Yi and Xia was one of the most central tenets of the Gongyang Studies (Hua, 1992). By analyzing the euphemistic and cryptic rhetoric used in the Spring and Autumn Annals, Dong Zhongshu presented the profound truths of Confucianism's perspective on the way of kingship and benevolence. Dong Zhongshu split the Spring and Autumn Annals into three sections based on time. He Xiu of the Eastern Han Dynasty built on this basis and divided it into "Three ages": the age of Chaos (衰亂世), the age of Ascension (升平世), and the age of Peace (太平世) (He, 2014). "Three ages" refers to the king's gradual arrival into the tranquil realm by resolving chaos, from inner to outer, and from close to distant. In space-time, they establish a perfect correlation. The far-near and inner-outer concepts were not just concepts related to time, space, or geography; rather, the Spring and Autumn Studies concepts involved the thickness of emotions, cultural identity and belonging, and the evolution of civilization (Yu, 2022).

Figure 2 shows the distinction between inner-outer and Yi Xia in the Spring and Autumn Annals at different stages of history. The Spring and Autumn Annals records the history of the state of Lu, which began with Lu as the inner and Zhu Xia as the outer. Subsequently, it took Zhu Xia as the inner and Yi Di as the outer. At the end of the "Tianxia commonwealth" stage, there is no distinction between the inside and the outside.

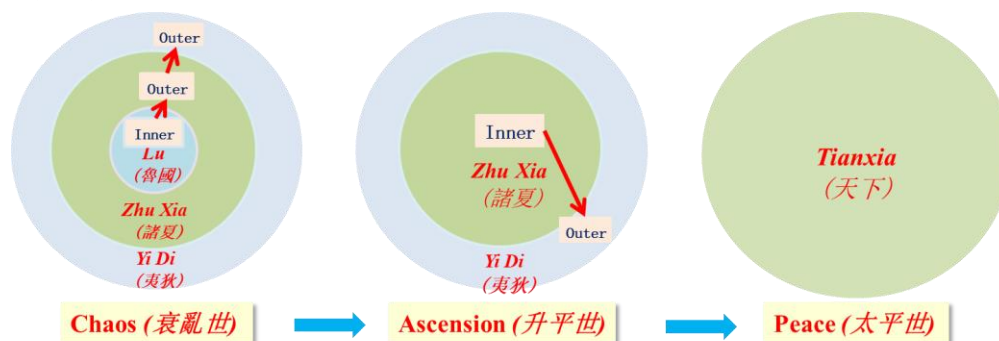


Figure 2: The distinction between the inner-outer space and between Yi and Xia in the Spring and Autumn Annals

The genuine king unifies Tianxia, understands Tianxia's feelings, and regards Tianxia as a single family (Yu, 2014). However, practical efforts must begin with the immediate, starting from the State of Lu and radiating outward in stages, distinguishing between internal and external domains. This leads to two issues: that of distinguishing between Zhu Xia and Yi Di and that of "Three ages": the age of Chaos (衰亂世), the age of Ascension (升平世), and the age of Peace (太平世) between them. The Spring and Autumn Annals strictly distinguishing Yi and Xia, as noted frequently in the Gongyang Zhuan, which disapproved of Yi Di encroaching on the central territory, capturing the officials of Zhu Xia, or presiding over alliances. In the fifteenth year of the reign of Cheng Gong of Lu (魯成公), Lu's ministers met with the ministers of Jin, Qi, and other states of Zhu Xia, as well as Wu, at Zhongli (鐘離盟會). The meeting at Zhongli was the first time that Zhu Xia had official contact with Wu, and it was the first time that Wu, like Yi Di, interacted with Zhu Xia in close proximity, which was highly important. When the Spring and Autumn Annals were written, the participants were designated seven plus one. The seven states of Zhu Xia were one party, and Wu (吳) was a separate party. Hu Anguo believed that Wu is Yi Di, an outsider on top of an outsider (外上加外). In the Battle of JiFu (雞父之戰), the state of Wu cannot take part in Zhu Xia ceremonies (Hu, 2010). In the 23rd year of Duke Zhao Lu (魯昭公), Wu and Jifu jointly defeated the six states of Zhu Xia. Originally, this war was a "Pian War" (偏戰), that is, the two sides agreed on a time and place, sounded the drums and fought, and did not cheat each other. The calligraphy of "Pian War" should record the date and "War", but the Spring and Autumn Annals only recorded the date and did not write "War". Although Wu won the war, the Spring and Autumn Annals still recorded the "fraudulent war" rhetoric. Because Wu is Yi Di, Gongyang Zhuan said that it was not in favor of the victory of Yi Di over Zhu Xia. However, Wu was able to agree on a date to combat Zhu Xia, which was an improvement in behavior.

This relates to the second issue: the advancing and regression between Zhu Xia and Yi Di. Figure 3 shows that the distinction between Zhu Xia and Yi Di lies in whether their behavior conforms to the standards of ritual and music civilization. If the Yi Di performs Chinese rituals, they can advance to the level of Zhu Xia. This is known as the "Transformation of Yi and Xia" (Yu, 2014). If Zhu Xia lost benevolence, righteousness, rites and music, it would be reduced to Yi Di.



Figure 3: The transformation of Yi and Xia in the Spring and Autumn Annals

Therefore, the practice of etiquette, music, indoctrination and benevolence is the fundamental criterion for realizing the distinguishing Yi and Xia. In the 12th year of Duke Xuan's reign, Jin was defeated by Chu in the battle of Bi (邲). When the Spring and Autumn Annals were written, Jin's great physicians did not write down their titles but only their names, whereas Chu was called "Chu Zi". According to Dong Zhongshu, Duke Zhuang of Chu was able to show his virtues and had the credit of a gentleman, so he should be promoted to be a member of Zhu Xia, so he was called "Zi" and regarded Chu as one of the members of Zhu Xia. In the battle of Bi, Jin was deposed as Yi Di, while Chu became a gentleman, and the relationship between *Zhu Xia* and *Yi Di* was completely reversed.

Dong Zhongshu realized that the difference between Yi Di and Zhu Xia is not fixed or unchanging. On the contrary, the distinction between Yi Di and Zhu Xia is dynamic and ongoing. Simply adhering to a rigid attitude of "firmly maintaining the distinction between Yi and Xia" (夷夏大防) in handling the relationship between Zhu Xia and Yi Di, solely because Yi Di lags behind in systems such as ritual, music, and material culture and lacks a conducive environment for education, eliminates or deprives Yi Di of their living space and the rationality of their potential for goodness (Peng, 2021; Tian & Ren, 2021). The progress of Yi Di toward Zhu Xia cannot happen all at once. Annals also do not immediately depict barbarians as perfect but leave room for development (Yu, 2022). Yi Di transited into Zhu Xia (夷狄中國化) has limits, restrictions, moderation, and reserved space. Conversely, Zhu Xia transiting into Yi Di (中國夷狄化) has no limits; if they are demoted, they are demoted without hesitation.

The "Great Unification" of the World with Benevolence and Righteousness at its Core

Dong Zhongshu transformed the Confucian thought of benevolence into a "far-near" and "inner-outer" perspective through the Tianxia vision. Tianxia is not an expansion of the realm but rather an unlimited growth of virtue. The king's benevolence spread to the four Yi, enlarging their territory to its full potential. However, the king did not define the four Yi within the domain of love, nor did he impose his own spiritual concepts and values on others; rather, by personally participating in the governance of the capital city, he created an influence that transcended the boundaries between the capital, the various states, and Yi Di, eventually being witnessed and felt by people of Tianxia throughout the realm.

Dong Zhongshu expanded the domain of benevolence infinitely, in terms of species, to all human beings as well as birds and beasts, suggesting that love was a deeper and wider "universal love". In terms of spatial distance, it is unlimitedly extended; the farther, the better, spreading to the four Yi and even Tianxia. A strong force of arms can lead to hegemony and the establishment of a powerful empire, but it is far from the spirit of the way of the Kingship.

The one who subdues people by virtue is able to gather all the people of the world. This is precisely what hegemony cannot hope to achieve. He believed that to be truly invincible in Tianxia, the path of governance must adhere to the principles of benevolence and righteousness, with no shortcuts. Dong Zhongshu explored the way of Kingship from the Spring and Autumn Annals. "Grand Unity" is not only a manifestation but also a complicated political process that includes specific exterior activities and their manifestations (Yang, 2021). In his three debates with Emperor Wu of Han (漢武帝), Dong Zhongshu repeatedly discussed the necessity and feasibility of the way of Kingship politics on the basis of the relationship between heaven and humanity. He believed that all political and moral issues must be resolved on the foundation of unifying the four corners of the realm (Li, 1990). He put forward specific proposals for realizing peace in the world around the concepts of virtue, benevolence and righteousness, far-near, inner-outer, etc.

Dong Zhongshu designed a top-down and inside-out path of "Universal Benevolence" for the Han dynasty and asserted that a truly benevolent king loves toward all humanity. However, love Yi Di is a noble goal and outcome, not a motive or purpose. If one starts with the goal of changing the entire world, their efforts are often less effective or futile. Only when one's own country gradually strengthens will distant peoples naturally develop admiration and aspiration. Through the moral appeal of cultivating virtue to influence others afar, "Tianxia Unity" can be realized (He, 2014). Dong Zhongshu hoped that kings would recognize the importance of their virtue and the implementation of benevolent governance. Therefore, he vividly showed them the positive outcomes achievable through governing with benevolence and righteousness. He envisioned a harmonious and friendly social atmosphere fostered by educating people with benevolence and righteousness. When everyone practices benevolence toward others and upholds righteousness within themselves and when these principles become universally recognized social norms, it eliminates deceit and disorder. People then acknowledge and support a king who brings them stable lives. As a result, the king's position of rule naturally becomes immensely secure.

Conclusion

Dong Zhongshu's worldview of Tianxia was guided by the theory of "grand unity" from the Spring and Autumn Annals, grounded in the principles of benevolence and righteousness, with the benevolent governance of kings at its core. He designed a path of "Universal Benevolence" that extended from the top down, inside out, and from the king to all under heaven. He emphasized the implementation of the way of Kingship, where kings must first practice benevolence toward others and uphold righteousness within themselves. If a king could expand the principles of benevolence and righteousness to encompass all under heaven, people from afar would admire the king's virtue, thereby gaining the recognition of all under heaven. This influence transcends spatial distances and internal and external boundaries, ultimately achieving the construction of a unified Tianxia. Moreover, Dong Zhongshu emphasized that such "unity" could be achieved only through the principles of benevolence and righteousness. This could not be accomplished through authoritarian repression and tyranny, highlighting the distinction between the way of Kingship and hegemony. The concept of the "Community of Shared Future for Mankind" serves as the foundation for China's foreign relations in the new age (Ge, 2011). This big vision is based on the ancient Chinese thoughts of Tianxia, harmony without diversity, and "One world, one

family" (Zhou, 2021). It provides valuable ideas for addressing numerous issues in modern world society and should be researched further.

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