From Tianxia to Tianxia: The Generalization of a Concept

Abstract:
The philosopher Zhao Tingyang argues that some 3000 years ago there existed a meaningful Chinese tianxia, at the time of the classical Zhou Dynasty. But what does the term mean today? And what does it (or should it) mean in English? Just as the Greek word hegemonia became the English hegemony and the Latin word imperium became the English empire, the Chinese word tianxia is entering English-language political discourse as something related to, but distinct from, its original Chinese meaning(s). Like hegemony and empire before it, the English-language term tianxia is likely to lose its cultural specificity while retaining its generic meaning as an international community of spirit. New political structures call for new terms to describe them, and tianxia may emerge as a useful supplement to empire and hegemony as a term to describe a more spiritual form of international society coordinated, but not dominated or ruled, by a single, central state.

Biography:
Salvatore Babones is a political sociologist at the University of Sydney. His book The New Authoritarianism: Trump, Populism, and the Tyranny of Experts was named 'Best on Politics 2018' by the Wall Street Journal. Salvatore is also the author or co-author of six other books, including the 2017 book American Tianxia: Chinese Money, American Power, and the End of History. His academic research takes a long-term approach to interpreting the structure of the global economy, with a particular focus on China.