**empire/天下(Tiān Xià)**

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| Final Remarks | ZHAO Tingyang, Alain le Pichon | 17 Feb 2022 |

**The Great Seal of America and the “the Great Seal of Chinese imperial authority”**

**Tentative questions**

**(work paper)**

A l P : Novus ordo seclorum – A New Order of the Ages?

*Novus ordo seclorum* is the Latin motto suggested in 1782 by Charles Thomson, the Founding Father chosen by Continental Congress for the final design for the Great Seal of the United States whose official description for the reverse side specifies: "On the base of the pyramid the numerical letters MDCCLXXVI and underneath the following motto: “novus ordo seclorum”. Thomson explained : “the words under it signify the beginning of the new American Aera”.

It can be intersting to comfront it to the following contemporary quotations of two other Founding Fathers. The first from Thomas Paine, writing in Common Sense, in January 1776, "The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind.... It is not the affair of a day, a year, or an age; posterity is virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected, even to the end of time, by the present proceedings." The other of George Washington, in his farewell letter to the army (1783) in his farewell letter to the army of June, 1783, : "The foundations of our Empire were not laid in the dismal age of ignorance and superstition, but at a time when the rights of mankind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any previous period."

These two quotes, demonstrate, if any were needed, how the concept of Novus Ordo Seclorum, which can be translated as New Order of Ages, and which refers directly to the vision of the Latin poet Virgil of the Roman Augustan Empire, and through Virgil's poem to Sibyl's prophecy of a "Novus ordo seclorum", is still present in the Western consciousness . But it shows also how it has been profoundly and definitely changed, from the Augustin vision inspired by the City of God, to the american and revolutionary promotion of an individualistic Religion of Human Rights...

ZTY A story about “the great seal of Chinese imperial authority” could be found as well implicative as a political metaphor of the fate of power. In the *Writings of Hanfeizi* (280 BC-233 BC), this story began with the miserable life of a man named Bian Heh, who knew precious stones and luckily found a huge raw jade supposed of top quality. Bian Heh went to the king, the expert said to the king “a usual stone” and king crippled Bian Heh’s left leg for cheating. After the death of the king, Bian Heh presented the jade to the new king, another expert told the king it is “a usual stone”, so the new king crippled Bian Heh’s right leg. This king died before long, his son, the young king learnt the miserable story and tried to console him, Bian Heh said he did not cry over his poor legs, instead, he cried over the truth that truths be misunderstood, good men be disgraced and talents be ignored. The young king then cut and polished that stone and got an incomparable most precious jade never seen.

The First Emperor Qin the Great got it when he defeated all powers and established the “greatest dynasty for all generations”. The emperor made the jade a great seal of imperial order, with carved words “divine mandate of permanent rule”. The legendary stories had produced the political superstition on this jade, which suggested that one would rule for long if he get the jade seal. This jade seal was lost for unknown reason in 10th century. The later emperors created many fake seals, while never forgetting the real one. But all failed to find it again. And it has not been discovered or unearthed today.

According to Confucian theory, the real seal truly representing the “mandate of heaven” cannot be any entity of gold or jade, instead, the heaven transfers its message into “hearts of people” then in presence of the public choices of people. The famous argument for the heart of people is that it is the only truth “so evident so that no one fails to see it”. It says heart never lies, in no need of interpretation, while mind may be misled by tantalizing concepts, discourses or ideologies. The universal order of Tianxia (all-under-heaven) is argued to rest on the seal of “the hearts of all people”.

The last two years, marked by the great impact of the Covid pandemic, have definitively demonstrated the evidence of a global reversal of the "world order", the evidence of an increasingly constraining globalization, the evidence of a global disorder, the evidence that the Western world is no longer in a position to decide, on its own, on a global agenda and a model of rules for globalization.

- de facto, the Western world has been accustomed, since the Augustan Roman Empire, to considering that its own vision of a universal empire should be accepted, at least legitimate in providing the universal philosophical and political references.

But times seem to have changed. We are thinking about the questions: do we need a new world order? What about the different and previous versions of this Order of the Age, in the West? What is the most adequate model to ensure it? A possible synthesis?

ZTY No answer. It suggests the episteme of modernity, established in the Enlightenment age, has been found incapable to such questions.