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# From Empires to Systems and Back to Empires? System Paradigm in the Intellectual Traditions of Iran, China and Russia\*

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## Abstract

This paper is an attempt to reconsider the legacy of universalism of traditional empires from the perspective of systems theory. In the West, the system ideas were already present in ancient Greek/Roman philosophy and developed further since the Renaissance within the domain of natural sciences (anatomy, mechanics or astronomy), whereas they did not develop as much in social sciences and particularly in politics, which lacks a holistic understanding. In the universal empires of the East (such as Iran, China and Russia) the system paradigm developed from the political life of centralized statehood. The core concept of the traditional imperial universalism was a particular understanding of “justice”, not as equality or absence of coercion, but as a certain form of social order. As the Chinese philosopher Xunzi and the Persian philosopher Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, noted, “justice” is primarily an “equilibrium”, that is a way of maintaining optimal interrelationships between different aspects of society within a single political whole. Traditional imperial universalism understood “just order” as a centralized hierarchical order. However, the current state of the systems approach and the complexity theory allows the reconsideration of the legacy of traditional universalism as the principle of totality of organizational connections and hierarchies of “systemic elements”, in the terminology of Russian philosopher, Alexander Bogdanov. It is concluded that the three Eastern thinkers share similar systematic understanding of “justice” as a hierarchically-arranged political order, coordinated on the basis of a single plan, which permits to maintain a dynamic balance.

**Keywords:** China, Iran, Justice, Russia, System Paradigm, Universal Empire

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## 1. Introduction

The lives of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, Xunzi and Alexander Bogdanov are separated in time by many centuries. They lived in different epochs in different cultural and historical contexts, which at first glance have little in common. However, there are at least two aspects shared by all three thinkers. First, they lived and worked in the social political context of universal empires during a particular period of their history: the period of acute political crisis. Furthermore, Tusi, Xunzi and Bogdanov reacted to the crisis of their time in a similar way - they developed and publicly proposed original ideas of a new political order that continued the holistic intellectual tradition of state-building of the imperial type. The life of Nasir al-Din Tusi (1201-1274) took over the period of the fall of the Khorezmshahs State and the establishment of the Ilkhanid dynasty in 1261. The Chinese philosopher Xunzi (310BCE - 238 BCE) lived in the Period of Warring States, where he witnessed the painful process of the formation of the first centralized empire in China under the leadership of the Qin dynasty (221 BC - 206 BC). Alexander Bogdanov (1873 - 1928) saw the collapse of the Russian Empire and the formation of the Soviet state. These thinkers were not just passive observers of the epoch-making events, but played an active role in the creation of a new political order. For example, Tusi worked at the court of the Ilkhans, and Xunzi at the courts of the rulers of several regional sovereigns during the period of Warring States (475 BCE to 221 BCE), while Alexander Bogdanov was one of Vladimir Lenin's associates and a leader of the Bolshevik Party.

There is one more similarity between the three intellectuals, perhaps the most important of all: the systematic nature of the three thinkers' views. In other words, Nasir al-Din Tusi, Xunzi and

Alexander Bogdanov were above all systemic philosophers; they considered the political order as a unified whole, where all parts are harmonized on the basis of a single methodologically developed political plan and where each part is in a certain functional relation to the whole. The origin of their systematic view has a very complex nature. The distinctive feature of Iran, China and Russia is that they are among the few countries with a stable tradition of universal empires, which lives to this day. It is the general trend towards systematicity, the common characteristic of traditional universal empires, which was the decisive factor that determined the peculiarities of intellectual traditions and traditions of state building of the three countries, and through them, influenced the formation of the views of Tusi, Xunzi and Bogdanov. The holistic perception of social life in a universal empire is born from such important characteristics as a centralized political order, an integrated logistical infrastructure and economic system that unite people of different cultures into a single whole.

This paper is an attempt to consider the general trend towards systematicity in the intellectual traditions of universal empires on the basis of Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's "*Nasirean Ethics*" (*Akhlāq-i Nāsirī*), the ancient Chinese treatise "*Xunzi*", as well as the work of Alexander Bogdanov "*Tectology: Universal Organizational Science*". Certainly, the above mentioned works are only an insignificant part of the large intellectual traditions of the three countries and their influence on the political process was different. On the other hand, these works are among the few that have most fully articulated the experience of universal empires precisely through systematicity. It should also be noted that in methodological terms, each thinker used his own terminology and very specific understanding of systematicity. In particular, Tusi

relied on Persian, Muslim, and ancient Greek philosophical traditions. Xunzi developed his views based on synthesis of Confucianism with achievements of other philosophical schools, primarily Mohism and Taoism; Alexander Bogdanov continued the tradition of the philosophy of Russian cosmism under the influence of Marxism and Western European natural science.

Unfortunately, the size of the article does not allow detailed examination of each work. The main focus will therefore be the theoretical grounds that highlight the common features in the understanding of political order as a unified system in such a way that the ideas of every thinker would complement each other. Thus, the common tendency of Iranian, Chinese and Russian intellectual traditions towards systematicity allows us to methodologically overcome historical and cultural boundaries that separate their lives, and smooth out different degrees of the development of the different aspects of the system approach in a way where each work would complement the others. The importance of studying the imperial experience lies in the fact that the sustainability and durability of the universal world order of traditional (non-colonial) empires may not only provide protection against the chaos generated by the destruction of the American-centered neoliberal global order, but also ensure further development on the basis of its own holistically-oriented tradition.

## **2. West: General Trend towards Unsystematicity**

The tendency toward systematicity radically distinguishes the intellectual traditions of Iran, China, and Russia from those of Europeans. In short, Western thought, especially Western political thought, is characterized by a tendency to understand order as the

result of a random, chaotic collision of different forces, as a result of which order is “naturally” born. This, as Marshal Sahlins correctly points out, depicted social life not as single whole, but as two contrasting and alternating forms trapped in mutual rejection. It is “either hierarchy or equality, monarchial authority or republican equilibrium: either a system of domination that (ideally) restrains people's natural self-interest by an external power; or a self-organizing system of free and equal powers whose opposition (ideally) reconciles their particular interests in the common interest” (Sahlins, 2008, p. 1).

The origin of this intellectual pattern has a very complex nature, and its consideration is beyond the scope of this paper. We can only briefly outline some of its important sources. These include, for example, ancient atomism (Empedocles, Democritus), the political practice of the ancient Greek polis and wars between them, as well as the ancient Greek theater, where the idea of democratic competition is developed. Nevertheless, a holistic understanding of political community (*res publica*) existed in the West, for example in ancient Rome and the Holy Roman Empire (*Res publica Christiana*). However, the French Bourgeois Revolution and the English Industrial Revolution put this mutually exclusive paradigm at the center of the capitalist worldview, theoretically reinforced by natural science (Darwinism), economics (market competition) or Hegelian, and later Marxist dialectics (labor/capital). The situation was aggravated by the fact that none of the pursuits of Western thought to develop a systematic approach did not progress further in social sciences. These include the works of thinkers of different years, such as Spinoza (Spinoza, 2018), Tolcott Parsons (Parsons, 1951), David Easton (Easton, 1953) and Leslie White (White, 1949). As a result, systematicity in

the West is present mainly in engineering, computer or natural sciences (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998, pp. 47–74).

Generally speaking, the crucial feature of Western political thought in the period beginning with the English Industrial Revolution of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and the French Bourgeois Revolution (1789-1799) was the rejection of a holistic approach and the search for pseudo-universal “lockpicks” that were supposed to solve the most important social problems. Such an approach that focused on simple solutions inevitably led to hypertrophy of certain aspects of social and political life to the detriment of others. The resulting contradictions became intractable, giving birth to the need for periodic or permanent mass psychosis through the triumph of *la volonté générale* (Rousseau, 2018, pp. 109-112) or the politics of fear (Hobbes, 1651/2011, p. 182) to blow off the steam of social contradictions. For example, the lockpick of liberalism, which was a response to the horrors of the Thirty Years' War in Europe (1618-1648) and the English Civil War (1639-1660), proposed to create social order through hypertrophied monetary relations that were supposed to transform the chaotic and destructive human actions in the market into social harmony (the invisible hand of the market). As a result, it was expected that a certain social order would emerge, where money would bring mathematical order to human relations from outside, while fear (fear and liberty are consistent according to Hobbes) (Hobbes, 1651/2011, p. 191) and universal ethical norms would provide self-discipline from within (ethical commonwealth according to Kant) (Kant, 1960, pp. 89-92).

The French Revolution (1789-1799) offered an alternative version of social order construction through a permanent emotionally-driven revolutionary transformation. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas on the role of affects in the life of society is an

illustrative example. In his view, human life should be organized in such a way as to destroy the social institutions that restrain them from passing into the natural state of “*bon sauvage*” (Rousseau, 2009, p. 372). It is with the help of constant revolutionary struggle against social structures of oppression that human beings can maintain a state of affect, and due to this emotional stress, individual (egoistic) destructive actions will form an organized general will (*la volonté générale*) of liberated individuals. This lockpick was further developed in the ideas of nationalist and socialist messianism. The former proclaimed a global mission of individual nations that would bring good to all mankind (e.g. J.G. Fichte (1808/2008, p. 107). The second proceeded from the assumption that the lockpick of class struggle was the universal solution to the problems of social exploitation and solidarity (Marx & Engels, 1848, pp. 4, 11).

The rejection of a holistic understanding of society has prevented western intellectual tradition from the development of a unified understanding of justice as a system. Specifically, the liberal tradition believes that justice is the result of chaotic clashes of individuals (or groups of individuals), the results of which can be considered fair (duly pruned and adjusted in reflective equilibrium according to Rawls) (Rawls, 1971, p. 21) if they satisfy the interests of the majority and are in accordance with the first principle of justice (equality) (Rawls, 1971, p. 61) guaranteed by laws in a particular historical period and in a particular socio-political situation. In other words, as Rawls argues, “what is just and unjust is the way that institutions deal with these facts” (Rawls, 1971, p. 118). The second principle of justice solves the contradiction between the first principle of justice (equality) and actual inequality with the help of increased economic competition

and/or protest movement (advantage of social and economic inequalities according to Rawls) (Rawls, 1971, p. 61). In other words, the first principle of justice assumes that inequality will be the main economic motive in the market competition, while the goal of the second principle is to demand for compensation for inequality through a protest movement (Luhmann, 1990, p. 71) or socialist revolution (from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs (Marx, 1986, p. 320), which reinforce the general trend towards egalitarian (unsystemic) understanding (first principle of justice).

As a result, different understandings of justice coexist in modern society in a way that only strengthens economic and political imbalances. In general, all understandings of justice in the West, based on the legacies of the English and French revolutions, can be conditionally divided into three types according to the components of the famous slogan of the French Revolution: Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. Post-bourgeois-revolutionary Europe created three types of justice: the Justice of Freedom which emerges from market relations; the Justice of Equality - the result of the political struggle of different social classes, and the Justice of Fraternity — the outcome of the struggle of nation-states (international order). Obviously, the coexistence of different “justices” is impossible either without the intensification of general imbalances, as it happens in modern society, or the unification of all three interpretations of justice into a justice of higher order (systemic paradigm). In other words, chaotic interactions between different types of justice inevitably lead to excessive suppression or, on the contrary, activation of each other. For example, the “justice of freedom” may contradict the “justice of equality” (the necessity of social inequality as a crucial source of economic motivation) or, on



the contrary, society under the slogans of the “justice of fraternity” and the “justice of equality” may fight against the “justice of freedom” (the demand for material compensation for inequality).

### **3. East: General Trend towards Systematicity**

Tusi, Xunzi and Bogdanov share a similar understanding of statehood as a system. In the most abstract form, they understand the political aspect of systematicity as an organized integrity, in which all parts are harmonized on the basis of a single methodically developed plan. Each part of the political system is in a certain dependence on the whole, which is determined by its structure. Structural interrelations are formed in the system through a complex relations to a leading element, which determines the logic of the relations of the various parts among themselves and to the whole (structure), as well as their hierarchy. The leading element organizes internal interrelations, as well as relations with the external environment in such a way that the system as a whole maintains dynamic equilibrium. Equilibrium arises in the system as a result of the activities of the leading element, which purposefully and hierarchically distributes internal resources in a way that ensures that all elements receive the necessary resources (energy) to fulfill their social functions. The determining role of the leading element allows maintaining equilibrium in the system by suppressing or activating the activities of individual elements in order to assemble at a given time the overall efforts of the entire system in the external environment.

The common notions for Tusi, Xunzi and Bogdanov that show the interrelationships of elements within the whole are “unity”, (dynamic) “equilibrium” and “hierarchy”. The interrelationship of

all three aspects of system according to Tusi provides “justice” (*adalat*), which serves as an organizing principle and consequently determines the structure of a unified political organism. Given the collective universal character of politics, Tusi considers it the highest of all the arts of organization (Tusi, 1964, pp. 192-193) that allows to maintain true equilibrium (*i'tidal-i haqiqi*) (Tusi, 1964, p. 44) (dynamic equilibrium (*podvizhnoye ravnovesiye*) in Bogdanov terms (Bogdanov, 1989b, pp. 197-199) that creates the optimal interrelationships of collective actions that set a general direction towards perfection (*wanmei*), as Xunzi put it (Xunzi, 2014, p. 8) or progress, according to Bogdanov (Bogdanov, 1989b, pp. 199-206). The role of justice becomes decisive because, according to Tusi, it introduces universal directions of common activity for the entire system, which he defines as striving for perfection. In particular, he notes that it is the virtue of justice that blends all harmoniously into a compounding homogeneous state (Tusi, 1964, p. 80); this, according to Bogdanov, it can be defined as “goal oriented” thinking, which after entering into consciousness, becomes an element of psyche and performs the organizational function of coordinating general work activity (Bogdanov, 1989a, p. 155).

The goal oriented unity of the society develops through justice, as Bogdanov notes, through maintaining a balance between organization and disorganization (Bogdanov, 1989b, pp. 234-236). Tusi approached the problem of maintaining a just balance in ethical terms as a balance between “perfection” and “defect”. Human soul has both perfection and defects (Tusi, 1964, pp. 48-50). “Perfection,” he considered to be the result of the activity of the rational soul that seeks justice, while “defect” is primarily the result of disorder due to the over-activity of man's bodily nature

(Tusi, 1964, p. 67). In other words, “defect” (*nuqsan*) refers to a state of disequilibrium, in which the strengthening of one element occurs to the detriment of others, resulting in increased disorder. In Bogdanov’s terms, it can be formulated as a ratio of two principles of organizational selection (*organizatsionniy podbor*), positive and negative, which maintain the dynamic equilibrium of the whole (Bogdanov, 1989b, p. 78).

Maintaining a dynamic equilibrium inevitably requires organizing the whole according to a hierarchical principle. Tusi notes that in order to maintain equilibrium, it is necessary to distribute resources among the elements of the system in combinations that reflect the real contribution of each to the whole. He suggests that the collective efforts of society should be combined in such a way that their labor functions harmoniously correlate with the amount of contribution within a single common cause (Tusi, 1964, p. 154). In doing so, Tusi notes that each element of the system has its own internal logic, which should be combined into hierarchically assembled combinations (subsystems), where one combination is an element of a higher-order relationship. In this case, similar to the system as a whole, each combination has its own organizational structuring principle, that is a leading element. As noted by Tusi, each combination has its head (*ra'is*), that is its organizing principle (leading element), and one combination is part of another combination. An example of such combinations connected in a hierarchical chain is the structure of an empire, which includes households at its base, which is a subsystem of a city, a combination of cities is a subsystem of a region, and a combination of regions is a subsystem of a higher-order system - a universal empire (Tusi, 1964, p. 193).

Bogdanov understood unity in a similar way. The goal oriented

distribution of available forces allows maintaining dynamic equilibrium through a rationally defined ratio of positive and negative selection (*podbor*), i.e. through decreasing the work of some and increasing others according to necessity defined by relations with the environment in given historical conditions. Bogdanov called it the principle of complementary relations, which maintain the stability of the whole when one part of the system compensates the excesses/deficiencies of the other and vice versa. The dynamic aspect of preservation of the complex occurs through the increase of its activities at the expense of the environment, and the dynamic aspect of the destruction of the complex occurs through the decrease of the complex's activities at the expense of their resources being taken away by the environment. Organizational balance of life, according to the leading element ensures that each element of the society receives the necessary amount of resources from the common product, in order to normally perform its social function. Such order is crucial in avoiding wasting labor forces by removing one from work and attract others more. The task of hierarchically organized subsystems is to take over operations in such a way as to free up the resources of the higher levels to perform their operations (Bogdanov, 1989b, p. 155). As Tusi noted, where each one is engaged in the task for which he is most fitted, co-operation results, good increases and evil declines (Tusi, 1964, p. 212).

The following quote from Xunzi vividly illustrates the way in which the different parts relate to each other within the whole political organism to maintain a state of equilibrium. Such a holistic understanding of the society is not only a characteristic of the Chinese political thought, but is also in accord with the Middle Eastern tradition of “The Circle of Justice”:

If they use yi (justice) in order to make social divisions, then they will be harmonized.

If they are harmonized, then they will be unified.

If they are unified, then they will have more force.

If they have more force, then they will be strong.

If they are strong, then they will be able to overcome the animals. And so they can get to live in homes and palaces.

Thus, the reason why humans can order themselves with the four seasons, control the myriad things, and bring benefit to all under Heaven (Xunzi, 2014, p. 76).

However, the stability of the political system can also create preconditions for its own crises. A just, hierarchically organized society may develop in a state of dynamic equilibrium if it emulates the highest leading element. Otherwise, conformity with more primitive leading elements in the hierarchy, triggers the mechanism of degradation of the entire system, which decreases the adaptability of the political organism as a whole. Bogdanov considered it the result of “conservative selection” (*konservativny podbor*), which is inevitable stable conditions. The more conservative the environment, the longer the selection in the same unchanging directions, the more perfect and complete is the correspondence of organizational forms with the existing environment and the more complete the equilibrium. Accordingly, in case of a sharp change in the environment, the internal reorganization of the system leads to acute crises and requires radical measures, which may lead to a loss of equilibrium and impose risk of total collapse (Bogdanov, 1989b, p. 157).

The tradition of universal empires developed mechanisms of adaptation to crises through the replacement of the leading element of the system, while preserving its structure. Bogdanov believed

that equilibrium is a special case of crises, that is, a transitional moment between two opposite oscillations. Crisis is a change in the organizational form of the complex and usually ends with a transition to a new equilibrium. Any complex develops cyclically because each separate paradigm of justice has a limited number of combinations, which through the actions of people inevitably become exhausted when it reaches “limit of tendencies” (*predel tendentsiy*) (Bogdanov 1989b, p. 217). The disintegration of a political system is usually accompanied by the opposite process of the formation of the next leading element. When the potential of all possible combinations of justice is completely exhausted, the phase of “explosive crisis” (*vzrivnoy krizis*) begins, which releases such a number of activities that exceed the energy of the initial leading element. As a result, one of these activities obtains a dominant position in the system and recreates a new just order (Bogdanov, 1989b, p. 218).

Iranian and Chinese political traditions of universal empires have developed, in practice, a systematic approach to crisis in form of Middle Eastern tradition of “circle of Justice” (*hālg'e 'adalat*) and dynastic cycle (*chaodai xunhuan*) in China. “The circle of justice” is what Wittfogel defined as the “optimum” (Wittfogel, 1957, pp. 128-135) that referred to a certain interrelation between state and society, where the supreme ruler periodically (re)distributes social resources and people within society in a way that helps to maintain a stable hierarchical order, where everyone would occupy a “proper” place that ensured the individual performance of a certain social duty (function) within the single whole. In the most general and abstract form, the mechanism of both traditions can be described as follows: As the unjust character of social hierarchy increases, this legitimately empowers the

supreme power to directly appeal to any social class in order to bypass the restrictions imposed by the existing legal regulations and create a new leading element in the system, which would restructure internal interrelations in a way to more efficiently adapt to the pressure of the external environment. In the Middle East, this principle was articulated at least since the Code of Hammurabi (Darling, 2013, pp. 21-22), and in Chinese political thought it is known as the “elevating the worthy” (*shangxian*) and “exalting unity” (*shangtong*) (Mo, 2009, pp. 46, 86).

It should be noted that in spite of the shortcomings of the hierarchical organization of political unity, all three thinkers are unanimous that its violation inevitably means the destruction of the whole and therefore leads to the inevitable degradation of every part. Tusi noted that the importance of all people and each individual derives from the need for cooperation and mutual aid for survival. However, he recognized that the absence of hierarchically organized interrelationship among the members of society means a downward direction (Tusi, 1964, p. 47). Degradation does not begin because of a decline in morals, as Ibn Khaldun would point, but because of a breakdown of balanced interrelationships within the whole. Destruction of the whole arises when within the system, the demands of equality (*tasawi*) are strengthened, which leads to the refusal to follow the leading element that maintains the balance between the higher and lower manifestations of human nature. As a result, the greater the equality, the stronger will be common alignment with the lowest manifestations of human nature, because the low nature is universal to all human beings regardless of their individual qualities and social status. The same thought was proposed by of Xunzi, noting that if the power of each person is the same, order is not possible. According to him, people share the

same pursuits, but have different ways; people share the same desires, but have different understandings. Order is born from the gentleman, whereas chaos (*luan*) is born from the petty man (Xunzi, 2014, p. 142).

Bogdanov believed that the degradation of the whole was the result of the so-called “law of the leasts” (*zakon naimenshih*), when the system is organized by the weakest elements. Equality, as Bogdanov pointed out, is first of all the equality of the lowest complexes of the cultural system. The leading role of the lowest and primitive element would make it difficult to coordinate common efforts to maintain equilibrium through movement towards progress. Bogdanov described the degradation of the whole in following way. Equality means the destruction of the goal oriented unity of the political system, where mutually destructive collective efforts begin to dominate. The destruction of purposefulness and the hierarchical distribution of efforts according to Bogdanov leads to a divergence of pace and increasing divergence between elements. The sum of center activities decreases and new centers move from higher to lower forms of organization, thus increasing the total number of disorganizing factors. Augmentation of organizational differences between parts of the whole leads to a mismatch in the pace of mutually necessary vital functions, which leads to the disorganization of the whole system. The “weak” do not keep up with “strong”; the less stable (but more progressive) are displaced by more stable (more primitive) (Bogdanov, 1989a, p. 221).

Tusi notes that an important aspect of the rational organization of the goal oriented whole is the balance between reason and emotion. According to him, it is about the relationship between the higher (rational) and lower (emotional) aspects of human life,



which should be organized in such a way that they do not suppress each other, but on the contrary maintain a dynamic equilibrium in the process of improving and maintaining a just order. In other words, according to Tusi, the lower forms of human nature should not be completely suppressed because ideally one must complement the others, which the Chinese philosopher Lee Zehou called the *rational-emotional structure* (*qingli jieyou*) (Lee, 2009, pp. 201-202). For instance, Tusi notes that the lower human nature takes on a positive meaning in the form of “love” (*mahabbat*) as a driving force towards justice. Justice itself, is the result of rational synthesis, while “love” provides a natural unity (Tusi, 1964, pp. 196-197). However, as Tusi argues, “love” as a manifestation of the lower bodily human nature organizes unity through extremes, that is, through excessive and extreme forms (*'ishq*) (Tusi, 1964, p. 198) and thus pushes the different aspects of social life to their limit, which in turn prevents the establishment of equilibrium, and leads to disorder. On the other hand, the suppression of “love” also disturbs the equilibrium because it weakens the driving forces towards a just order. In other words, the predominance of “love” in the political whole means the suppression of rational aspects such as laws, turning the supreme ruler becomes an idol who builds his power on manipulating the emotions of the crowd. On the other hand, if rationality is playing a dominant role, for example in form of laws - the ruler becomes a tyrant (Tusi, 1964, pp. 214-215).

Bogdanov approaches the rational-emotional structure as a form of organization of collective labor activity. In doing so, he relies on the tradition of Russian literature and turns to poetry (*Proletkult poetry*). Poetry, according to Bogdanov, is born out of labor activity and for this reason, can set a unified rhythm of collective labor. Since poetry reflects the psychological abilities of each

separate class determined by the peculiarities of their labor activity, different poetry cultivates different attitudes to the whole at each individual level. Poetry (for each class its own) helps to organize preliminary preparation (emotional mood) of a community for the future common labor tasks. It sets a certain rhythm of collective efforts and their combinations and helps to fix the selection of positive results and preserve the suitable ones, including the establishment of emotional connection with the experience of previous generations (Bogdanov, 1918, pp. 12-22).

Bogdanov offers a dynamic model of the transition of the emotional to the rational and the rational back to the emotional through the connection of labor and poetry. Emotions are the beginning, the driving force of rationally organized labor. However, labor should not end with a simple quantitative or even qualitative (i.e. rational) external result, such as an increase in the quantity of products, the introduction of new technologies, or even profit (which ultimately leads to an emotional experience of individual consumption). Collective labor, according to Bogdanov must culminate in the affect of collective victory. It is the emotional experience of a common victory that will lead not only to a psychological change in the individual himself, but also strengthen the interrelationships between people in a single purposefully organized whole (Bogdanov, 1918, pp. 12-22).

In the Confucian tradition of centralized bureaucratic hierarchy, the logic of rational-emotional structure is seen most clearly. According to Xunzi, bureaucratic hierarchy must be combined with the periodic entry and exit of all people into a state of intense affect. It would be more accurate to define imperial affect as an affective complex, since for Xunzi, the emotional experience of the political hierarchy occurs as a whole where the various aspects

(psycho-physiological, linguistic, musical and material) are closely interconnected. Each element in the centralized hierarchy must have its own psychological mechanisms for entering into affect, according to its position in the bureaucracy, and according to its own regional, ethnic and religious laws, but in a strictly defined order and form. The technique of entering into affect is based on a particular psychological interaction with death (*si*), which provides the maximum intensity of emotional stress. With the help of psychological interaction with death, the whole of human life in a centralized hierarchy receives a completed form: what is born must die. Interaction with death must follow certain standards, which is set by a harmonious musical (musical harmony) accompaniment that establishes a specific rhythm (especially drum rhythm) that controls the entry into a state of altered consciousness. Interaction with death through music allows, according to Xunzi, to reach the maximum degree of exaltation. The material control over the course of affect is undertaken through direct interaction with the body of the deceased, which determines the onset of affect, the process of its inhibition and eventual exit from affect (Xunzi, 2014, pp. 207-217).

In particular, biological death and the beginning of mourning ritual are usually accompanied by the most intense experience of grief (*weizhi tongji*). Further interaction with the body of the deceased makes it possible to reduce the intensity of affect and increase the degree of rationalized social order. In particular, as the body decomposes, it should be gradually removed further away from a dwelling. As it moves away from dwelling the amount of jewelry on the body should be increased to hide the processes of decomposition. In other words, interaction with the deceased is organized in a way to an increase of social order and a decrease of

chaos. The apogee of establishment of social order is placing the body in the grave, where the departed relative receives a fixed place in the hierarchy of the dead. As a result, the social status becomes sacred because it helps to symbolically overcome death, and the emotional experience of death makes it possible for the bureaucratic hierarchy and the entire imperial order to become part of the inner psychic life of each individual and group. Similar tradition of political interaction with death in state-building emerged in Iran and Russia in form of Shia and Christian orthodox eschatology (Karavashkin, 2000, pp. 45-62) at least since Safavid Iran during the reign of Shah Ismail (1501-1524) and in Russia under the reign of Ivan the Terrible (1547-1575), where supreme ruler politics was an act of martyrdom that purified individual from sins as divinely mandated agents of Apocalypse (Mitchel, 2009, p. 38). Paraphrasing Ernest Becker - it was the imperial "plan of immortality" (Becker, 1997, pp. 118-120).

#### **4. Conclusion**

This paper attempted to illustrate, based on the example of the works of Tusi, Xunzi and Bogdanov, that the general trend towards systematicity is an important aspect of the intellectual traditions of Iran, China and Russia, which developed within the political context of universal empires. In particular, the paper has revealed that all three thinkers share a similar systematic understanding of "justice" as a hierarchically arranged political order, coordinated on the basis of a single plan, which with the help of rational-emotional structure unites different parts in a certain functional relation to the whole in a way that it allows to maintain a dynamic balance. The ethnic factor should be considered as a possible direction for a further development of the systematicity in the intellectual tradition

of universal empires. This may help to integrate the cultural and psychological dimensions into a systemic intellectual trend of universal empires. From this perspective, universal empire appears as a system of stable inter-ethnic ties, formed around the leading ethnic group and which maintains dynamic balance in relations with the external (ethnic, social, natural and material) environment (Shirokogoroff, 1938, pp. 39-41).

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