Globethics Repository



Chinese values : conception and practice [vol.1]

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see https://www.globethics.net. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy.

Item Type	Book
Authors	Liu, Baocheng
DOI	10.58863/20.500.12424/4312480
Publisher	Globethics Publications;Center for International Business Ethics (CIBE)
Rights	2024 Globethics Publications & CIBE;Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International
Download date	2026-11-09 20:18:09
Item License	http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/4312480

China Ethics 10

Second Edition

Liu Baocheng (刘宝成)

Chinese Values: Conception and Practice Vol. 1

Preface by Christoph Stückelberger

对外经济贸易大学
国际经济伦理研究中心
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ETHICS
全球创新与治理研究院

Globethics

The Chinese Values

Conception and Practice

2nd Enlarged Edition. Volume 1

对外经济贸易大学
国际经济伦理研究中心
Center for International Business Ethics

Globethics

In cooperation with Academy of Global Innovation & Governance (AGIG) at UIBE Beijing
对外经济贸易大学—全球创新与治理研究院

Chinese Values

Conception and Practice

2nd Enlarged Edition Volume 1

Liu Baocheng

Preface

Christoph Stückelberger

Globethics Cultural Series: China Ethics No. 10

Globethics Cultural Series: China Ethics

Publications Director: Prof. Dr Fadi Daou, Executive Director of Globethics

Series editor: Prof. Dr Liu Baocheng, Founder and Director of Center for International Business Ethics (CIBE) at University of International Business and Economics in Beijing/China.

Prof. Dr. Dr. h.c. Christoph Stueckelberger, President and Founder of Globethics, President of Geneva Agape Foundation GAF, Professor of Ethics in Moscow/Russia, Enugu/Nigeria, Beijing/China.

Globethics Cultural Series: China Ethics 10
Liu Baocheng, *Chinese Values: Conception and Practice, 2n Enlarged Edition, Volume 1*
Geneva: Globethics Publications, 2024
DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4312480
ISBN 978-2-88931-584-0 (web); ISBN 978-2-88931-585-7 (print)
© 2024 Globethics.net

English translation: by Prof. Dr Liu Baocheng
Managing Editor: Dr Ignace Haaz
Proofreading and editorial work: Xiaosong Li; Cover Design: Michael Cagnoni

Globethics International Secretariat
Chemin du Pavillon 2
CH-1218 Le Grand-Saconnex, Switzerland
Website: *https://globethics.net/publications*
Email: *publications@globethics.net*

All web links in this text have been verified as of July 2024

The electronic version of this book can be downloaded for free from the Globethics website: www.globethics.net.

The electronic version of this book is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). See: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/. This means that Globethics Publ. grants the right to download and print the electronic version, to distribute and to transmit the work for free, under the following conditions: Attribution: The user must attribute the bibliographical data as mentioned above and must make clear the license terms of this work; Non-commercial. The user may not use this work for commercial purposes or sell it; No derivative works: The user may not alter, transform, or build upon this work. Nothing in this license impairs or restricts the author's moral rights. 

Globethics Publ. retains the right to waive any of the above conditions, especially for reprint and sale in other continents and languages.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME 1

Preface **15**

Introduction **19**

1 FORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL VALUES ... **27**

1.1 Philosophical Inquiries *27*

1.2 Optimal Liberty as the Ultimate Goal *36*

1.3 Human Nature and Morality *41*

1.4 Individual Motivation and Psychoanalysis *47*
1.4.1 Bentham's Principle of Utilitarianism 47
1.4.2 Maslow's Theory of Motivation Formation 52
1.4.3 Psychoanalysis by Freud 55

1.5 Individual Moral Consciousness and Its Development Theory *60*
1.5.1 Plato's Dualism of Human Nature 60
1.5.2 Piaget's Theory of Psychological Development and Moral Consciousness 62
1.5.3 Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Reasoning 65
1.5.4 Schwartz's Basic Individual Values 68
1.5.5 Aunola's Parenting Style Model 70

1.6 World Values Survey *72*

1.7 UN. Principles and Norms on Human Rights *80*

1.8 Competition: A Catalyst for Human Progress *84*

1.9 Law and Value *88*

1.10 Morality in Governance and Leadership *91*

1.11 Summary Commentary *96*

2 VALUE IN HUMAN SOCIETY 99

2.1 Characteristics and Commonalities of Humanity 101

2.2 Humanity as a Subject of Social Science 105

2.3 Microscopic Study on Human Attributes 113

2.4 Economic and Ethical Debate on Value 115

2.5 Needs and Happiness 118

3 CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE 129

3.1 The Essence of Civilization 129

3.2 Culture versus Civilization 136

3.3 Culture and Civilization in the Chinese Context 140

3.4 Hierarchical Cultural Construct 148

3.5 Behavior Norms 150

3.6 Human Attitude 151

3.7 Cognitive Capacity 154

3.8 Human Value 165

3.9 Socialization and Stratification 168

3.10 Cultural Collision and Amalgamation 170

4 ORIGIN OF CHINESE VALUES 175

4.1 Chinese Genesis and Its Impact on Beliefs 175

4.2 Origin of the Chinese Nation 185

4.3 The Cosmic and Worldly View in China 188

4.4 The Chinese Worship and Rituals 199

4.5 The Notion of Central Kingdom 210

4.6 The Concept of Clan in China 213

4.7 The Concept of Filial Piety in China 222

4.8 The Root of Totalitariam and National Unity 226

4.9 Culture Characteristics and Personality Traits of the Chinese Nation 229

5 THE SOURCE OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY 233

5.1 The Mystic River Map and Incription 235

5.2 I Ching 239

5.3 Chinese Metaphysics: School of Mystery 242

5.4 Hundred Schools of Thought 244

5.5 The Four Books and Five Classics 247

5.6 Fervour for National Traditional Culture 251

5.7 Summary Commentary 255

6 THE DAOIST PHILOSOPHY OF EMPTINESS AND NON-ACTION 261

6.1 The Profundity of Laozi 261

6.2 The Blitheness of Zhuangzi 266

6.3 The Evolution of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements 275

6.4 The Art of Huang-Lao and Taoist Religion 279

7 CONFUCIANISM: BENEVOLENCE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN 285

7.1 The Essense of Confucian School of Thought 285

7.2 The Doctrine of the Mean 291

7.3 Benevolence and Righteousness of Confucius and Mencius 304

7.4 The Loyalty and Filial Piety in Confucianism 316

7.5 Mencius Humanitarian Value 323

7.6 Xunzi's Cold Severity 331

7.7 The Philosophical Knot of Neo-Confucianism 338

8 MOHISM: PRINCIPLE OF UNIVERSAL LOVE AND NON-AGGRESSION 347

8.1 A School of High Integrity 348

8.2 Universal Love 349

8.3 Argument for Non-aggression 352

8.4 Synchronized Governance for Moderated Sufficiency 355

8.5 Summary Commentary 357

9 THE DRACONIAN SCHOOL OF LEGALISM 365

9.1 Governance by Virtue or Law? 365

9.2 Rule by Law for Rule by Man 368

9.3 Competition in Legalist Reforms and the Fate of Reformers 371

9.4 The Climax of Legalist Reform by Shang Yang 374

9.5 Moderation and Commentary on Legalistic Governance 378

10 HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS IN THE PRE-QIN ERA 381

10.1 The Chinese Primogenitors and the Abdication System 382

10.2 The Three Dynasties Period 388

10.3 The Beginning of Hereditary Dynasties 391

10.3.1 The Xia Dynasty 391

10.3.2 The Shang Dynasty 394

10.3.3 The Zhou Dynasty 397

10.4 Institutions of the Three Dynasty Period 404

10.5 The Spring and Autumn and Warring States 412

11 THE SHORT-LIVED QIN EMPIRE 421

11.1 The Great Dictator 423

11.2 Unified Administration and Standardization 426

11.3 The Ruthless Legalism 429

11.4 The Fallout of Qin Empire 435

12 THE MANIFICENT HAN DYNASTY 439

12.1 The Struggle between Chu and Han 440

12.2 Reunification and Turmoil of the Han Dynasty 447

12.3 The Tanacious Chinese Concept of Hometown Reflected by the Emperor's Magnificent Home Visit 452

12.4 Political Power vs. Family Ethics 455

12.5 The Grandiose Rule by Emperor Wu 457

12.6 The Eastern Han Dynasty 463

13 THE ERA OF DIVISION AND TURMOIL: FROM THE THREE KINGDOMS TO THE WEI, JIN, SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DYNASTIES 467

13.1 Rivalry of the Three Kingdoms 468

13.2 Literary Spendor during the Three Kingdoms Period 470

13.3 The Ethical Principles Manifested in the "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" 473

13.4 The Twin-Jin Dynasty 482

13.5 The Southern and Northern Dynasties: Regime Confrontation and Ethnic Integration 486

14 SUI AND TANG DYNASTIES: FROM UNIFICATION TO PROSPERITY 489

14.1 Reunification under the Sui Dynasty 490

14.2 The Rise of Tang Dynasty 493

14.3 The Interaction between the Emperor and His Advisor 495

14.4 Magnificance of the Prime Tang Dynasty 498

14.5 The Tumultuous Tides of Buddhism: Embraced and Spurned 502

14.6 The Collapse of Tang Dynasty 506

14.7 Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms 508

15 THE SONG DYNASTY: FROM PROSPERITY TO DOWNFALL 513

15.1 The Three Miracles of Peaceful Settlement 514

15.2 The Thrive of Neo-Confucianism 518

15.3 An Era of Prosperity 524

15.4 Dramatic Reforms 527

15.5 The Decline of the Song Dynasty 530

16 TRANSITION FROM YUAN EMPIRE TO MING DYNASTY 535

16.1 The Dominance of the Mongol Empire over Eurasia 536

16.2 Heavy-handed Anti-corruption 541

16.3 Autocratic Governance by Terror 546

16.4 The Manificient Maritime Expediations 551

16.5 The Decline of the Ming Dynasty 562

17 THE QING DYNASTY RULED BY MANCHURIAN AISIN GIORO 569

17.1 The Rise of Manchurian Power and Its Conquest on China 570

17.2 Massacre by the Manchurian Troops 573

17.3 The Governance of Qing and Territorial Management 576

17.4 Oppressive Control 581

17.5 The End of Chinese Dynastic Rule 589

17.6 Controversy over Four Outstanding Figures in the Qing Dynasty 591

VOLUME 2

As China Ethics No. 10, Vol. 2 – not in this volume

18 A CENTURY OF HUMILIATION IN RECENT HISTORY..……. ……...599

18.1 The Needham's Grand Question……...602

18.2 The First Opium War……621

18.3 The Second Opium War ……..….638

18.4 Rebellion, Reform and Resistence amidst Fatal Crises……652

18.5 Self-defeating Diplomacy and the Boxer Movement……687

18.6 Hundred Days' Reform ……...696

18.7 Summary Commentary ……...…703

19 SOCIALIST ASPIRATIONS FOLLOWED BY THE TRAUMATIZATION OF THREE WARS…….717

19.1 The Quest for Political Reform ……..……717

19.2 Utopian Socialism ……..…..722

19.3 Scientific Socialism ……..…..729

19.4 Various Practices under the Socialist Helmet…… 734

19.5 The Socialist Practice of the Soviet Union…… 738

19.6 May 4th Movement and Political Strifle…… 745

19.7 Joint resistance against Japanese Invasion……..… 751

19.8 The Civil War and Korean War ……..…756

20 CHINESE SOCIALIST CONSTRUCTION……761

20.1 Socialistic Reformation ……764

20.2 The Blindfolded Great Leap Forward ……768

20.3 The Catastrophic Decade of Cultural Revolution ……775

20.4 Back to Order from Chaos……781

21 REFORM AND OPENING UP……..…….787
21.1 Shift in the Ideological Paradigm……..……788
21.2 The Rural Reform towards De-collectivization…..……..…..…796
21.3 The Urban Reform towards Market Economy.……799
21.4 The Opening Up towards Globalization…….…….…..803
21.5 Continuous Drive towards Equitable and High-Quality Development…….……810
21.6 The Chinese Dream…….……..818

22 SOCIALIST CORE VALUES……..823
22.1 The Evolution of Contemporary Chinese Values…….……825
22.2 Building Socialist Spiritual Civilization……833
22.3 Rekindling Chinese Values under the New Era…….844
22.4 The Essense of Chinese Traditional Culture……..855

23 SOCIALIST CORE VALUES AT STATE LEVEL……863
23.1 Value on Prosperity……...864
23.2 Value on Democracy…….895
23.3 Value on Civility ……...914
23.4 Value on Harmony……920

24 SOCIALIST CORE VALUES AT SOCIETAL LEVEL……931
24.1 Value on Freedom…….934
24.2 Value on Equality……..957
24.3 Value on Justice…….979
24.4 Value on the Rule of Law……..992

25 SOCIALIST CORE VALUES AT INDIVIDUAL LEVEL..1009
25.1 Value on Patriotism…….1011
25.2 Value on Dedication……1021
25.3 Value on Integrity……1029

25.4 Value on Friendliness……..…….1035
25.5 Summary Commentary……1046

26 CULTURAL INTERACTIONS WITH THE WORLD…….1053
26.1 Sinicization of Buddhism……1054
26.2 Christianity in China ……...1060
26.3 The Pride and Prejudice toward Western Culture……...1074
26.4 Contemporary Cultural Outreach of China…….1081
26.5 Global Outreach of Chinese Language……1090
26.6 Economic Thought and Business Ethics……..1098
26.7 The Collision of Multifacet Values Reflected in the Case of ZTE Technology…….1106

APPENDIX……1127
Chronology of Chinese History……...1127
REFERENCES…….....1131

PREFACE

by Christoph Stückelberger

This impressive book is a profound overview of three thousand years of development in China. In a very differentiated way, this study puts a special emphasis on the values and virtues in history and presence of China and how it influenced and still influences economic, political, cultural, and religious development of society. The author clearly writes as Chinese from a Chinese perspective. At the same time, he has lifelong experience living and teaching abroad as well as acting internationally in academic cooperation, as advisor of governments, in training business executives (ethical and green business is at the heart of the author), in cooperating with non-governmental organisations and in publishing. His vast experience gives him the knowledge for a differentiated perspective and the academic independence for some critical remarks where appropriate, in all solidarity as citizen of his home country.

The book describes in detail the development of values throughout history. It is readable as an overview or can be read by selected chapters of the readers' interest.

The first part (Chapters 1-3) shows anthropologically the development of human values and its relation with culture.

The main second part (Chapters 4-9) is digging deep into the history of the formation of the Chinese values and civilization. China integrated diverse systems like Daoist, Confucian, and Mohist values. Yin and yang and the longing for Dao and harmony is deeply rooted in China, to be reached in a passive way; also in Confucianism, the heavenly mandate is the mandate for the Golden mean and harmony, but it is achieved through

proactive rules and action in structuring society and a world order through discipline, respect and loyalty. The fascinating Chapters 10-17 analyze and describe in detail the values-development throughout the dynasties: Some dynasties implemented them more through legalistic rules or violent oppression, others ruled more so by virtue. The development is not strictly linear, but with complex, sometimes contradictory steps throughout the various dynasties.

The main third part (Chapters 18-26) starts with the the period between mid-19th and mid-20th century, described as a century of humiliation (Chapter 18). It is a kind of collective trauma for China and the Chinese. Contemporary China can only be understood by remembering and understanding this humiliation. At the same time, each nation must overcome trauma in order to be oriented to the future and not fixed to the past. The Western brutal oppression during the century of humiliation is juxtaposed with strong innovation inputs in education, universities, science, infrastructure, legal reform etc. during this period between mid 19th and mid 20th century, also described in the book. This shows the ambiguity of international interaction between domination/humiliation and innovative cooperation.

The focus of this third main part is on contemporary Chinese Socialist Values throuout the last eighty years until today with the global interaction of China with the world. The author shows in selected areas the contemporary imple-mentation of Chinese socialist values in a rapid transition of Chinese culture, manifold intercultural interactions inside China and with the world - the domestication of foreign religions and the sinization of religions and the development of business ethics related to international standardization and sustainability as in the broad UN frame of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The size of China and its abundant agricultural potential with its Yellow and Yangtze River, is seen by the author as one of the reasons why China had little need to interact with the rest of the world. The natural

boundaries by sea in the South, mountains in the West and human-made China Great Wall in the North, combined with its central power-oriented Confucianism, one-language, ethnocentric and virtue-controlled culture are signs for the determination to be one nation since the Xia-dynasty 4,000 years ago. The author shows how the unity of China under a strong central leadership is an undeniable part of the DNA and identity of China - and has been for three thousand years. Whether foreigners agree or not, it must be recognized as a fact.

However, the author also acknowledges: "On the other hand, the purported 'wolf warrior diplomacy' in recent years has sparked cynicism from the world community; China has forsaken its traditional modest or even polite behavior, and has become assertive in its proposition and stands ready to denounce criticisms with full-blown confrontational rhetoric. Accusations and criticisms are indiscriminately viewed as hostility or envy over China's rise. Wounds left on the nation by western powers since the Opium War have formed scabs that continue to stir Chinese painful memory. A reciprocal adaptive process is required to readjust their perception over a more constructive role of China in the world community in the 21st century."[1]

The reader finds an invaluable amount and debth of information and value judgment. The reader, including myself, does not need to agree in every part with the author.[2] It is an encouragement and invitation to scholars, policy-makers, politicians, entrepreneurs and and civil society to continue researching and publishing on these subjects. I invite you to download for free and read not only this book, but also the whole book

[1] Liu Baocheng, Chinese Values (this book, 2024), Chapter 25.

[2] E.g. the Chinese "people's democratic dictatorship", made understandable by the author as a Marxist dialectic concept, needs further debates about a multi-parti democracy versus a "peoples' participation democracy" as it is the Chinese concept. However, most democracy models are in crisis and new visions of peoples' participation in solving urgent problems of humanity are needed.

series "China Ethics", published by Globethics, with Liu Baocheng and myself as the series editors.[3]

I highly recommend this book to all those who want to deeply understand the values of people and institutions in China. It helps to interact and cooperate with the Chinese in a respectful, productive, and futureoriented way. I recommend it for readers in all sectors of society in China and internationally: government officials and parliamentarians, leaders in the private sector, teachers, and students in the academic and educational world. Today's geopolitical situation is dominated by signs of a new Cold War, now between the US and China, a new bipolar world, where each superpower competes for allies and hardliners escalate and threaten war. In such a situation, we need deescalation and renewed and expanded cooperation. Listening to and understanding others from his/her own background, history, humiliation, dignity and values, is the foundation for mutual respect. This book is great contribution to it. I thank the author, my friend Liu Baocheng!

Christoph Stückelberger
Prof. Dr Dr h.c. mult, Professor of Ethics
in Europe, Asia incl. China and Africa.
Advisor to various institutions of UN and in China
Geneva/Switzerland, 1 July 2024 (English Edition)

[3] All China Ethics books co-published with Center for International Business Ethics (CIBE); free download of soft copies and link to order print copies: https://globethics.net/publications?copublisher%5B58%5D=58

INTRODUCTION

Every human advancement takes us further from the barbarian state. Among nation states, some are well charged to spearhead to the frontier, some intermittently fall into swirls of impasse, some tred on a path of reversal, and still others remain stationary in the state of antiquity. Many ancient civilizations have either eclipsed or fragmented in the historical dust. China as a nation of unity outstands itself as a conspicuous exception which has persevered for five thousand years with resilience, tenacity, and now vibrancy. To many, this nation remains an oriental myth.

Paltry ramblings have to be thrashed out in order to depict a genuine profile over China, a most populous nation with a continuous civilization that has stood the test of 5 millenniums. Behind all the turbulent forces, what sustains its national integrity at core is the default axiology designated by the existential circumstances and reinforced by generations of philosophers and ethicists in value construction consummate with the primary notion of social stability and cosmopolite harmony. This cultural umbilical cord has not completely fallen off despite of several major interruptions, and thereto continues to feed nutritional ethos to the current political regime and popular lifestyle.

The Chinese are officially atheists, but in folk life, they are polytheists. They tend to invest their faith in a portfolio of popular religions in hope that no blessings of any divine forces would be missed. They care less holy spirit than secular ethics. They talk aloud about politics and economics sitting around a lazy Susan laden with delicate cuisine, where micro media like WeChat or YouTube news becomes the main source of entertainment. But they care more seriously about which school their children

are able to enter and how much of their medical bills can be covered by insurance. Their per capita income is only 1/5 of the western world, but their life expectancy is almost at par. They wear Western suit and tie, but chopsticks are still their favorite tools of eating.

Years before Donald Trump's clamorous coded MAGA, Chinese president Xi Jin-ping loaded the phrase with great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. When Joe Biden is weaving democratic allies, still Xi is proposing a community of shared future for the entire mankind. China is moving steadfast to the center of global stage, but it is not ready to accept the existing world order, nor the notion of universal value or liberal internationalism.

Beyond mere existence, the entire human endeavor is vested in the tireless pursuit for meaning. However, cognitive and behavioral differences among nations stubbornly persist despite accelerating global connectivity. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) claims that each particular thing constitutes the entirety of itself as essence; each particularity is at the same time both itself and the universal; each thing expresses the whole and is thoroughly interconnected with everything. From observation of those perplexing behavioral traits of the Chinese, insight can be enhanced when we dive deep to examine the underlying substrata that form and structure its moral values. More objective viewpoints can be obtained by both emic and etic approaches. As an insider, one can examine empathetically the social scheme derived from the nation's inner layers of disposition, cognition and value proposition. As an outsider, one is able to ruminate in a disinterested position so as to engage in a rational inquiry into its specular reflection in comparison with its surroundings. Furthermore, if one manages to stand above with a helicopter view coupled with a long-range retrospect, a magnificent and dynamic scroll may

roll out to unveil the rugged path this nation has walked along as well as the milestones crossed in joys and sorrows.

The Chinese nation maintained a close-knit empire for two thousand years, bitterly experiencing a century of humiliation since the Opium Wars when Western powers pushed open its door with guns and cannons filled with gunpowder invented by the Chinese. Trade embargo and economic sanction by the Western world failed to baffle its communist regime after the WWII. It emulated the Soviet political and economic institution, but did not fall apart like its teacher. As a matter of fact, the past forty years witnessed a burgeoning economy calibrated by its reform and open-door policy. Its political construct has disappointed all democratic liberals, but its singular ruling party continues to enjoy national popularity.

Value embedded in the conscience is the unique property humans possess distinctive of all other species. It is the ultimate source that empowers individual and collective attitude and behavior. Catchphrases that bear universal values all find their entry in the contemporary Chinese political dictionary. As a matter of fact, they are deliberately categorized into three tiers - prosperity, democracy, civility and harmony for the nation; freedom, equality, justice and rule of law for the society; patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship for the individuals. Nonetheless, in addition to the etymological differences between Chinese and English, their interpretation and implementation are highly contextualized evolving along various stages of socio-economic development and are susceptible to frequent changes in the political climate. This book is an initial attempt to excavate and decipher the historical, political and cultural rationale and legitimacy behind these officially sanctioned 12-character proposition of the Chinese socialist core values that are intended to guide and shape the collective belief and behavior of the Chinese nation on a steady course

towards modernation. Laden with historical burdens and confronted with perplexing realities, lofty ideals are easy to formulate, their implementation on the ground is nonetheless far more challenging.

Axiology is a subset of philosophy that undertakes ethical judgment. It overstrides ontological inquiry into fundamental truths and come straight to explicate the worth or value of something based on a set of metaphysical criteria hence forged. There is a subtle difference between ethics and axiology. Ethics is a discipline of moral philosophy that is concerned with what is good, right and beautiful versus what is bad, wrong and ugly. Axiology is a component of the ethics school that selects and categorizes the good aspects of ethics, i.e. worth of something or its goodness. The 12-characters of Chinese socialist values is more precisely subsumed under the study of axiology.

In view of China's protracted footprint, nothing can help to better explain its present and predict its future but by revisiting its past. This book intends to capture the highlights of Chinese value constellation along its historical continuum – from legendary genesis through various imperial dynasties, all the way till the current new era - in order to vindicate the intrinsic quality of the ostensible 12-character socialist core values. It begins by examining the basic human nature and formation of collective conscience for humans to co-exist and interact with each other in order to identify wherein Chinese ideological paradigm is positioned and impacted. A comparative approach is adopted drawing on the occurrences and philosophies of other nations. More elaborate research is conducted over those environmental factors, preeminent figures, dramatic events that caused erratic deflections at particular historical junctures. A large portion of the book is devoted to the traditional philosophies and ethics –

Confucianism, Taoism (also Daoism), Legalism and Buddhism that have conflated with time but continue to animate the Chinese mind-frame.

The origin of Chinese philosophy is identified in the I Ching (Book of Change) the oldest classic divination of cosmological text. It has created a key concept of yin and yang symbolizing two polar forces that constantly oppose each other but coexist in a revolving paradoxical equilibrium under the cosmic law, most notably the sky and the earth. It is further extrapolated to denote two distinctive sides of every composition – from the explicit day and night, man and woman, to the implicit masculinity and feminity, pride and humility, offense and defense. A dichotomous dialectics is developed to explain the formation and evolution of a wide array of physical and social phenomena. Readers may well note that Chinese scholarly pieces are typified with "on the one hand, and on the other hand."

From the I Ching, numerous schools of thought sprouted in the Spring and Autumn era stretching to the end of the Warring Period (770-221 A.D.), enmeshed in heated debate over how well a state can be strategically governed in order to survive and prosper among fierce competition. Through various stages of sublation (aufheben) interacting with incoming cultures - Buddhism and Islam in particular, Chinese culture has been distilled into four distensible aortas: Taoism, Confucianism, Legalism and sinoficated Budhism. They together shape the homestead of Chinese spiritual life as well as social institution.

The core notion of yin-n-yang theoretical framework is harmony on the premise of co-existence. The Daoist great polarity (tai ji) goes further to embrace inclusivity where yin finds accommodation within yang and vice versa. Each one acts as a constraining or offensive force at different time, but no one can eradicate the other. This is probably the earliest

discourse on the notion of check-n-balance, narrowly employed in the modern political science. Discovery and mastery of the delicate balance between yin and yang which is the Dao requires superb wisdom. Dao, the big way of power resembling the law of universe, is so occult that it can hardly find any proper linguistic expression. But it is there, working all the time. The demarcation line that separates yin and Yang is shaped in a smooth curve, representing a contant motion of balance calibrated by the interaction of the opposing forces. This underscores a Pareto Optimality paradigm in a dynamic fashion. Such delicate balance is posited as the doctrine of golden mean by the discourse of Confucius school. It is described as the heavenly mandate in popular Chinese culture.

Towards it, Taoism takes a laissez faire approach; it believes that excessive intervention in what is already endowed by heavenly mandate is injurious. In contrary, Conficianism takes a proactive approach, resolved to decipher and implement the heavenly mandate to restore social order from chaos.

Henceforth, the Confucius school selected and revised a collection of classic literatures, namely the Four Books and the Five Classics to systematically promote the idea of nobility and benevolence. The Four Books are the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean, the Confucian Analects, and the Works of Mencius. The Five Classics include the Book of Change, the Book of Peotry, the Book of History, the book of Rites, and the Spring and Autumn Annals. The nine works have mainstreamed Chinese literature and most profoundly the worldview of the learned class from intellegensia to officialdom. The collection was also ractified by the imperial court as compulsory textbooks for official examination. By Conficianism, people are born virtuous, and it demands lifelong dillgence to dust off unwholesome exposure via repeated self reflection and self discipline.

The goal of nobility starts from streamlining family affairs to governing the state and eventually seeking a proper world order. With filial piety at the center, more rigorous ethical code of conduct had been forged at the Confucius inspiration in the ensuing dynasties. Inculcation of moral obligations instead of individual rights is posited to transmute the instinctive drive for personal enrichment into caretaking an enlarged community. Filial piety to the parents naturally extends loyalty to the emperor parenting the state.

Mohism stepped beyond kinship affection by advocating generalized fraternity and went all out to deter wars between states. Its institutionalized structure represents probably the first non-government organization in ancient China. Just because their unwillingness to bend their principles for appeasement with the ruling imperial count, the Mohists as a coup soon disappeared in early Chinese history.

Most scholars are distainful of Legalism citing its ruthless execution which led to the collapse of the overweening Qin dynasty that brought the warring states into a unified empire. Nonethess most dynasties scarcely spared any mercy prosecuting rebels and other criminals implementing legalist rules however they preached the notion of rule by virtue.

After thousands of years of distillation and sediment, the Chinese value boils down to an essential construct of “inner sagehood and outer kingship” or internal holiness and external achievement. In the absence of a unified faith, the Chinese are able to make free choices among different beliefs to justify their status quo or pursuit under different circumstances.

To delve into the highly subjective values and frame them in a logical construct requires profound knowledge and long-range vision. Critical thinking is indispensable in a effort to avert political distortion of facts and their causalities while philosophical profundity is contained at a

measureable level. Instead of mesmerizing readers in endless philosophical debate, empirical evidences such as illustrious figures or game changing events are presented in a pedestrian way. They are consistently evaluated on how the livelihood of the mass commoners are impacted other than how legendary they are or how they've shaken the earth.

Chinese long history and lush cultural heritage have accreted oceanic treatise to draw from. It also poses daunting challenge in the selection of antinomical materials strewn in mountainous literatures to entertain a consistent and impartial perspective. This book is an initial venture, knowingly it is impossible to cover all aspects of Chinese values, so profound and more often perplexing. If only certain perspectives can elicit readers' contemplation and reasoning, that will fulfill its objective. Given the topic of book, the author would naturally expect divergent views and critiques.

1

FORMATION AND EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL VALUES

On the account of historical materialism, the formation and evolution of values follow the flux of human existence and development. Man is the creator, bearer and follower of those values in cognition and practice, ready to internalize the extant conditions in which he is placed and loses no time to assign meaning to his goal and pursuit.

1.1 Philosophical Inquiries

It is generally agreed that morality arises from innate self-consciousness and ends in relationship with others. Hegel in his famous Phenomenology of Spirit adopted a humanity approach in his investigation of morality. He asserted “self-consciousness is desire itself” and that it attains its “satisfaction” only in another self-consciousness. Karl Marx levied his critique at Hegel's exposition of spiritual determinism with his materialist conception of history, emphasizing on the moral imprint of material productive forces, independent of individual will:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.

——Karl Marx: A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy

Karl Marx is right: it is labor, not will, which creates history. However, he is too eager to deduce his conclusion on distributional injustice of productive gains thus risks disregarding the fact that it is will that assigns normative values on labor and history. After all, men need to activate their will power to ascertain the purpose of their labor, and conscientiously discover the meaning of life in the laboring process and outcome.

In the beginning, values are simply expressed in likes and dislikes depending on individual perceptions over a particular matter of his relevance. When such values are compounded among members of a community or a society as large, they assume an assertive and even binding power to orient, judge and configure individual views and conduct. Deviants and rebels will be alienated, reproached and punished. The consolidation pace of a collective value system was a very slow process in primeval ages. 5th century BC, however, witnessed a boom when three paradigmatic figures - Socrates, Shakyamuni and Confucius – coincidentally casted loads of

philosophical thoughts and teachings on moral values. Karl Jaspers also included Jesus among them.[4]

The collective value system is transformed in reconciliation with the shift of living circumstances albeit its lingering effect, especially due to the mobility of people. Its level of establishment and sophistication depends on philosophical maturity and the power of cohesion in the inhabitant community. One cannot ignore the fact that some of the human values, such as sympathy, honesty and respect, are perennial, and they are indigenously nurtured within various groups of people and turn out to be universally accepted. The answer lies in the moral reason embedded in human nature graciously and indiscriminately endowed by the Creator necessary for survival, reproductivity and prosperity of this particular species on the planet earth. As human interdependence increases and individual being gets more vulnerable, in addition to the emotive bond with others, the requirement for moral prudence is continually reinforced.

China officially denies the term universal value on the perception that it bears Christian connotations. In its place, President Xi Jinping deploys the term common value that is deemed more inclusive regardless of religions and beliefs for the entire humankind.

In layman's term, value is expressed in the satisfaction of human desire. Five factors add to its complication when the question of value is brought to the foyer. First, human desire is insatiable. To varying degree though, one tends to obtain and control what he really needs. Secondly, human needs are stratified in multiple facets, hierarchically stacked according to Maslow. Value is highly subjective; different people assign different and even opposite values over a particular matter. thirdly,

[4] Karl Jaspers, Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus: From The Great Philosophers, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1962.

resources for satisfaction are always scarce compared with human desire. Therefore, people often end up in a zero-sum game when it comes to the issue of distribution. Forthly, people are competitive creatures; they establish their cognitive value in reference to their surroundings. Everyone endeavors to stand out among his peers even for something that does not bear any rational meaning. Fifthly, sympathy and empathy are part of human nature. In view of the fact that people have different abilities and chances in their lifetime, everyone has an emotive need to see that the weaker and unlucky ones are taken with extra care for humanitarian concerns. Otherwise, the society would remain in a barbarian state where the weak fall into the prey of the strong. In the end, the relatively strong would also be predated.

While all legitimate ecclesiastical, political and ethical theories are fraught with a mission to promote social welfare, oriental philosophies, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism alike, has a strong inclination to thwart the natural desire of individuals for the sake of the society as a whole. Their propositions are always inward-looking, advising people to contain and even forgo the natural instinct of self serving lest it might conflict with the public interest.

By the World Giving Index published by the Charities Aid Foundation, among more than 140 countries surveyed, Japan and China, despite their colossal economies, rank below 100th for most of the years. It does not mean that Japanese and Chinese are distinctively indifferent, but because the three sub-indices employed - helped a stranger, donated money to a charity, volunteered time to an organization – misalign with their value and practice. As a matter of fact, charity is largely considered a mutual assistance among the community of familiars, a primitive form of self-organization. When help is directly offered to relatives and friends

alike, there's no need for accurate accounting or reporting. Another reason is related to the patriarchic society where a large part of charity work by individual voluntarism is replaced by the government or employers via higher taxation rate or lower payrolls in the vertical form of benevolence.

In the book Chrysanthemum and the Sword, Ruth Benedict epitomized the distinction between Christian culture and oriental culture; the former emphasizes on the sinfulness as in the classic case that Judas betrayed Jesus Christ, whereas the latter is preoccupied with the sense of shame. Sinfulness is the betrayal to God of his sacred tenets; shame is defined by the worldly relation with other people, i.e. the loss of honor or face among kinships and friends. That explains the divergent individualism and collectivism between the West and the East. A profound subtlety lies in the fact that a bona fide Christian is under omnipresent supervision of the God whereas a well-disciplined Easterner would free himself of oversight when acting beyond the radium of his circle of kinship and friendship. One would not be surprised easterners adopt double standards within and without their realm of familiarity. Edward Said in his book Orientalism essentialized a patronizing attitude toward the oriental societies, which is widely criticized as depicting western superiority. But one of his observations stands to reason that most the oriental value is devoted to the service of imperial power, typically in China and Japan, while western values are in the pursuit of individual emancipation.

For the powerless commoners, the inward-looking tendency is a viable approach for self conservation in a volatile environment. Exploration of the unknown and competition for personal distinction are discouraged. Everyone is supposed to play a predefined role from cradle to grave. Ironically, the sole persuasive power of these philosophies eventually arrives on self interest except that people are advised to arrange their personal

happiness over a longer range of life. For the asceticists, a Daoist secludes into high mountains for longevity, and a monk trades secular pleasure for a better rebirth in the circle of life.

In the Confucius doctrine prescribed by Mencius, a righteous man should live the largest house of benevolence, stand in the most appropriate position of rite, act in most proper way of righteousness. If he is able to fulfill his aspiration, he should abide by the appositive course with the people; if not, he should improve himself in obscurity. Wealth and status must not corrupt his mind. Poverty and humility must not compromise his integrity. Might and power shall not force him to his knees. This is the quality of a real man. To achieve such moral perfection, Confucius' favorite disciple Zeng Zi proposed three self reflections on daily basis: Have I offered full dedication acting on behalf of other people's interests? Have I been sincere interacting with friends? Have I practiced what I have been taught? In essence, people are expected to be risk-aversive for the protection of personal dignity and honor of the circle they belong to, from family, organization to the state.

It is wondered, however, how many people can attain such prowess of incessant aspiration and impeccable integrity in the real world? Moreoever, even tough there is undisputably good intention, one may not address the real needs of others, or the others would fail to appreciate, because of intellectual weakness on either or both sides, and even create extra trouble and worsen the relationship. We've seen frequent occrences of such cases in the frustrated parenthood.

In the real world, exclusive reliance on moral perfection or emotive bond is a false assumption in the absence of institutional and legal framework that draws a clear line in human relationship. There are numerous cases that people sacrifice others in the darkest situations, not to mention

deceptive behaviors for self enrichment. In the Xuanwu Gate Incident at the beginning of the Tang Dynasty, the third prince Li Shi-min slaughtered his two brothers fighting for the heirship. But he proved himself a great emperor in Chinese history who brought the nation onto the crux of prosperity. In the middle of the Tang Dynasty, the Mawei Hill Mutiny saw emperor Li Long-ji compromised the life of his devoted concubine Yang Yu-huan.

Chinese great thinkers have harboured a heap of lofty ideals on personal development as well as relational cultivation. They cover benevolent government on the part of the ruler, gentrification of the learned class and education of the layman class, with primary focus on social harmony, national unity and reverence to nature. Among the most ancient treatises, the Book of Change says that a man of virtue is like the earth that is able to bear every load, and the Book of Documents (Shang Shu, speech collection of kings and ministers in the pre-Qin era) advocates harmony of all states. Laozi (also Lao Tzu) proposes that human law is to follow natural law. Confucius posits that the world is equally shared by all. His grandson Zisi developed the notion of golden mean. His follower Mencius, who is almost equally renowned, brought forth the notion of good governance that people should always be given priority over the state and the monarch. Mohist did not only raise but also practiced his proposition of inclusive fraternity and non-aggression. He led his disciples to shuttle between states to dissuade monarchs from launching warfare against each other. Zhang Zai (1020-1077 A.D.) in the Northern Song dynasty continues to inspire the elite class by his four grand mission statements – to ordain conscience for Heaven and Earth; to secure livelihood for the people; to carry on the orthodox teachings from the sages along past; to forge ahead peace for all generations to come. Wang Shou-ren (1471-

1529), founder of the Neo-Confucian Yangming School of the Mind in the Southern Song dynasty, predicated the unity of knowledge and action – division of which breeds delusion. Gu Yanwu (1613-1682), at the turn between Ming and Qing dynasties, raised a popular notion that the rise and fall of the nation is the shared responsibility of all its ordinary citizens.

These propositions are lofty but secular, with constant reference to utility other than divinity. They set the lighthouse on the mountain top that radiates beams to guide the Chinese nation in the pursuit of ultimate common value. Unfortunately, they are so sketchy and lyrical that no roadmap is drawn as how people can climb step by step from foot to top, except for repeated emphasis on individual moral cultivation. Furthermore, moral cultivation has become increasingly subservient to the successive political regimes ever since the national unification under the Qin Empire. The key value of Confucianism is benevolence (ren), and the foundation of it, as Confucius put it, is deference to parenthood and brotherhood, i.e. filial piety and fraternity. The plethora of honors heaped upon him by virtually all rulers along successive dynasties underpins the fact that such a value proposition renders perfect service to desirable social and political order. Filial piety to the parents versus political loyalty to the emperor, fraternity to siblings versus social harmony, are all mutually reinforceable to sustain a super stable social and political hierarchy. Confucius even frankly said: very few of those who are filial and fraternal, are fond of offending their superiors; there are none who are obedient to their superiors would cause trouble in the society. Unsurprisingly, the intelligentsia has by and large relinquished its independence under the patrimonial reign of the highly unified empire, albeit certain ephemeral resurgence during chaotic intervals of dynastic change.

Western thinkers, in contrast, through their incessant entanglement with the church, close interaction with natural science, and fierce polemic among themselves, are able to pave the staircases leading to the mountain top of enlightment and modernty largely based on instrumental rationality and philosophical ratiocination. Many of European thinkers were equally disliked by their ruling class either from the church or government. But similar to the pre-Qin era in China, the European continent was ruled by many kingdoms with very different policies. Those dissident thinkers were able to find a refuge within more liberal kingdoms to escape prosecution for their critical ideas and rebellious initiatives. This is epitomized by the rugged life path and great thought of Carl Marx. Born in Trier in the Kingdom of Prussia, denied of academic post, Carl Marx flurried between Germany, France and Belgium. After expulsion by Belgium and Germany for his radical views, he was able to settle in London for the rest of his life, fully dedicated to the cause of proletarian revolution. His critical theories in dialectical philosophy and historical materialism were capable of defending his discourse in political economy and, a fortiori, his proposed scientific socialism as its logical extension. They stormed the world in the time of political and economic confusion under ruthless capitalistic exploitation. The proliferation of Marxist works was supported by the freedom of press and multifabric interaction among Western states, which was absent in China, representing divergent views. His call for "Working men of all countries unite!", though with divergent interpretations, blew the loud horn for the revolutionary leaders in many parts of the world to organize the proletarians to rise against the bourgeoisie class aiming at an ideal society of complete human emancipation - "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need." (Figure 1-1)

Figure 1-1 The First Volume of Marxist on Capital



1.2 Optimal Liberty as the Ultimate Goal

Modern civilization is heading towards optimal liberty of each and every individual member of the society. So long as no harm is inflicted on others, which is the bottom-line, anyone can enjoy the complete space of free choice, action or inaction. In other words, self-interest pursuit without harming other's interest ought to fall in the realm of social respect and legal protection. The larger the realm, the clearer its profile, the higher the social vitality and its innovative capacity. Only on the premise of personal liberty, people can enjoy a dignified life, from which aspiration and self-consciousness can be nurtured. Social responsibility is a natural outcome. Forced altruism either by law or social pressure is considered by John Mill as moral coercion interfering the independence of self will. Double standard in morality is a prevalent phenomenon. A large majority of people expect or even demand others of moral conduct so as to take unfair advantage, which include forgiveness for the harm they so caused, or rendering extra aid while they have no intention to do the same.

A popular concept in Chinese for this scenario is moral hijacking, which likely results in moral decayance for the entire society. If morality is used to discipline oneself it excels any law; if it is used to discipline others, it is worse than all the ruthless greed combined.

Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), an Anglo-Dutch philosopher, political economist and satirist, defined private vice as the self-regarding actions of men, and virtue as "every performance by which man, contrary to the impulse of nature, should endeavour the benefit of others, or the conquest of his own passions, out of a rational ambition of being good." In the long poem The Grumbling Hive, he described a bee community thriving until the bees are suddenly made honest and virtuous. Without their desire for personal gain their economy collapses, and the remaining bees go to live simple lives in a hollow tree, thus implying that without private vices there exists no public benefit.[5] Mandeville revokes the distinction between higher and lower life; he considered it a mere fiction of the philosophers and rulers. The appearance of nobility of so-called higher class is simply a matter of craft. Evil desire exists equally within the poor and the wealthy. He therefrom unclothed the raw self interest of every man. However, just based on such vice, it forms a necessary condition for economic prosperity. On the contrary, his thesis holds that virtue is actually detrimental to the state in its commercial and intellectual progress. With that, he concludes at the end of his poem:

"Bare Vertue can't make Nations live
In Splendour; they, that would revive

[5] Cook, Harold John (1999). "Bernard Mandeville and the Therapy of 'The Clever Politician'". Journal of the History of Ideas. University of Pennsylvania Press. 60 (1): 101–124. doi:10.2307/3654002. JSTOR 3654002.

A Golden Age, must be as free,
For Acorns, as for Honesty."

Adam Smith (1723-1790) who lived through the same era of thriving capitalism and industrialization juxtaposed to the recognition of self-interest as the invisible hand that guides people in the unintended growth of national wealth and hence public benefit. But his philosophy sets apart from that of Mandeville who also emphasizes on the virtue in the self-interest which brings about collective cooperation for market efficiency. Smith established himself as the father of classic economics simply because he was able to unveil and prove the relationship between human nature and economic progress.

Inhabited on a vast land of self-sufficiency by farming, physiocracy has mainstreamed Chinese policy framework. The whole society has always been disdainful of merchants who are engaged in the business of exchange. In the eye of Laozi, author of Tao Te Ching (also Dao De Jing), an ideal world should be composed of small states with small population. People never intercourse with each other even though they can hear fowls crowing and dogs barking among neighboring states so close at sight. With all resources considered the assets of the imperial family, only those who climbed the ladder of officialdom either through imperial exam or military exploit deserved wealthy life, because this path is in full control of the emperor. Merchants who accumulated wealth outside the realm of emperor's patronism is marginally tolerable. Plus, they are highly mobile which is considered disruptive of social stability. Consequently, those merchants who were able to thrive had to rely on connect with government officials for special favor, stoking a black market of money for power or vise versa. This is the root cause for corruption until today.

With burgeoning commerce, especially after a series of political, religious and social movements – most notably Magna Carta Libertatum, the great Renaissance, Protestant Reformation, and the Enlightment, western thought began to break free from the the writ of the Crown and the theocracy, ushering in the drive for human emancipation. The dynamism of the society unleashed explosive human greed propelling fervent overseas expansion - adventure, trade and conquest. Colonialism quickly spread out modernty to almost all corners of the world in a slew of bloody conquests. It dismantled the stalemate of tribal life in the primitive lands of Africa, Americas and Oceania, knocked open the gates of Japanese shogunate and Chinese empire, and rocked the throne of Chinese arrogant emperors. The western value system centering around individualism and private property amplified the inherently insatiable human desires. It activated the powerful turbine of modernization but inflamed predation among human race and eventually diluted the social signification of people. While slicing the world, the conquerers - Spaniards, Portugese, Brits, Dutches, to be joined by French, Germans, Russians, Japanese - also engaged in fierce see-saw fight for their power base. None of them, however, was aware of the fact they sew the seed for anti-colonial revolutions in almost all localities.

History has repeatedly proven that excessive tilting to either side of the raw desire or social aspect of human nature, individually or collectively, shall lead to higher cost of governance and even a dysfunctional society. Suppression of the natural aspect of human being for wealth, power and sensual pleasure with dogmatic moral canons will not nullify human pursuit for self enrichment, but rather to force individual actors to weave a hyopcritic cloak. Under its disguise, they might act as unbridled horses for their self interest. Their behavior gets all the more deceitful and unpredictable. We've seen government officials who solemnly took oath

in front of the communist party flag and gushed their political loyalty to serve the people with heart and soul are charged with hefty corruption. There are rich Millers who take advantage of their devoted friends like little Hans with sweet tongues. If these are sporadic or random cases, individual actors bear the blame for moral decayance. However, when these cases become rampant and unchecked, the institutional and cultural vice behind it has to be put into question. To legitimize the indulgence of the crude desire is detrimental to humanity since the Darvinism risks reversing human society to the barbarian state. In contrast to the animal world regulated by estrus cycles and limited food storage capacities, human beings are so possessive that their desires are inexhaustible.

As a matter of fact, extreme polarization in resource distribution shall render the livelihood of the few haves unstainable. Birds of the same feather flock together. Those who enrich themselves by outsmarting others shall be eventually deceived by members of his small circle. Overloaded boat shall sink, and excessive desire is suicidal. Exploitive government and employers shall engender civil commotion and strike. The extreme case is that generations of Chinese emperors seized all resources and dominated the livelihood of all citizens within his own hand, or at most within the control of his family. That explains why for two thousand years, China was swirling in the cycle of dynasty changes without substantial progress. Most revolutionaries utterly gambled for survival in desperation; they were not ready with propositions for political reform except for a simple slogan to inspire the poor followers, and the rulers left no room for negotiation either. Revolutionary leaders ended up in the same cycle of their predecessors once they seized the imperial throne. Criticism was hardly tolerable by any ruler. Legions of historians and ethicists were tasked to whitewash the dirty history and eulogize over the triumph for

whoever contrived to power. That is why Zhuang Zi was contemptuous of those royal scholars, because under their pen, the one who stole a pin is defined a thief, but the one who usurped the state is adorned as a king. That explains why only the royal court is infused with all the proclaimed virtues. Theft and robbery would not cease until these dressed scholarly saints vanished, he added. What he failed to mention was that, in addition to offering lavish praises to the ruler, those scholars also tried to fathom the ruler's preference and accordingly fabricated rules to be believed and followed among the common clay.

Gu Yan-wu, an enlightened scholar at the turn of Ming and Qing dynasties, pinpointed a fair correlation between private and public interest. Affirming that private interest is an inextinguishable part of human nature, he reduced public interest from an abstract notion to an implementable concept by his proposition that sound governance lies in amalgamating all private interests into public interest.[6]

1.3 Human Nature and Morality

Human beings stand out amongst all gregarious creatures on this planet for a simple reason that they can act upon reason. While they acquire skills as how to get things done, they always inquire why things should be done in a particular way, and how is it going to impact themselves and others within their perview. In other words, they are ready to assign values on everything they involve in daily life. I throw a dime into a begging bowl because I sympathize sufferers in extreme poverty. I hate thieves because they unfairly dispossess other's property. I protect endangered species because the planet would be boring in the absence of

[6] Gu Yanwu, Diary of Knowledge, Vol. 1.

biological diversity. These are simple reasons that prompt human attitude and action. By instinct, people tend to formulate their evaluative criteria revolving their personal loss and gain. They are thankful to those who have brought them benefits, and hateful to those who inflict harm. In light of their communal default, this tendency naturally evolves into social contract whereby people engage in reciprocal exchange. In a contractual relationship, either explicit or implicit, expectation is established on parties involved to deliver their respective promises. Therefore, credibility becomes a recognized value. This logic can be extrapolated beyond the concern over immediate personal welfare. I've benefited from a helping hand in a critical need, and thereby I applaud any charity work even though I'm not the direct beneficiary. While it is natural for people to act intuitively for their loved ones free from personal gains, then, how do we explain those people who are ready to sacrifice their lives for strangers or defending their country fellows against foreign invaders? At every critical moment along Chinese history, there are people who stand out and die a martyr for what they believe in a righteous cause. During World War II, if there is a good reason for Americans to defeat Japan for its surprise attack on the Pearl Harbor, why did millions of American soldiers join the Allied Powers to fight against the Nazis on European continent? This way, the instinctive feeling of empathy ascends to rationalized justice as a common value denominator. Swiss Guards went further to act upon their solid faith in Catholicism and have established an irreproachable reputation protecting the Pope in the Vatican during the Sack of Rome since the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

Man is a sentient being, composed of a trifold faculty - body, mind and soul - with inate biological, social and spiritual needs. His life-long preoccupation is to maximize the fulfillment of these needs. Ethicists set

forth guiding principles for people to conceive and act to the common good of all. In other words, moral judgment is made in the eye of "others" considering man's natural proclivity of self interest serving. When one offers benefit - aiding others in fulfillment of needs, they say he is morally praiseworthy. When one seeks personal benefit - his own fulfillment of needs - at the pain of others, they say he is morally bad.

Conservatists tend to see a conflict between self fulfillment and public interest. They strive to preemptively decentivize self fulfillment given its likelihood to harm public interest. Christinality calls it an inherent sin. They believe that people's motive and behavior can be shaped and diverted towards public interest through redemption when virtue is instilled. Although the school of Confucianism holds that people are born virtuous, it shares similar solution. They believe that unwholesome motive and behavior result from bad exposure, thus the innate virture requires constant dusting through repeated teaching and self reflection. This is disgeniuous simplification. In an ethically justified lawful society, in order to seek self enhancement, like it or not, one has to offer something of value to other members whom he does not even know or care. In a world dominated by market actors, both businessmen and customers are benefit seekers. They all get satisfaction of their needs via exchange. They unintentionally contribute to the accumulation of public wealth and social advancement. A café owner and the customers do not have to love each other. The owner provides good product and service to customers with the intent to make money on them, and the customers are willing to pay so long as they get the desired pleasure from the product and service.

This simple daily scenario would put an end to the senseless debate whether human nature is virtuous or vicious. Fraternity with peers as highlighted by Confucius, regardless its warmth in human relations, is not

a precondition for people to get along harmoniously with each other. On the contrary, without a clear line of rights and duties among people to interact along, autruism can easily be abused either intentionally or negligently. It is immoral either to teach or expect the café owner to ruin his business in order to offer free drinks to customers, or customers to pay for poor product or service in order to enrich the café owner.

Since individual desires are innate, advocating or enforcing harmless behavior that is subject to natural instinct is redundant. In fact, during the Warring States period, the philosopher Yang Zhu decisively pointed out the concept of "valuing oneself," saying, "In ancient times, if one sacrificed even a hair to benefit the world, I would not do it; if one offered the world in exchange for my own body, I would not accept it. If everyone does not sacrifice even a hair, does not benefit the world, then the world will be in order." He also said, "Those who govern well externally may not necessarily govern well; those who govern well internally may not necessarily cause disorder. If one governs externally like this, their methods may be temporarily effective in one country, but will not win the hearts of the people; if one governs internally like I do, it can be extended to the whole world." The core of his thought is that if everyone can govern themselves internally, value themselves, respect and love themselves, and not harm each other, then everyone can live in peace, each in their own place, and the world can be stable and secure. On the contrary, if external constraints are imposed, it may be effective in the short term, but ultimately, it will be difficult to sustain without winning the hearts of the people, and may even backfire.

An enlightened society merely designates these as rights to be tolerated and protected, rather than as obligations to be fulfilled. For instance, a society may impose the duty to labor during specified hours but does

not need to mandate the obligation to sleep; similarly, while a company is responsible for paying taxes, it is not obligated to make a profit. Therefore, in maintaining public order and good customs, it is generally believed that the values promoted by a normal society carry the dual mission of suppressing evil and promoting good. The first is to restrain individuals from harming others or the public interest due to excessive greed, and the second is to encourage altruistic behavior. However, the vast space between these two missions is often overlooked. This should be seen as a third mission of an enlightened society, namely, to respect and protect the freedom of individual decisions and actions that do not harm the interests of others but are not necessarily altruistic. In other words, a society dominated by a collective consciousness of good versus evil is naïve, distasteful, fragile, and oppressive.

Nonetheless, moral teachings are useful because self interest pursuit is so naturally strong that it does not need education or supervision, whereas serving other's interest is optional in many cases. In the absence of moral development, one is inclined to profiteer from others – deception, theft, piracy, robbery or ransom, to name a few. Nowadays, it is taken for granted that these vicious behaviors are taken care by the law. But it is exactly on the ground of such moral reasoning that the law is created and enforced. Of course, in extreme cases, sacrificing personal interest and even life for the benefit of others is always praiseworthy. Those who offer praise for an atrusic deed are representative of the general public, collectively composed of individuals who again care about their personal interest. After all, moral judgment over a particular act or actor is established by the stakeholders whose interest is or may likely be impacted. If seemingly unprovoked, the president Vladimir Putin would hail the Russian soldiers to invade their neigbouring countries simply for

chauvinist motives, the virtue of patriotism would undoubtedly be abused. It in turn triggered remarkable patriotism among the Ukrainians to defend their national sovereignty and the sense of justice of many other countries rushing to aid. The same is true when the virture of allegiance to the nation is converted to loyalty to the autocrat via brainwash. The apparent bystanders other than direct stakeholders may also be impacted by certain act. Suicide and animal abuse are considered immoral because they cause negative feelings on those bystanders with natural sense of empathy as explained by Mencius.

That principle is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. ... In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.

——*John Stuart Mill, On Liberty*

Human knowledge and mode of production in the material world is ratcheted with technological advancement in information and transportation. Few would seriously wish to regress to a barbarian lifestyle fighting for fruits with monkeys. After Ferdinand Magellan completed his circumnavigation in the Age of Discovery, no informed man wound believe that the earth is flat, just as the Chinese rejected the belief that the moon was inhabited by goddess Chang'e and Jade Rabbits after pilot-astronaut Neil Armstrong and his crew set foot on it. With mechanical and electrical vehicles, few would resort to horse driven cabriolet unless for nostalgic

leisure. In the subjective world, however, many people do not feel as happy with such advancement in the productive force. Even in the face of reality, they refuse to use common sense to reason. Blue workers may defend their inability to acquire new skills by blaming the invention of robots for their loss of jobs. Parents may complain the internet that distracts their children from conventional textbooks. Protectionists get skeptical of free international trade.

Rationalism is the arch enemy of romanticism and mysticism. Scientism it incubates is ready to defy sentimentalism and pierce the mask of authoritarianism on the strength of hard truth and solid reasoning. Humility of human race used to be sanctioned by mystic power. Science makes people realize how tiny they are within the endless universe, but still inspire their explorative enterprise into the vastly unknown. Even in the distant future, rational reasoning will not be able to light up every corner of human mind. Men shall continue to look around for immediate fodder and cobble of transient joys in order to alleviate the pains caused by their limitation of reasoning and capability even at the cost of self-deception.

1.4 Individual Motivation and Psychoanalysis

1.4.1 Bentham's Principle of Utilitarianism

The British philosopher Jeremy Bentham, in his 1780 publication "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation," posited that individuals and groups, whether consciously or not, invariably follow a universal principle of utilitarianism. This principle is to seek pleasure and avoid pain as the fundamental motive behind thoughts and actions. "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pleasure and pain. Only they dictate what we should do and determine

what we will do. The standards of right and wrong, the chains of causes and effects, are all decided by them. Everything we do, say, or think is governed by them."[7]

Regarding what specifically constitutes pleasures and pains, Bentham attempted to create an exhaustive list and offered definitions for each, thereby laying the groundwork for quantitative decision-making in utilitarianism. He identified 14 types of simple pleasures accessible to human nature: (1) pleasures of the senses; (2) pleasures of wealth; (3) pleasures of skill; (4) pleasures of amity; (5) pleasures of a good name; (6) pleasures of power; (7) pleasures of piety; (8) pleasures of benevolence; (9) pleasures of malevolence; (10) pleasures of memory; (11) pleasures of imagination; (12) pleasures of expectation; (13) pleasures based on association; (14) pleasures of relief. Correspondingly, there are 12 basic types of pains: (1) pains of the senses; (2) pains of privation; (3) pains of toil; (4) pains of enmity; (5) pains of an ill name; (6) pains of piety; (7) pains of benevolence; (8) pains of malevolence; (9) pains of memory; (10) pains of imagination; (11) pains of expectation; (12) pains based on association.

For an individual, there are six criteria to quantify the amount of pleasure or pain: (1) intensity; (2) duration; (3) certainty; (4) propinquity (or remoteness); (5) fecundity (the likelihood that a pleasure or pain will produce more of the same feeling); (6) purity (the likelihood that a pleasure or pain will not produce the opposite feeling). For a group, there is a seventh criterion: (7) extent (the number of people affected by the pleasure or pain). The calculation process involves first using the initial four criteria to compute the value of each pleasure or pain, then revising these

[7] Jeremy Bentham, "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation," Commercial Press, 2012, page 58.

values with the fifth and sixth criteria, and finally incorporating the seventh criterion to calculate the total value of pleasure or pain for a group.

Bentham referred to the things that induce pleasure or pain as "motives," and the feeling of pleasure or pain as "sensibility." He recognized that there could be qualitative and quantitative differences in how different individuals understand motives and feel pleasure or pain. Consequently, he listed 32 factors affecting the efficacy of motives: (1) health; (2) physical strength; (3) endurance; (4) physical disabilities; (5) quality of knowledge; (6) intellect; (7) perseverance; (8) stability; (9) orientation; (10) moral sentiment; (11) moral inclination; (12) religious sentiment; (13) religious inclination; (14) sympathy; (15) sympathetic inclination; (16) antipathy; (17) antipathetic inclination; (18) insanity; (19) habits; (20) financial situation; (21) sympathetic relations; (22) *antipathetic* relations; (23) physical constitution; (24) mental constitution; (25) sex; (26) age; (27) rank; (28) education; (29) climate; (30) lineage; (31) governmental conditions; (32) religious beliefs. It's understandable that an individual's physical and mental qualities, along with their cultural characteristics, inevitably influence their perspective on pleasure and pain and their sensitivity to its causes. Among these factors, stability refers to the constancy of influencing factors in the absence of other disturbances; orientation and inclination refer to a psychological tendency to expect pleasure or pain from certain but not all alternatives, depending on one's range of cognition and attitude; moral and religious sentiments and inclinations have a restraining and guiding effect on one's outlook on mental pleasure and pain. Bentham also placed a person's sympathetic and antipathetic connections within the social realm, considering that the pleasure or pain of others a person cares about or detests can affect their own outlook on pleasure and pain, such as empathizing with the fate of loved ones or reveling in the

misfortune of enemies; likewise, they are also influenced by the pleasure and pain perspectives of others, hence the tendency to 'love the house for the crow of the rooster' or the reverse. His references to climate and government indicate the impact of different natural and administrative environments on the physical and mental constitution of an individual or a group. For example, under a well-governed administration, people's moral sentiments are usually stronger, while religious sentiments tend to be weaker.

Based on this, Bentham derived the moral principle of utilitarianism: whether for an individual or a collective, an action is morally good if the total pleasure it produces exceeds the total pain, and evil if not.

Utilitarianism is a philosophy of common sense based on the assumption of rational egoism. Its straightforward common-sense approach has had a profound impact on ethics, economics, political science, and law, and has been widely applied in practice. Its applicability is primarily demonstrated by extending this principle from the individual to the collective composed of each equally valued person, hence it supports democratic systems and firmly believes that individuals can make the most accurate judgment about their own suffering and joy. This provides legislators and administrators with a direction for their efforts: a policy that serves the greatest happiness of the greatest number is considered the ultimate good.

Utilitarianism acknowledges selfishness as part of human nature, different from other conservative ethical thoughts, it neutralizes motives and does not concern itself with the methods and processes of implementation; the only criterion for evaluation is the outcome. For example, if lying about an illness relieves a patient's mental stress without harming others, then such deception is considered good. This does not mean it advocates

case-by-case judgment without regard for context; it also supports a society with rules, even if these rules seem flawed to an individual or a minority. For instance, robbing the rich to help the poor may bring happiness to bandits and a few poor beneficiaries but contradicts the governance goal of utilitarianism when considered in a broader sense. Criticisms of utilitarianism mainly stem from its belief in equal rights, accusing it of providing a moral excuse for the suffering of a few innocents in pursuit of the greatest happiness for the majority, leading to the tyranny of the majority, which is a core flaw of simple majority democratic decisions.

China's rapid pace in infrastructure development, involving land acquisition, demolition, and relocation, has been largely guided by utilitarian thought. In many cases, human rights and property rights of the small number of people are compromised for the immediate or future benefit of a greater majority. This is well fitted in its collective culture where individuals are encouraged to sacrifice for collective or national interest. In contrast, during the 1980s in Japan, the planned route for the Hanshin Expressway Umeda exit ramp was to pass through the land where the Gate Tower Building was to be located. While the landowner insisted on constructing a high-rise on the original site, altering the expressway's route would have incurred significant additional costs, delayed the construction period, and inconvenienced many travelers. Adopting a utilitarian policy would have provided a simple solution by forcibly depriving the landowner of his rights for the benefit of the majority. Although efficient, this approach is overly simplistic and aggressive, constituting a violation of the rights of a few. After nearly 5 years of negotiations, both parties finally reached an agreement. In 1992, the 16-story Gate Tower Building was completed on its original site, with the Hanshin Expressway passing through its 5th to 7th floors. While people marvel at the spectacle of a

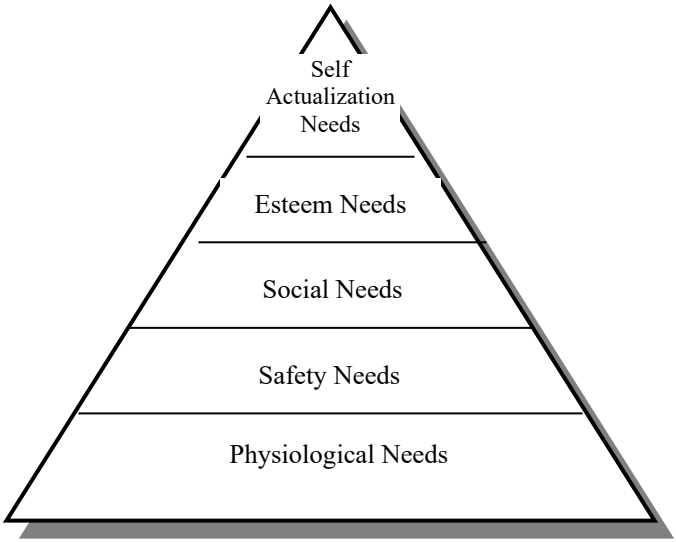
highway through a building, one might wonder if they also appreciate Japan's approach to resolving conflicts between private rights and public interests.

As for the abuse of power under the guise of serving the majority's interests, this phenomenon is a procedural issue. It violates the principles of utilitarianism to begin with, constituting both a breach of democracy and a harm to the interests of the majority.

1.4.2 Maslow's Theory of Motivation Formation

Abraham H. Maslow, a principal founder of American humanistic psychology, proposed the theory of motivation formation in the 1940s. This theory divides human basic needs into five hierarchical levels, explaining human motivation, hence also known as the Hierarchy of Needs. (Figure 1-2)

Figure 1-2 Maslow's Need Hierarchy



Maslow believed that needs reflect human nature; people's motivations depend on their needs, and only unmet needs provoke motivational behaviors. Needs are hierarchically arranged from lower to higher, with higher-level needs emerging and demanding satisfaction only after the lower-level needs have been fundamentally met. Under this premise, Maslow hypothesized that human needs could be categorized into five levels in ascending order of progression, where the lower the level of need, the greater its intensity; conversely, the higher the level of need, the lesser its intensity.

1. Physiological Needs: These are basic survival needs closely related to human existence, such as eating, drinking, excreting, sleeping, and sex. These needs are instinctual for humans as animals, motivated by the maintenance of personal survival and the reproduction of offspring. For most people in a normal state, other needs become secondary until physiological needs are fundamentally met.
2. Safety Needs: These are needs for certainty in one's environment, including conditioned responses and reactions to the current and anticipated situations. The motivation here is to reduce uncertainty in life, ensuring personal safety and the conditions for satisfying physiological needs are not deprived (e.g., personal security, health care, job security, insurance).
3. Social Needs: Also known as belongingness needs. Humans are social, emotional beings who wish to belong to a group or community, interact as a member, and receive empathy and love; otherwise, they feel empty and lonely. Belongingness, social activities, friendships, and love fall under this category.

4. Esteem Needs: These needs include two aspects: one is the desire for social respect and recognition, hence the need for prestige, acknowledgment, power, and status; the other is satisfying self-esteem, thereby generating the need for improving one's abilities and confidence. Driven by esteem needs, a person strives to make their existence felt by society and the environment, hence wanting to exert some influence. A lack of esteem can lead to feelings of inferiority and loss, triggering irresponsible or even destructive behavior.
5. Self-Actualization Needs: Positioned at the pinnacle of human needs, this refers to the continual realization of personal potential, talents, and gifts. Based on an understanding of one's potential and the external environment, individuals establish a value system, generating ideals and a sense of mission. This is a continuous process towards the integration and unity of the person, driving individuals to fully exploit their potential, achieve accomplishments, and realize their ideals. As Maslow stated, "What a man can be, he must be."

It should be noted that although human needs are hierarchically progressive from lower to higher, this does not mean that a lower level of need is replaced by a higher level of need. Instead, the former serves as the foundation for the latter, merely receding in terms of influence on motivational behavior. Due to the different dominance of these five needs in individuals, there are differences in everyone's motivational structure. Moreover, even though the elevation of needs is predicated on the satisfaction of lower-level needs, no level of need can be completely satisfied, thus emphasizing "essential" satisfaction. The higher the level of needs, the more apparent the differences between individuals become,

epitomizing the saying: “The common folk seek profit, scholars seek reputation, and officials seek power.” Furthermore, for some people, there is rarely an opportunity to elevate their needs to a higher level. Clare Graves, an American experimental psycologist who was highly inspired by Abraham Maslow, categorized individuals into different "levels of existence," suggesting that at a given level of existence, an individual's behavior and values reflect the commonality of people at that level. A person at a lower level may not even comprehend someone at another level. This resonates with the ancient Chinese saying, “Birds of a feather flock together, people of a kind are drawn to each other.”

Many scholars have questioned Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A typical example can be cited of Mahatma Gandhi, the spiritual leader of nonviolent resistance in India, who often sacrificed physiological and safety needs for grand ideals. On any level of need, even at the most basic level, people will consider the satisfaction of other levels of needs given a choice. For instance, even in a basic survival state, people still express different aesthetic tastes in the colors of their clothes and the arrangement of their homes. Indeed, Maslow himself acknowledged that he did not intend to create a universally applicable template but was attempting to explain the behavior patterns of most people in a normal state.

1.4.3 Psychoanalysis by Freud

Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud used a scientific approach to analyze the psyche of individuals, an endeavor that is respectable. He linked psychological activities with physiological factors, denying the independent existence of the soul and firmly believing that every mental activity has its roots, with free will being nothing but an illusion. That is

to say, no aspect of thought can exist independently of the brain, and the physiological processes in its neurons are the material of thought phenomena. He divided the psychological functions of humans into three levels: consciousness, preconsciousness, and unconsciousness.

Consciousness encompasses memories, perceptions, thoughts, ideas, and fantasies that have been stored and processed by the brain. Preconsciousness lies dormant in the mind, merely forgotten for a moment, requiring stimuli such as reminders or inducements to resurface. Through clinical trials, Freud found that memories difficult to recall were often things that patients tried to forget, involving shame, guilt, mental anguish, or actual pain. Patients unwilling to recall traumatic episodes were unconsciously protecting themselves from suffering. However, the phenomena Freud discovered may not equate to the truth. Things some people claim to have forgotten may be those they deliberately conceal and are, in fact, their most profound memories. To cover up past disgraces, a more respectable approach is to try to magnify the glorious aspects, diluting or obscuring the disgraceful parts. A cruder method is to directly falsify one's history, not because the memories have faded but to deliberately dilute others' memories. This reminds us of the Japanese right-wing repeatedly revising textbooks to dilute and hide their militaristic atrocities. For example, in 2015, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology altered the description of the Nanjing Massacre, determined by the military tribunal for war criminals in Nanjing in December 1937 to have killed over 300,000 prisoners and civilians, from "the Japanese army killed numerous prisoners and residents" to "affected prisoners and residents."

In Freud's view, consciousness and preconsciousness are only a tiny part of human thought, with the vast majority being unconscious.

This kind of thinking, not processed by the brain, may be due to neglect or subjective avoidance. The libido hidden in the unconscious plays a decisive role in daily responses. Although related to sexual desire, Freud used it to broadly refer to the energy contained in all bodily organs. He believed that instincts based on libido are the driving force behind behavior, determining individual fate and even social development. From the desire for food and sex to the impulses of scientists and artists for invention and creation, it is omnipresent. Its form is covert or transformed, but far from being a static material warehouse; it is a highly active area, usually determining a large part of people's behavior in the struggle with conscious thought.

Freud's analysis of personality reflects the combination of the two triadic theories about human attributes he proposed, consisting of the id, ego, and superego, essentially corresponding to the trinity of body, mind, and morality.

1. The Id, or original self, refers to the primitive self, encompassing basic desires, impulses, and life forces. The id is the source of all psychic energy, aiming for individual comfort, survival, and reproduction, unconscious and unnoticed by the individual. Humans, composed of various biological elements, have the primary mission of survival and reproduction, thus creating conditions to satisfy needs like hunger, love, and security. The organism communicates its needs through the nervous system. In infancy, the human nervous system is not significantly different from that of other animals, and with slow brain growth, basic needs mechanically convert into motivational forces through the nervous system, a process Freud called the primary process. This is instinct or primal drive. The philosophy corresponding to

the id is the pleasure principle, aimed at immediate satisfaction of real needs.

2. The Ego. After gaining certain experiences, people start to concretize their goals. The same response to hunger, but with accumulated experience and judgment of reality, allows one to choose what they consider the best option among milk, bread, steak, seafood, etc. At this point, the id begins to transform into the ego, with biological needs becoming conscious, objective orientations, following the reality principle. Freud called this problem-solving process involving experience and judgment the secondary process.
3. The Superego. As the ego seeks pleasure for the Id - satisfying the organism's primal needs - it interacts with the external human world and is assisted or restricted by others. For a child, the greatest influence initially comes from parents, with their behavior often encouraged, corrected, or punished. As the individual grows, this relationship expands beyond the family to society at large. The ego builds memories of external reactions and analyzes them to decide how to maximize benefits and minimize harm, allowing desires to be satisfied to the greatest extent. The ability to remember, learn, analyze, and adjust social relations signifies the ego's transcendence, becoming the superego. The superego follows a dual philosophy of life, namely awareness and ideals. Awareness is the summary of negative external reactions (such as criticism, punishment) to guide the ego to learn from them; ideals are the summary of positive external reactions (such as encouragement, praise) to motivate the ego to continue striving. Awareness and ideals convey their standards

to the ego, with feelings like shame, honor, guilt, pride, etc., establishing the ego's social conduct. Because the superego involves social norms, it largely represents societal constraints on the id and ego. As a Chinese proverb says, “To be an adult is to live in constraints; to live freely is not to be an adult.” Freud did not define the personality forms and response processes of this stage, which we may consider as marking the transition from material to moral elevation.

Table 1-1 combines Freud’s analysis of personality, summarizing the states of consciousness, philosophies of life, personality forms, manifestations, and response processes. It is evident that personality maturation is a process of gradual detachment from instinct. Through mental growth, an individual establishes and perfects their value system in connection with society. However, Freud noted that most people complete the transformation from ego to superego around the age of seven, while some never achieve it in their lifetime.

Table 1-1 Freud’s Personality Analysis

Aspect of persona	Id	Ego	Superego
State of consciousness	Unconscious and Preconscious	Partially conscious	Mostly conscious
Philosophy of life	Principle of Pleasure	Reality principle	Principles of awareness and ideals
Type of persona	Primitive Person	Material person	Moral person
Manifestation	Basic Needs	Objective choices	Social norms
Process	Primary Process	Secondary process	Sublimation process

1.5 Individual Moral Consciousness and Its Development Theory

1.5.1 Plato's Dualism of Human Nature

Unlike simple theories of inherent goodness or evil, or the neutral view that posits humans as neither good nor evil, Plato adopted a dualistic approach to human nature. He stated, "Within the soul of a person, there exists a better part and a worse part," and a person becomes his own master if "the worse part is controlled by the naturally better part." Conversely, "when a person, through poor upbringing or bad company, allows the better but smaller part to be dominated by the worse and larger part," he becomes his own slave.

This is significantly different from the Chinese Taoist concept of Yin and Yang, which divides into two parts that balance each other, unify in harmony, and yet transform into one another. Moreover, Taoism does not impose moral judgments on the ends of Yin and Yang. Instead, wisdom is placed on the smooth curve that divides and harmonizes the two extremes of Yin and Yang, and virtue is attributed to the holistic mechanism of harmonious unification.

To argue for the four cardinal virtues of wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice, Plato introduced the tripartite theory of the soul. From a scientific perspective, the three components of the soul he mentioned - desire, reason, and spirit - actually all belong to human psychological consciousness. His argumentation starts from an individual perspective, but he repeatedly emphasized that these virtues are equally applicable to states, and this is also his real aim in "The Republic," namely to forge a model of a wholly happy state. Plato proposed that when these three parts of a person are in friendly harmony, with reason positioned in a leading role,

and that both spirit and desire agree not to rebel, such a person possesses the virtue of temperance.

Reason has a leading function over the other two because desires represent irrational physiological needs, occupying the largest part of every person's soul and being most covetous of wealth. Desires thus require the surveillance of reason to prevent deviation from one's proper role in pursuit of bodily pleasure. When bodily pleasure attempts to control or dominate parts it should not, a person's life risks getting ruined. Spirit should obey and assist reason because "if a person's spirit maintains, in both pleasure and distress, the convictions given by reason about what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, then we would call such a person brave on account of his spirited part."

Wisdom comes from knowledge, but for a state, it is not the knowledge of a carpenter or a coppersmith in a specific area, but the macro knowledge used to consider the major affairs of the entire state and improve its internal and external relations. Plato's understanding aligns with the Chinese philosophical relationship between the Dao and the tool, as stated in "Category I" of the "I Ching": "That which is above form is called Dao; that which is under form is called a tool." Plato believed that "those who have this kind of knowledge (to lead and govern the state) are always the least in number by natural law," which echoes the Confucian distinction between the noble and the petty, as well as the distinction between those who work with their minds and those who work with their hands, thus supporting meritocracy rather than democracy in the modern sense.

Indoctrined in the Confician school, the famous thinker Chen Liang in the Southern Song Dynasty also invested his hope in the meritoceatic governance by the emperor already on his last legs. Deeply pained with

the loss of half of its territory to the normadic invader - the Jin Kingdom, he submitted five memorials to the court in the position of a commoner, proposing a series of strategies for resisting the invasion to save the country. At the same time, he gently pointed out the governance flaws of the dynasty. In his "Five Discourses on Revival: On the Way of Holding the Essentials," he stated that the duty of an emperor is to "distinguish right from wrong, delegate responsibilities, understand the essence of governance, and grasp the overarching gist of authority." He advised Emperor Xiaozong Zhao Xun, to "grasp the essence of control and be aware of the pitfalls of favoritism and detail," and to "hold the essentials at the top and delegate the details at the bottom." However, with his passionate arguments totally unheeded, he returned to his hometown in disappointment to write and teach, expressing the helpless lament of a patriot with the poem "Revenge has always been my lifelong ambition, do not say that a Confucian official's hair has turned gray in vain."

1.5.2 Piaget's Theory of Psychological Development and Moral Consciousness

Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget conducted in-depth and meticulous observations on the psychological development and formation of moral consciousness in children. He himself was a precocious child prodigy, publishing his first scientific paper at the age of 11. Tracking observations and records of his own daughter and nephew provided him with early inspiration. From a person's birth, he divided their cognitive development into four stages by age. During the sensorimotor stage (0-2 years), individuals learn about the world through movement and senses. Even if an object disappears from view, they understand it continues to exist. This understanding of object permanence begins their

ability to associate names and words with objects. They know that their actions can change the world before them. Through continuous interaction with the environment, they can expand their range of discoveries. Children in the preoperational stage (2-7 years) start to develop symbolic thought, learning to understand objects through words and images. They tend to be egocentric but begin to try viewing things from others' perspectives. Although their language and thought are improving, they still struggle to distinguish between parts and wholes, focusing on very concrete items. They also cannot differentiate between animate and inanimate objects, often attributing human consciousness to inanimate things. Language development is a notable feature of this stage. Children in the concrete operational stage (7-11 years) can only perform logical operations on concrete events, understanding conservation laws. Egocentrism starts to wane, though they still believe their views are unique. While they pay more attention to others' views and feelings, they do not necessarily agree with them. Adolescents in the formal operational stage (12 years and above) begin to have the ability for abstract and deductive reasoning and are concerned with moral, philosophical, ethical, social, and political issues that require theoretical and abstract reasoning.

Correspondingly, Piaget proposed a three-stage theory of moral development. Children in infancy lack moral judgment capabilities, focusing solely on physical development and communication skills, passively accepting the outcomes of actions, known as the premoral stage. The next is the heteronomous stage, characterized by obedience to authority and strict adherence to rules; judgments of the goodness or badness of actions still focus on outcomes, with difficulty evaluating the actor's motives. The third stage is called the autonomous stage, where children can internalize external moral standards to form their own subjective value

judgments, recognizing that established rules have flexibility and can even be changed, and considering motives behind actions when judging whether an action is moral.

From this, he concluded that cognition is the result of the interaction between the subject and the object, influenced by four factors: individual development, physical environment, social environment, and a self-regulating process of equilibrium; the formation and development of moral consciousness are related to cognitive abilities. Faced with external stimuli, the subject exercises subjective agency for self-selection and self-regulation, achieving psychological construction and reconstruction. On this basis, he proposed four processes related to cognitive development: schema, assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration.

A schema is a cognitive framework that acquires and processes information through mental and physical activities, forming a certain knowledge system to effectively adapt to the environment. With enriched experiences, a person uses newly acquired information to modify, augment, or change previous cognitive frameworks. Assimilation is the process of incorporating new information with minor adjustments without changing the existing framework. Accommodation is changing the existing or creating new cognitive frameworks based on new information. Equilibration is a balancing mechanism between assimilation and accommodation, constituting the psychological dynamics of the subject's development. The subject combines previously accumulated knowledge with newly acquired knowledge, adjusting behavior to achieve a dynamic equilibrium that meets environmental requirements.

1.5.3 Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Reasoning

American educational psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg proposed a theory of moral reasoning that progresses through three levels and six stages - with each level comprising two stages - considered an inheritance and deepening of Piaget's theory of moral development. The first level of moral thinking is the pre-conventional level, the second is the conventional level, and the third is the post-conventional level. At the entire pre-conventional level, children's moral views are controlled externally. They accept and believe in the rules set by authority figures (such as parents and teachers), and since their consciousness has not yet accepted or internalized social norms about right and wrong, their moral cognition primarily focuses on the external outcomes of certain actions. The first stage within this level is characterized by strict obedience and punishment orientation, where children mechanically follow rules to avoid punishment. An action is deemed wrong because the doer is punished; the more severe the punishment, the more serious the error is considered. The second stage is instrumental-oriented, where children believe that whatever serves their best interest is correct, with little consideration for the needs or feelings of others. Their concern for others is limited to what they can gain, not based on loyalty or genuine respect.

At the second level, children's sense of morality starts to consider social relationships. They continue to accept rules from authority figures because they believe this promotes comfortable interpersonal relationships and stable social order. Their adherence to rules is quite rigid as they rarely question the legitimacy or fairness of the rules. In the third stage included in this level, children begin to pay attention to others' attitudes, but their good behavior is superficial, aimed only at gaining praise and

avoiding denigration. In the fourth stage, children develop a preference for stable interpersonal relationships and social order, thus uncritically accepting established social rules and believing that everyone should strictly adhere to them. Their moral thinking goes beyond pleasing others to genuinely recognizing and feeling a responsibility to uphold established rules. Kohlberg believed that most people in society stop at this stage, convinced that morality is given by external forces. This conformist mentality is a mechanical aversion to risk, as deviating from the norm could mean losing face, isolation, or material loss.

At the third level, the post-conventional level, an individual's moral views derive from more abstract principles and beliefs. They believe some rules are unjust and should be changed or abolished. This represents an awakening of individual consciousness; no longer seeing oneself as a mere grain in the societal sands, but as an individual with a unique personality among many, hence refusing to blindly follow the crowd or comply with rules that contradict his principles. They recognize that norms are useful but also negotiable or adaptable mechanisms, not inflexible golden rules that everyone must blindly follow. Since individual moral consciousness transcends the norms most people take for granted, their nonconformity sometimes appears naive or at least unpolished and tactless in the eyes of others. Under heavy pressure, they may conform to the dictates of power, superficially regressing to the pre-conventional stage.

Kohlberg emphasized again that many people may never reach this level of abstract moral thinking in their lifetime. At the fifth stage in this level, individuals establish a social contract orientation. They view the world as pluralistic, where individuals and communities have different opinions, rights, and values that deserve mutual respect. Rules are seen as products of social contracts, not uniform doctrines dictated by those in

power. Rules that contravene the welfare of the majority or common sense should be amended, thus decision-making should reflect the majority's views, and some compromise between individuals is necessary. In theory, democratic systems are based on the moral thinking of the fifth stage. The sixth stage is called the universal principles orientation. Individuals can use universal ethical principles for abstract reasoning, thereby establishing their moral thinking. They move beyond simple case-by-case reasoning to focus on abstract values like equality, justice, dignity, and integrity. They act according to these values or feel ashamed; they also oppose any rules and actions that violate these universal principles. To uphold their deeply held correct values, they are willing to challenge authority and established rules at a cost. Although Kohlberg firmly believed in the existence of the sixth stage, he found it difficult to find individuals who consistently act according to it in real society.

For ease of understanding, we summarize Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning progression in table form as follows (Table 1-2):

Table 1-2 The Three Levels and Six Stages of Moral Reasoning Progression

Moral Levels	Stages of Moral Development	Moral Behavior
First Level Pre-conventional level	**Stage 1** Obedience and Punishment Orientation	To avoid punishment, strictly follow rules
	Stage 2 Instrumentalist Orientation	Seeking one's own maximum benefit, regardless of others
Second Level Conventional Level	**Stage 3** Good Boy/Nice Girl Orientation	Concerned with others' attitudes, only to win praise and avoid denigration

	Stage 4 Law and Order Orientation	Conform blindly, accept, and maintain established social rules
Third Level Post-conventional Level	**Stage 5** Social Contract Orientation	Recognizes the diversity of value concepts, considering rules as products of social contracts
	Stage 6 Universal Principles Orientation	Adheres to and defends abstract value concepts

1.5.4 Schwartz's Basic Individual Values

Social psychologist Shalom H. Schwartz and other scholars have long been trying to identify a set of basic values recognized universally across human societies through large-scale surveys. They define basic values as "trans-situational goals of varying importance that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or group." The 1992 survey covered 83 countries, resulting in 10 value elements; a 2012 survey further refined this to 19 value elements (Table 1-3) through validation in 10 countries in the revised version. These basic value elements are then organized according to their compatible and conflicting motivations, assembled into a coherent circular system to analyze and explain individuals' decision-making, attitudes, and behaviors.

These value elements are positioned based on the contrast between self-enhancement versus self-transcendence and conservation versus openness to change.

*Table 1-3 Basic Value Elements in Schwartz's Theory**

	Value	Value Elements		Motivational Goals
1	Openness to Change	Self-Direction	Thought	Freedom to cultivate one's own ideas and abilities
2			Action	Freedom to determine one's own actions
3		Stimulation	Excitement	Seeking excitement, novelty, and change
4		Hedonism	Pleasure	Sensory gratification, enjoyment
5	Self Enhancement	Success	Achievement	Achievement in conformty with popular standard
6		Power	Dominance	Control over others
7			Resources	Control over material and social resources
8	Self Conservation	Dignity	Face	Keep public image, avoid humiliation
9		Security	Personal Security	Safety in one's immediate environment
10			Social Order	Safety and stability in the broader society
11		Tradition	Tradition	Reservation of cultural, familial, and religious traditions
12		Conformity	Rules	Adherence to rules, laws, and formal obligations
13			Interpersonal	Avoiding upsetting or harming others
14		Humility	Modesty	Recognizing one's place in the context of the larger social order
15	Self-transcendence	Benevolence	Trustworthiness	Being dependable within a group
16			Caring	Seeking the welfare of group members
17		Universalism	Concern	Commitment to broad and inclusive justice

18			Nature	Protection of the natural environment
19			Tolerance	Acceptance and understanding of those who are different from oneself

*Adapted in reference to: Schwartz, Shalom H, et al. Refining the Theory of Basic Individual Values, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 103(4):663-688. Oct. 2012, P.60

1.5.5 Aunola's Parenting Style Model

In the article "Parenting Styles and Adolescents' Achievement Strategies"[8], Finnish psychologist Kaisa Aunola and other scholars summarize four types of parents based on numerous studies in child psychology. There are two parenting styles: demandingness and responsiveness. The demanding style focuses on expectations, control, and supervision, while the responsive style emphasizes warmth, acceptance, and involvement. From these two styles, four child-rearing patterns emerge.

1. Authoritative parents are both demanding and responsive. This means they control but do not restrict. They are child-centered, meaning parents deeply engage in their children's interests and activities, maintain open communication, trust their children, accept and encourage their children's psychological autonomy, and pay attention to and understand their activities - who they are with and what they are doing.
2. Authoritarian parents are strictly demanding but not responsive. Compared to authoritative parents, scolding is their usual way of expressing emotions to children because of a lack of trust, so

[8] Kaisa Aunola et al. Parenting styles and adolescents' achievement strategies. Journal of Adolescence 2000, 23, 205-222

encouragement and communication are rare. Driven by a sense of psychological control, they tend to criticize and complain, diminishing the child's value by comparing them with more successful peers. This is an adult-centered family model.

3. Permissive parents focus on responsiveness but are not demanding. They are affectionate and indulgent but indifferent to what their children think or do, allowing them to be independently autonomous.
4. Neglectful parents are neither demanding nor responsive. They neither support nor encourage their children's self-discipline, nor do they supervise their daily activities, leaving them to their own devices.

These four parenting styles have different impacts on children. Children from authoritative homes tend to have a higher interest in learning, achieve excellent grades, adapt well to the learning environment, and actively participate in school activities, mainly due to their ability to solve problems independently and think critically. Authoritarian parenting discourages children's independence in exploring and solving problems, encouraging them to develop a dependence on adult monitoring and instruction. Authoritarianism, especially excessive control, can make children accustomed to passively following orders, lacking self-learning interest and ability. In an uncontrolled environment, children raised in neglectful and permissive homes lack self-discipline, are prone to emotional impulsiveness, and perform poorly academically from childhood to adolescence, with neglectful homes showing particularly severe effects.

1.6 World Values Survey

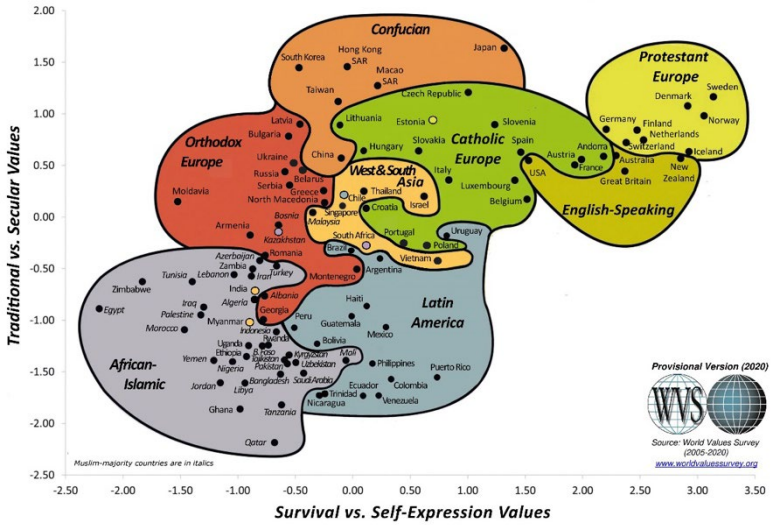
Traditionally, social psychologists have focused on the study of individual motivations, behaviors, and values. Since the 1980s, particularly among European scholars, there has been an increased focus on the moral phenomena at the group level (group dynamics), and thus an attempt to identify a set of universal values through empirical methods, aiming to provide guidance for administrative governance and sustainable development of humanity.

The World Values Survey Association is a non-profit organization initiated in 1981 by Professor Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan. Registered in Stockholm, Sweden, its membership includes hundreds of researchers from the social sciences across the globe. Its core mission is to conduct a tracking survey on beliefs and value orientations every five years in over 120 countries worldwide and to analyze their impact on societal structures, political systems, economic development, and gender discrimination, among other aspects. They have established a two-dimensional index helpful for cross-national comparisons and have used it to create the World Culture Map, named after Inglehart and Professor Christian Welzel of Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany. (Figure 1-3) More importantly, through 40 years of relentless efforts, their research has accumulated longitudinal comparability regarding the stability and variability of values.

In the World Cultural Map, the x-axis represents the dimension from survival values to self-expression values, and the y-axis represents the dimension from traditional values to secular-rational values. Moving from left to right signifies a transition from survival values to self-expression values, while moving from bottom to top indicates a transition from

traditional values to secular-rational values. This map categorizes different countries into eight major clusters based on their value orientations: English-speaking, Latin America, Catholic Europe, Protestant Europe, Africa and Islamic countries, South and West Asia, Orthodox countries, and Confucian societies. Moreover, it roughly groups different countries based on wealth, with low-income clusters near the bottom left corner and high-income clusters near the top right corner.

Figure 1-3 Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map (2020)



Source: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs.jsp

In societies dominated by survival values, people's activities are limited and pragmatic, focusing only on matters related to personal interests, emphasizing economic stability and personal safety, being slightly sensitive to stimulation, politically moderate, unwilling to engage in public life,

having low trust among individuals, and very low tolerance for diversity. Islamic countries and Orthodox Europe are most typical of this.

In societies dominated by self-expression values, people place high importance on subjective well-being, self-expression, and quality of life, are enthusiastic about arts and cultural forms, prioritize environmental protection, show higher tolerance towards foreigners, homosexuals, and gender equality, actively demand participation in economic and political decisions, and emphasize interpersonal trust and privacy protection. Protestant Europe and the English-speaking Commonwealth are most typical of this.

In societies dominated by traditional values, people are conservative, emphasizing religion, parent-child relations, family, and obedience to authority among other traditional moral concepts, continue to accept inequality passed down from traditional societies, oppose divorce, abortion, euthanasia, and suicide, and demand harsh punishment for criminals. Countries holding these views have a strong sense of national superiority and cohesion, favor large families, have historical prejudices against other races, have very low tolerance for diversity, but are relatively warm to people and have poor multilingual capabilities. African and Islamic countries, as well as Latin American countries, are most typical of this.

In societies dominated by secular-rational values, people emphasize rationality and tolerance, advocate for equality for all; do not place much importance on religion, traditional family views, and authority, consider divorce, abortion, euthanasia, and suicide to be relatively acceptable, or at least subjects open to public discussion and research; encourage the compatibility of old and new cultures; believe that laws should be maintained by institutions rather than prioritizing punishment. Societies holding these values are tolerant of increasing foreigners, homosexuals, or

those with special behaviors within their borders but may also reject the integration of heterogeneous cultures due to their relative rational pragmatism. Protestant Europe and Confucian societies are most typical of this.

The authors emphasize that a country's socioeconomic status is not the only factor determining its position on this map; its religious and cultural historical heritage is also a significant influencing factor.

They also note that under the drive of industrialization, as living standards improve, societal values shift from the bottom left to the top right. However, a society's attitudes are closely related to the dominant ideas, political, and religious philosophies that have been prevalent in the country for a long time. For example, in many countries under such influence, from social democratic systems to socialist policies, the secular-rational values and materialist philosophy created by left-wing philosophers and politicians during the French Revolution are still clearly visible today. Eastern countries exhibit typical survival values, while self-expression values prevail in the Western world. This is because, in the post-industrial free nations, people have come to take survival and freedom of thought for granted.

The author concludes that freedom of choice and autonomy are universal values and aspirations of all humanity. When people are still concerned about their livelihoods, personal safety, and economic stability naturally become priority over the pursuit of democracy. Once basic physiological needs and personal safety are ensured, people inevitably value freedom of expression more. This research shows that self-expression values are extremely important in societies where democratic systems are emerging. With the process of industrialization and the rise of post-industrial societies, the new generation has a widespread desire for self-

expression, and autocratic regimes face pressure from the public demanding political freedom. The increasing awareness of rights among the populace forces governments to change authoritarian governance styles, and empowering ordinary citizens to become masters of their own lives and community affairs is an essential path towards democracy. Globalization on one hand promotes the cross-national integration of values, and on the other, it widens the divide in values between wealthy and poor countries. In terms of everyday objects, most countries are becoming more aligned, but in social norms such as marriage, family, gender, and sexual orientation, developed industrialized countries have rapidly undergone synchronized changes, while economically backward countries remain stagnant.

In 2013, Welzel wrote "Freedom Rising: Human Empowerment and the Quest for Emancipation", which highlighted the core concept of "emancipative values". Ultimately, it's about the desire and pursuit of freedom. He believes that freedom and democracy, as universal values of all humanity and not just Western concepts, are expanding globally at an unprecedented speed and scale; people around the world, including those in non-democratic countries, have never called for freedom as frequently and powerfully as today. He asserts this is first the result of exogenous influences, which are then amplified within individual values through people's interconnections within the same society. His theory of emancipation includes three causally interrelated elements: foundational (action resources), connective (emancipative values), and achievement elements (democratic institutions). Foundational elements refer to the tools, skills, and opportunities necessary for individuals to act according to their will, connective elements are the catalysts that bridge action resources towards civil rights, and achievement elements ensure the rights to individual autonomy and political participation on an equal basis. Individual autonomy

means that everyone can shape their own lifestyle according to their wishes, and political participation means influencing decision-makers in public affairs by expressing individual will, which are two blossoms of the same lotus of democratic rights.

Understandably, improvements in economic income and education level, innovations in transportation and communication tools, etc., provide people with more resources to pursue freedom, while citizens' interconnections spawn a collective consciousness of rights and forms of civil self-organization, ultimately fostering a democratic atmosphere and system. Therefore, emancipative values are a powerful force spontaneously formed by grassroots people, "releasing the public's inner longing, adding vitality to civil society, and creating social capital" (Welzel, 2013, p.12). Due to the flourishing of emancipative values, the criteria by which people measure overall happiness have shifted: satisfaction with material life has drastically declined, while the demand for spiritual fulfillment has significantly increased. Accordingly, the acquisition of material resources gradually becomes a means, while the pursuit of spiritual fulfillment emerges as the purpose of life.

The author defines the pursuit of material life as the "acquisition strategy" and the pursuit of spiritual fulfillment as the "thriving strategy". Surveys have found that although both strategies contribute to enhancing people's happiness, prioritizing the thriving strategy can increase happiness to a greater extent and sustainably, while happiness gained from prioritizing the acquisition strategy clearly demonstrates the law of diminishing returns, even detracting from overall happiness. From an evolutionary perspective, the thriving strategy constitutes the driving force of human progress because it awakens people to act according to their own intrinsic motivations rather than willingly submitting to others' control.

Maximizing free will is an inherent pursuit of every individual, while the acquisition strategy is merely a transitional means towards this ultimate goal.

Some question whether emancipative values, with their strong individualistic tendency, might be at odds with society. Through analysis, the author finds that emancipative values represent a form of individualism beneficial to society, fundamentally different from egoism. The author demonstrates through multi-level models that individual preference for emancipative values is beneficial to society because: 1) spiritual elevation requires caring for others and the environment; 2) empathy is the foundation of trust, prompting people to abandon selfish interests and break the boundaries of egoism; 3) humanistic concepts emphasize equality, oppose discrimination, and unite on common concerns. Since the thriving strategy supports individuals in transcending the pursuit of personal safety and economic stability, stimulating empathy for the reasonable demands of others—even distant strangers—by serving society to ascend higher on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, emancipative values thus represent a reciprocal good - a new form of social capital.

Overall, emancipative values encourage people to take their destiny into their own hands and speak out on matters of common concern. Activities such as petitions, boycotts, and protest marches exemplify the bottom-up pressure for democratization: tirelessly demanding that autocratic regimes implement democracy and consistently maintaining public pressure on established democratic governments. The prevalence of such values mobilizes public participation in collective action, even in politically high-risk areas. Participants see their involvement as an end in itself, not just to achieve an immediate comfort, thereby eliminating the opportunity for free-riding motives.

Meanwhile, with increased global transparency, emancipative values have coalesced into a universal movement driven by empathy, pointing fingers at other heterogeneous regimes and their handling of public events. Citizens even force their domestic governments to adopt boycott measures to apply pressure on oppressive regimes that voliate a universal value. Heterogeneous regimes, which generally adhere to the traditional notion of sovereignty above all, treat external criticism as a fierce onslaught, retaliating under the pretext of unreasonable interference in their internal affairs.

Ancient wars were mostly focused on material interests such as land and resources, while the Cold War in the aftermath of the World War II highlighted the rivalry between opposing political systems in the spheres of influence. Unlike past international alliances and oppositions orchestrated by a few political elites with the public blindfolded, public participation will outline a new landscape of international politics in the foreseeable future. Various media shall play an unprecedented role in shaping public opinions and fueling social movements. Instead of dividing the world into North and South based on the level of national economic development, nations adopting “acquisition strategies” and those following “thriving strategies” will form new camps in the realm of value beliefs. They will continue to cooperate on “acquisition strategies” but maintain continuous confrontation on "thriving strategies."

Research shows that for social movements, the impact of connective elements far outweighs that of foundational and achievement elements. That is, conscious public participation is not strictly limited by actionable resources and social welfare, nor does it depend on the existence of a democratic system. Instead, the formation and maintenance of democratic systems rely on a deep social backdrop, namely the consciousness of

human rights driven by emancipative values. The intensity of the desire for democracy is unrelated to political systems and income levels; it's just that the nature, content, and mode of expression of demands greatly vary.

1.7 UN. Principles and Norms on Human Rights

Human rights refer to the fundamental rights inherent to all people, regardless of race, place of origin, color, gender, age, physical condition, language, and belief. The basic concept of human rights is rooted in human empathy, thus necessitating mutual respect among individuals. As moral principles with universal value, they are unanimously protected by all civilized nations and the international community. Except under special circumstances and through due process, no one, including public authorities, may discriminate against or deprive any other person of their rights.

Human rights are the only universally recognized common value of humanity, yet their content, types, levels, and extensions are the focus of widespread controversy. Noting that the disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, the basic human rights listed by the United Nations include:

1. the right to life and personal liberty;
2. the right against slavery and torture;
3. the right to freedom of thought and speech;
4. the right to work and education;
5. the right to a fair trial, and more.

It is widely accepted in academia that the concept of human rights originated from the tradition of natural law in the Middle Ages and was systematized during the Enlightenment in Europe. Notable British philosophers and political theorists John Locke, Francis Hutcheson, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau from Switzerland were among its founders. The ideas of human rights from the Enlightenment had a significant impact on the American Revolution (1765-1783) and the French Revolution (1789-1793), forming the core content of the United States Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. Philosophers like Thomas Paine, John Stuart Mill, and Hegel further expanded the universality of the human rights concept. The modern notion of human rights was comprehensively enriched in the latter half of the 20th century, especially with the formulation of systematic binding norms against atrocities such as slavery, genocide, torture, and war crimes. Given the inherent vulnerability of humans, the recognition and protection of human rights constitute the precondition for maintaining social justice.

Based on the social contract theory, Locke argued that life, liberty, and property are natural rights endowed to an individual, and that a government's rule is legitimate only when it has the consent of the governed and ensures these rights for the people. The English Bill of Rights of 1689 and the Scottish Claim of Right Act recognized a series of oppressive acts by the government as illegal.

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

——The Declaration of Independence of the United States

The anti-colonial independence movements solidified the concept of national sovereignty, while the Second World War and the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews facilitated the international human rights movement. The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. It is worth noting that the "world" mentioned here is not a geographical concept, but means "universal" or "among people".

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights views "the recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" as "the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world", urging member states to promote a comprehensive package of individual, social, and economic rights. These rights specifically include four freedoms:

1. Freedom of speech;
2. Freedom of belief;
3. Freedom from fear; and
4. Freedom from want.

Although it has no binding force, it is a milestone document in the history of human rights that reflects the common values of all humanity. The Declaration has been translated into nearly 500 languages and is universally recognized by most countries in the world.

Authoritarian regimes might pay lip service to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or even scorn it, which exactly reveals their ignorance behind their complacency. Little do they know, the spirit of the Declaration is beneficial for the long-term stability and peace they desire, as its preamble explicitly states: to prevent humanity from being compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, it is necessary to protect human rights under the rule of law.

Looking both at history and around the world, lessons of government-induced public rebellion under tyranny are abundant. At the end of 2010, Mohamed Bouazizi, a 26-year-old Tunisian man who, like many poor people, made a living from street vending, set himself on fire in front of a government building after being insulted by the police and finding no recourse. This seemingly isolated incident quickly sparked a wildfire, setting off a wave of opposition against dictatorial rule, from the "Jasmine Revolution" that led to the downfall of then-President Ben Ali's regime to the "Arab Spring" that swept across North Africa and the Middle East. Long-standing dictatorial strongholds, such as the regimes of Egyptian President Mubarak, Libya's Gaddafi, Yemeni President Saleh, Algerian President Bouteflika, and Sudanese President Bashir, all collapsed amid social movements centered on democracy and economic themes. Many attribute the "Arab Spring" to the internet or allege manipulation by the United States, but the root cause lies in political strongmen who were once hailed as national heroes during independence movements and who brought a ray of hope to people's lives, yet over time, they became corrupt and turned into enemies of the people. These leaders lifted the people high, proclaiming that history is made by the people, while at the same time, they scorned the people's judgment of good and evil. Clearly, no external evil force could stir up such massive turmoil in a

peaceful and harmonious country. If the people were so ignorant, they would not deserve a normal democratic life.

This modern democratic revolution has sounded an alarm for more dictatorial regimes that disregard the people, and sadly, some still refuse to improve their country's human rights situation, ignoring the root causes. Instead, they intensify internet censorship and turn a deaf ear to the people, stoking nationalism by creating imagined enemies to divert public dissatisfaction with reality, in order to continue living a life of imperial luxury. Isn't this a contemporary version of seeking fish by climbing a tree?

1.8 Competition: A Catalyst for Human Progress

Inasmuch as man's identity and self-worth is established in reference to others, his inexhaustible energy finds its role in competition with his peers. The only difference from the animal world is that they will fabricate justifications to convince themselves, or folly excuse to others. That is the distinctive power of morality.

In the human society characterized by hierarchy, from earning top grades in the class to winning out in presidential election, everyone strives to stand out amid competition to prove his superior value. More aggressively, one would go to great length to control others either physically or mentally. Position elevation along the social hierarchical order is a sure way to enlarge one's power at the service of his will. The famous poet Du Fu in the mid-Tang dynasty spent 10 years in the capital Chang'An trying every avenue for a high official position in order to realize his dream of proper governance. Witnessing the rapid decline of this once glorious empire, he wrote: (let me) assist the emperor to the height of

Yao and Shun (the most sacred rulers in ancient Chinese history), and revive the mellow disposition of the nation.

On a positive note, civilization moves forward when everyone vies head over heels to excel each other. In a neutral sense, competition is a component of human nature – survival of the fittest in the natural selection process. Via a negative len, competition can be destructive. In numerous cases, if one is unable to attain their fulfillment by means of production, he will seek ways to snatch from hands of others. In Homer's Iliad, Greece engaged in a decade-long war with Troy and looted the entire city after Paris eloped with Helen from her husband Menelaus, king of Sparta. Thousands of concubines in the Chinese imperial court wouldn't scruple to win a night favor with the emperor. Gladiators staged deadly combat in the Roman Amphitheater, cheered by hundreds of thousands of audiences. Vladimir Putin is calling for peace when Israelis launched counter-attack on Hamas terrorist group while he is waging brutal invasion to Ukraine. Nowadays, many more young people trump their heroic deeds over internet games beating animated monsters. Sports contest serves as a mechanism to divert the energy and emotion of people - sportsmen and spectators included - from unruly violence like warfare to the promotion of health building and social bonding. If ill directed, however, it stimulates warlike attitude and behavior in the process of combative training. In May 1969, Mao Tse-tung raised a proposition "friendship first and competition second" which was reiterated by premier Zhou En-lai in 1971 when Chinese team was heading for the 31st world table tennis competition held in Nagoya, Japan. Since then, this slogan was institutionalized as a guiding principle for Chinese teams in all contests.

If one does not possess something of pride on himself, he would weave superior connections as his due. Marriage is a shortcut to

reinventing one's network upward. In the novel Vanity Fair, William Makepeace Thackeray portrayed the life path of ambitious Becky Sharp who fought her amoral way up through society from a poor background, including casting eyes on Amelia Sedley's husband George Osborne close to the powerful family. The folk poetry *Mulberry Tree by the Country Road* described a fair lady in her teens (15-20 years old) who refuted the seduction of a high official on the country road. She elaborated how charming a white knight (actually an old man in his forties) her husband was:

He is an official in the city to the east. His public appearance is escorted by thousands of horseman guards. He rides on a white horse with its tail tied by silk ribbon, head dressed by golden halter. He bears a million worth sword with handle wound with silk thread. He started as a junior clerk at the age of fifteen, became an administer at twenty, a minister in the royal court at thirty, now a mayor of the city at forty. His skin is creamy and white, beard neatly trimmed. He walks languidly in the city hall and swaggers elegantly between government bureaus. At the palace banquet seating thousands of dignitaries, everyone praises how outstanding my husband is.

Wendi Deng, born in an ordinary family in Shandong province, China, obtained her green card in the U.S. via her first marriage with Jake Cherry, and went on to marry Rupert Murdoch, who is 37 years her senior, thus managed to join and leverage the world-class elite circle. Wu Xiao-hui born into a farmer family in Zhejiang province, through his three marriages all the way with political elite families, until his third marriage with Deng Xiao-ping's granddaughter, was able to create a huge financial

empire - Anbang Insurance Group. By time he was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment, more than 85.7 billion RMB was confiscated from his personal wealth.

Explosive ambition has been conspicuously demonstrated at every turning point of Chinese dynasties. Chen Sheng (? – 208 B.C.), a farmer ploughing in the fields, sighed: "do those kings and ministers have superior genes?" When his fellow farmers laughed at his idea, he proclaimed, "You sparrows never understand the ambition of the swans." He was the first one to organize massive uprising against the Qin Dynasty. At his heel, Liu Bang and Xiang Yu, the two successful uprisers were so much inspired by the magnificence of the emperor's parade that they respectively proclaimed: "a real man should be living like that!" and "I can take his place." More ironical is Yuwen Huaji, the minister at the very tip of the Sui Dynasty who were closely chased by the uprisers. Knowing that their days were numbered, he murdered the young emperor, took his throne and changed the dynasty into Great Xu on the way of escape. "Now that death is the destiny of everybody, why don't seize even a single day to be an emperor!" he said. A millennium later, the same drama was repeated by Yuan Shi-kai who survived in the throne - also his death bed - only for 83 days after the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty was ousted from the Forbidden City. A hideous approach is to drag those on a higher ladder down on the sly or simply trample them under one's feet.

Such an evil is best revealed when someone bullies the weaker. Lu Xun (1912–1949), the best admirable literary critic in China, described a tramp in *The Real Story of Ah-Q* who mischievously rubbed a nun's face on the road. This behavior is unethical but may be forgivable. However, the two characters in his Medicine deserve condemnation. The Uncle Kang, an executioner, sold steam bread soaked in human blood as

medicine; the red eye Ah Yi, a prison guard, robbed the heroine prisoner's cloths and slapped her in the face.

1.9 Law and Value

Values are imbedded beliefs and traditions that are able to ensure co-existence of people within the community. They are progressively formed in the lives of people through frequent communication and interaction. Considering the complexity of human society, moral values are essential to maintain healthy relationships between and among individuals, organizations and governments. They provide constant and ubiquitous surveillance and guidance over everybody from idea to action. Anyone who contradicts well-established values will feel the pain of shame and guilt from within. Over the pressure of public opinion, offensive deviants will face the consequence of isolation, marginalization, and alienation as means of punishment.

Values are plastic against human learning and environmental changes. Over time, some values may fade away or mutate while others can be strengthened by way of deliberate fosterage. Their mission is to validate the conduct of a society by defining the boundaries between what is commonly regarded right and wrong，acceptable and detestable. They empower the mind of an individual and public opinions. More subtlely, as human sophistication grows, their value system learns to balance over particular issues when virtues and sins are blended. After the emergence of government, these values are increasingly codified and determined by hard-n-fast rules enforceable by public power. Governments and laws are established to preserve social values through enforcement procedures. The judiciary system is to interpret the law and adjudicate behaviors.

Various government institutions are therefore created to maintain proper functioning of the society. In turn, the behaviors of government and its officers are also constantly exposed to critical examination by public values.

However, values in its entirety cannot be completely substituted by explicit rules of law, because law only goes as far as to regulate behavior in explicity with definite regard to what is permissible and what is punishable. As for what is hidden in the mind that justifies behavior, moral norms continue to play an indispensable role. Furthermore, a society would be operationalized in a more orderly and efficient fashion if tacit consensus in moral norms is available amongst its people. In addition to the hefty cost involved in legal enforcement, it is impossible to police everybody at any moment. Furthermore, law cannot act on its own to prevent the resurgence of undesirable behaviors because it can only punish those who actually break it. When people hold antipathy to the values that lawmakers aim to defend, a society will become chaotic.

While morality is pervasive and persuasive, law which is compulsory and mandatory. It narrows the scope of morality to regulate detectable behavior since it is impossible to observe and enforce ideas in people's mind. Intriguingly, there is distinction between knowledge and opinion. Knowledge can only be taught by reason, whereas opinion can be infused via knowledge distortion or simply fabrication. Ideological indoctrination backed by power against majority interest can trigger behavioral disinhibition under the disguised allegiance. The powerless and ill-informed could be inspired for a short period and on specific occasions, but when confronted with daily pinch in livelihood - shortage of food, mobility restriction, forced silence - they could soon realize that those ideas propagated are in the dire interest of the powerful few. History has repeatedly

proven that attempts to systematically control people's mind frame will stymie social vitality and lead to government failure.

Good law is supposed to defend the bottom-line of morality by employing the highest reason to intervene social customs aiming at the greatest good for the present and future of the largest majority. It means that law is coward enough to refrain from excessive intervention into the realm of well-functioning morality, but brave enough to eliminate bad social customs as a result of ignorance or vicious political craft. In the real world, morality is so persistent for a static community that any drastic change based on pure reason either by domestic rulers or by foreign intruders is futile and even dangerous. Few flinty reformers who rushed with dramatic changes along Chinese history were able to avoid evil fate even though their initiatives warranted tangible benefit to the nation. It is not only the entrenched interest groups that quickly rallied to reject, but the general mass would also express their discomfort for fear of uncertainties ahead. Attempts for the United States to introduce democratic governance in many underdeveloped countries failed to achieve its desirable result, and even stirred waves of civil commotion. Sir Stamford Raffles assisted by William Farquhar during British colonial governance in the Far East adopted a liberal policy to allow Chinese migrants in Singapore to continue their way of life, form their own clan associations and schools within their own communities. As a matter of fact, Raffles Institution was established in 1823 based on his concept "for the cultivation of Chinese and Malayan literature and for the moral and intellectual improvement of the Archipelago and the surrounding countries". Many legacies of the British government continue to have an impact on Singapore today. Aside from English as the working language, Singapore's political and legal system is heavily influenced by the British rule of law and parliamentary

democracy they introduced, but its local cultural genome is preserved. The country has been successively run by the Lee family but their presidency is the result of democratic election.

1.10 Morality in Governance and Leadership

In the primitive state, men had no moral relationship toward each other when they lived in isolation far apart. They were the inhabitants but not owners in the wild nature. Population assembly and power concentration are the *sine qua non* in the formation of nation state. When wise men synthesize individual will into a collective one, a systematic moral norm becomes a compelling force upon internalized conscientiousness and externalized behavior of individual members. It is eventually sanctioned by the state as a sufficient condition *de jure* to maintain social order.

Does political power which is generally expected to be attached with higher responsibility yield moral behavior? The answer depends on how power is gained and exercised, and most fundamental of all, whose interest it is designed to serve. Lawmakers are expected to turn these moral principles into specific codes of conduct that can be enforced by state power instruments, i.e. police, court, army and prison. Therefore, the intent and process as well as the outcome of legislation will have to be placed under ethical scrutiny. Laws that deviate far from the widely accepted moral principles will not be complied, and even trigger backlash from the populace under their jurisdiction. It does not mean that law should adopt all social conventions though because some of them are unethical *per se*. It is the mission of lawmakers to revoke those bad conventions to initiate social progress. Until the first Provisional Constitution in 1912, the feet-bond convention for women which gained popularity since

the Song dynasty was put to an end. Yuan Shi-kai the reversed the wheel of history abolishing the Provisional Constitution and restored the imperial institution in 1916, but one thing to his credit is that in the New Royal Court Code he phased out the eunuch system within the imperial harem which began in Chinese Zhou Dynasty. When the U.S. occupants forced Afghanistan regime to offer equal school rights to woman only to find it reversed by the come-back Taliban regime.

In view of the natural inclination of risk aversion and interest pursuit, four instruments are available to orient human behavior: reward, coercion, information, and inspiration. Human reaction to these instruments stems from his body, mind and soul. These three interconnected parts play distinctive roles. Greek philosopher Plato conjured a dualist view. He believed that soul is a higher existence; it is immaterial and immortal. He used allegory to depict human body as a cage trapping the soul and restricting it from higher plain. The soul leaves a dead body and enters another body to activate a new life. Nonetheless, Plato was not entrapped in superstition; he believed that one only gains true knowledge and understanding of reality through reason, which is the job of the mind.

Body is ready to respond to sensual pleasure and displeasure. Children may do better homework on the promise of a favorite toy from their parents, or otherwise face imminent spanking if they mess up. Caning in the form of corporal punishment in Singapore is highly effective to deter offences such as drug abuse, vandalism, extortion, and sexual abuse. Employees are motivated to work harder at the prospect of higher salary or promotion. Equally, they are more willing to help others if they realize such deeds are praiseworthy. Mind is responsible for processing information and making decisions. It functions on both intuition and rationality. The intuitive part is unconscious and emotional. It is the gut feeling or

sixth sense that pulls the string behind instant reaction. The rational part is conscious and deliberate. It runs a reasoning process of cost-benefit analysis. Judgment and decision are made in logical cascades based on past experience, observable facts and scientific data. Intuition is not persuasive among equals of knowledge and status. That is why its unique role is too often set at naught in a democratic and informative environment. It reminds us of the famous saying by Albert Einstein, "The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift."

For everybody, life is short. There are moments of helplessness in everyone's lifetime. More dreadful and disturbing, is the thought of death. For either of the two reasons, people are transpired with a natural psychological inclination to restore peace in the mind. The belief in an all mighty, in various forms though, that is able to dissolve perplexity beyond reasoning, bring justice to misfortunes and forgive wrongdoings, helps alleviate one's anxiety and fear. The belief of an immortal soul is comforting at the thought of death since it is enlivening to imagine the infinite opportunities in acquisition to realize one's dreams. On this note, the notion of karma has been popular within religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Although most Chinese are atheists and there are far fewer religious fanatics, they buy in the concept of *karma* in the circle of life as a matter of fairness. They believe that good or bad intent and deeds will eventually be rewarded or punished by a nebulous image with ultimate power. For most people, it would be sufficient so long as they embrace the conviction that the virtuous will be ascend to heaven and the vicious will decend to hell. And this can extend to their future lives or their descendants.

Soul or psyche is widely held as an incorporeal essence of a being. Some believe it exists in all living creatures while others take it as the divine faculty reserved solely for human being. In Islamic tradition, prayer (dua) in the name of Allah must be whispered in the animal's ears upon slaughter so that its soul is informed of its purpose. Soul is filled with distinctive qualities of emotion, conscience, empathy and passion. That is why it is in constant spiritual quest for aspiration and revelation. Socrates believed that soul can be inspired by reasoning thus he spent his life to exhort people around him to excel in matters of the psyche. Many regions promote meditation as a pathway to revelation.

Intuition-based leadership is heavily reliant on entrenched personal charisma or authority. Faith is an energizing power. Due to blind trust or fear, people do not have to activate their rational mind to follow direction set by the leader. A society or organization that rests on veneration for a single wise leader can be more efficient than those that entertain divergent voices. Alexander the Great is quoted for his famous saying: "An army of sheep led by a lion is better than an army of lions led by a sheep."

Many leaders deliberately deify themselves with messianic discourse assuming that the majority are incapable of sound reasoning. They claim divine revelation and attempt to wrap all senses of their constituents with crafted messages. They stage ceremonies, build magnificent palaces, wear special costumes, erect statues, spread posters of their portraits and pompous slogans, organize biblical studies, exercise demagoguery and mystify decisions. Most crucial of all, they seize all media apparatus to launch deluge of propaganda campaigns in order to solidify their desirable image. Although such endeavor can expeditiously bring about group unity and collective action, the prerequisite here is that an authoritarian leader must be wise and responsible enough and remain so all the time. The danger is

that when people are led astray, there is no restraining force to step on the brake. Until a tipping point, civil commotion and revolution would flare up. Ironically, revolutionary leaders would very likely reemploy the same set of gimmicks to galvanize the morale of his followers. This has been the cyclical curse revolving along the Chinese history. After the World War II, in the aftermath of anti-collonial triumph, many nationalist leaders scuttled from national heroes into a stature of Caesar exhausting all means of deification and prosecution of dissidents. Most of them established totalitarian regimes promoting nationalism and wholesaling communism from the Soviet template. Unfortunately, none of them brought about prosperous life to their people as promised. Ironically, the iron curtain of sanction and embargo forged by western allies against the Soviet bloc in the aftermath of the World War II actually formented dictatorship in those new regimes. Their leaders were more than happy to have their people insulated from western influence. Lack of information and interaction, they could easily allienate the worldview of their people. By fueling hostility against the more developed nations, they could win fanatic worship from their own people depicting themselves as the sole saviors of the nation. Some of them are still enshrined as fathers of the nation such as Mao Tsetung, Kim Il-sung and Fidel Castro, while others like Joseph Stalin, Muammar Gaddafi, and Muhammad Mubārak are crucified by people who used to vehemently support them. Nicolae Ceaușescu, the charismatic general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, was dramatically overthrown by awakened people in the middle of his recalibrating speech during a mass congregation staged in Bucharest. In comparison, George Washington and Winston Churchill who gave up power after their glorious achievement have left perpetual good names in history.

1.11 Summary Commentary

The fundamental characteristic that distinguishes humans from other living beings is their understanding and pursuit of values, with their social nature necessitating a collective awareness of values. Values, invisible and pervasive, interact with cognitive abilities to shape the attitudes and behavioral norms of individuals or groups. Values are always active in the subjective world of humans, ultimately guiding objective behavior. People constantly evaluate their surroundings, attributing positive value to things that benefit them and negative value to the contrary; the positivity or negativity of values depends on the evaluator's understanding of the benefits and leads to corresponding actions.

For most people, the formation and expression of values depend on their upbringing and the living conditions of the time, and this is no different for a group or nation. Nations preoccupied with survival are inevitably pragmatic, prioritizing the utility of things and thus led by acquisition strategies; while those free from survival concerns focus more on formalism and the aesthetic values of romanticism, led by strategies of enlightenment.

The pursuit of freedom is a common value of all humanity, based on the autonomy of individual will and the self-governance of individual affairs. Within this universal proposition lies the diversity of individual values. However, individual will has a strong tendency to expand, with everyone wishing the external world to conform to their will. Among individuals, and between states, the powerful take an offensive stance, emphasizing elitism and universalism; the weak are defensive, adhering to populism and independence. In today's interdependent world, for the sake of peace and cooperation, enlightened nations choose to voluntarily cede

part of their sovereignty to abide by common rules. Behind these common rules, however, are shared values that play a decisive role through treaties.

A nation can impose its will on others through military or economic strength for a time, but ultimate development depends on the level of knowledge and moral awareness of every citizen.

The diversity of human life determines the multiplicity of values, creating a colorful world. Any attempt to homogenize this diversity is futile. On the other hand, since all people are classified as one kind, there must exist common values based on human nature among them. In today's global village, where people and nations are closely interconnected, extracting and promoting these common values to formulate and adhere to a universally accepted system of rules is of exceptional importance and urgency for world peace and development. For national states, a perfect governance system needs to respect the value and comprehensive development of each member, deriving and implementing a value system recognized and defended by the majority. It should at least have five basic features: 1) equality of citizenship, with highly free will and decision-making, and the opportunity to participate in the formulation of governance rules; 2) clear definition and legal protection of various rights; 3) equal treatment of citizens, encouragement of fair competition, and establishment of an effective reward and punishment mechanism; 4) a transparent and stable system of rules that promote cooperation and competition, avoiding frequent changes and multiplicity of regulations; 5) fairness and effectiveness in judiciary and law enforcement. Only with that, can a country create conditions for stable rule-based cooperation with other countries. These five basic features are the fundamental signs of whether a country can develop healthily and sustainably and win the respect of other nations.

2

VALUE IN HUMAN SOCIETY

In the preface of Discourse on the Origin and Basis of Inequality Among Men, French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote: “Studying humans is harder than any other subject.” Now that a society is the aggregate of people living together, any discourse on the subject of social value must begin with the investigation into the intrinsic human nature that is shared by all members. In the meanwhile, ideological indoctrination to forfeit individual interest in the name of collective welfare should be placed under stringent ethical scrutiny, because it is likely the scheme of the few to deprive the legitimate pursuit of the majority. This shall sow the seed for eventual political and social disintegration, as in the case of Soviet Union and many other autocracies.

Regardless of the various outward differences in color, gender, age, race, language, ability, customs and religion, is there commonality among all individual human beings? Intuitive observation can easily capture those differences, which are also the topics for amplification by the extremists either out of ignorance or deliberate political agenda. Nonetheless, discovery of the commonality entails inquiry into the rudimental essence beneath varying appearances through abstraction and reasoning.

To know the differences is to see their manifestations; to know their commonality is to grasp their essence. Discard the differences and observe the commonalities, then the mind can wander in the origin of things.

Observing the commonalities, one can homogenize with all things. Homogenizing oneself among all things, one can harmonize with truth and falsity.

——*Laozi*

Christianity believes that every single person is equally created and loved by God. Allah and Prophet's Hadith Pbuh also states all humans are born as equal since they all have a soul. Daoist points to the indescribable yet eternal dao as the origin and sole source of everything and its constant motion in the universe. Confucianism is preoccupied with the principles of human ethics. Buddhism explores the commonalities behind the varied appearances. They all attempt to reveal the universality behind diversity. Philosophically, this issue falls within the study of ontology. In biology, humans belong to the order Primates within the class Mammalia. Like most primates, human life and migration are conducted in a social manner, with a strong sense of hierarchy and territorial awareness. This social and political nature is gradually formed over an extended process as humans, as solitary individuals and autonomous subjects, learned to adapt to nature and each other. Correspondingly, there must be some form of organization, communication, and command system that connects members of a community to maintain the survival and development of the group.

2.1 Characteristics and Commonalities of Humanity

An evident fact is that, in the vast expanse of the universe, nearly 8 billion humans currently inhabit the relatively small planet Earth. Regardless of the perspective or purpose, the classification of the species known as humans into a single category implies the existence of common attributes distinguishing them from other species. Compared to other species, including primates, humans are capable of prolonged upright walking, possess more flexible upper limbs, and excel in tool-making and usage. They have a more developed brain, enabling complex computation and abstract thinking, along with long-term memory, advanced learning capability, sophiscated language communication skills, and boundless imagination.

Especially after the invention of writing, human experiences and technologies have been passed down through generations by recording and disseminating knowledge through communication. This, in turn, accelerates the deepening and enhancement of knowledge through application and sharing. While most species adapt passively to given external environments, humans proactively alter the external environment to suit their needs. Birds and mammals may instinctively grow fur to resist the cold, while humans can gather feathers from birds and skins from mammals to make clothing. Consequently, apart from a few individuals who achieve exceptional skills in certain areas with specialized training, the adaptive physiological functions of the human body have generally regressed, while life expectancy continues to increase with improvements in living conditions and medical treatment.

Psychologist Erich Fromm believed, “Man is the most desperate among all animals, but this biological deficiency itself is the foundation

that gives him strength, the primary reason for the development of his human characteristics." More explicitly, it is from the moment humans became conscious and determined to seek their independent development, aiming to overcome their biological vulnerability, that the source of civilization they carved out began to unfold and meander. Driven by intense curiosity, the enhancement of cognitive abilities facilitated humans' understanding of various things and their connections. This, in turn, clarified the purpose of actions, propelling innovations dominated by science and technology. This forward-looking creativity significantly surpassed instinctive adaptability, just as the end of the Stone Age was not due to the depletion of stones but the discovery of bronze and iron crafting. Similarly, mainstream medical formulations moved away from herbal remedies towards chemical and biological drugs, not because herbal resources vanished entirely.

In the drive to improve their own living conditions, the innovation of tools enhanced humanity's ability to conquer, transform, and utilize the natural environment, including other animals, making humans the only dominators on this planet. The accumulation of experiences in this process also enriched the subjective world of humans, including emotions, reason, and will.

Observations and experiments in biological science confirm that the physical abilities and instinctive responses of other animals not only surpass humans in many aspects but also include the ability to create and use simple tools, engage in language communication, and express emotions. Resorting to mere quantitative comparison with other animals to prove the distinctive superiority of humans in particular aspects, language and the use of tools, for example, can hardly produce convincing arguments. From a biomimetic point of view, animals are actually human's teachers

in multiple aspects. Therefore, we must explore an alternative path, delving into the spiritual world of humans to seek answers. This involves their rational thinking and value consciousness in questioning and pursuing the meaning of life through their connection with the world. Aristotle believed that the similarity between humans and plants lies in the sharing of life, the similarity with animals lies in the commonality of desires, and human greatness stems from their unique function—reason. Only humans possess this function among animals, that is, rationality, acting "according to right reason (logos)", which is the form and purpose of humans. The continuous extension of this rationality allows humans to become divine. It represents a parallel thought with Mencius who argues that as long as one dedicates to the pursuit of the Dao, "everyone can ascend to the sacred height of Yao and Shun". Kant differentiated humans from objects based on their distinct existences and assigned different values to each. He believed that there are two different "beings" (Wesen) in the world: one is irrational beings, i.e., "things" (Sachen), which exist not according to our will but to the will of nature, and therefore, they only have relative value and can only serve as "means" (Mittel); the other is rational beings, i.e., "persons" (Personen), who possess absolute value, and their nature manifests as the "end itself".

In the socialized context, the intentions and actions of rational beings must undergo moral scrutiny. Aristotle further categorizes virtues into two types: one is intellectual, including wisdom, science, and knowledge; the other is ethical, encompassing generosity, temperance, courage, and justice. Following Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 and to fulfill its obligation under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, committing to protect Ukraine's territorial integrity in exchange for denuclearization, western countries, instead of succumbing to Russia's

expansionist aggression, chose to economically weaken Russia's war chest by diverting energy supplies from Russia even at higher cost. This was aimed at countering Russia's energy extortion and supporting Ukraine's defensive actions. This opportunity also accelerated their research and development of non-fossil energy sources, ready to completely break free from dependence on Russian energy and achieve a strategic green transition. Ironically, Russia, a leading signatory of the Budapest Memorandum, not only failed to fulfill its commitments but also acted to the contrary, turning itself into an enemy against its own obligations. India's behavior appears even more complex and paradoxical. Traditionally a major buyer of Russian weapons, India abstained from the United Nations General Assembly resolution calling for Russia's immediate withdrawal from Ukraine. Taking advantage of the Russia-Ukraine war, India made large purchases of Russian oil at low prices on the international market, providing a crucial economic lifeline to the Putin government. On the other hand, Indian President Modi directly warned the initiator of the war, Russian President Putin, stating, "This is not the age of war". India also provided humanitarian aid to Ukraine and assured Ukrainian President Zelensky at the G7 summit in Hiroshima, saying, "India and I personally will do everything possible..."

Intellectual virtues can be instilled through education, while ethical virtues require habitual cultivation. Since ethical virtues correspond to intense social attributes of humans, interpersonal relationships and daily interactions constitute the core content of individual and collective meaning in human life. For example, a doctor saving a patient's life, a businessman negotiating favorable trade terms, a general leading troops to victory, or a student achieving top grades in class (compared to other classmates) - such life meanings are realized via impact on others. From a different

perspective, had Laozi refused to leave behind any writings at the Hangu Pass, choosing to disappear with his philosophical treasures of enlightenment, nobody would have bestowed such lofty respect upon him.

Happiness, as an ultimate human pursuit, comes from an individual's sense of value. What exactly is this sense of value? Kang You-wei wrote in his “Book of Cosmopolitanism”: “Those poor people who build shelters and weave clothing with grass can still live happily in couples when they earn a few coins each day and have their bowl filled with a few bites”. In the eyes of the poor described by Kang You-wei, grass, shelter, clothing, money, food, and marital relationships all fulfill their needs, and therefore, they are useful and valuable.

2.2 Humanity as a Subject of Social Science

Scientific research is a process of seeking truth, which primarily should undertake three basic tasks: 1) seeking and recognizing the truth of things; 2) discovering patterns and distilling truths amidst complex phenomena; 3) explaining and disseminating its research findings. Furthermore, scientific research may initially be driven by the curiosity of a few, but its mission and results should serve the good of humanity, i.e., to be applied to advance human progress and welfare, rather than reserved for the pleasure of a few scientists or to fulfill the schemes of some ambitious individuals. Robert Einstein dedicated himself to studying the principles of nuclear fission. As a Jew persecuted by the Nazis, he once wrote to President Roosevelt during World War II urging the rapid development of atomic bombs, a weapon of mass destruction, to curb the Nazi threat to the safety of people worldwide. After realizing the catastrophic destruction to humanity and the environment caused by the two atomic

bombs dropped by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Einstein regretted his contributions and advice that accelerated the application of weapons of mass destruction in war, admitting it was the biggest mistake of his life. After much reflection, he decided to dedicate the rest of his life to anti-nuclear research and advocacy to make amends for his mistake.

As a starting point, scientific research uses humanity as a measure, dividing its objects of study into two parts: the objective world composed of matter and the subjective world composed of spirit. As a conclusion, it aims to satisfy human natural curiosity by discovering, describing, and explaining the nature of things and their existence, movement, interconnections, and interactions, facilitating interpersonal communication and cooperation, and guiding people to make optimal decisions and actions.

The practical role of science lies in helping us understand the potential and even distant consequences of our actions, thereby aiding us in making more rational choices.

The actual role of science is to help us understand the potential and even distant consequences of our actions, thereby helping us to choose our actions more rationally.

——*Karl Popper*[9]

Therefore, it can be said that scientific research is a process of deconstruction, abstraction, and expression. It begins with understanding the characteristics of a particular thing, then gathers the characteristics of multiple things, and through careful analysis, finds their differences, commonalities, and connections. It summarizes universal laws and finally

[9] Karl R. Popper. "Conjectures and Refutations", Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1986, p. 379.

wins the trust of the world with its processes and results. From the perspective of epistemology, scientific research needs to follow seven basic steps sequentially: 1) Define concepts, which means first addressing the issue of linguistic definitions. According to the British philosopher Simon Blackburn, concepts must be intelligible, clear, and coherent, covering all their homogenous connotations and establishing exclusive boundaries. Descartes said, "Accept nothing besides clear and distinct ideas." And "We should always conduct thorough inspections to ensure nothing is overlooked." 2) Establish classification criteria based on concepts, ensuring their consistent and unbiased applicability. 3) Perform layer-by-layer deconstruction, like peeling an onion, until reaching the smallest indivisible level, similar to decomposing matter in physics from macro to micro levels—molecules, atoms, protons, neutrons, electrons, photons, gluons, quarks. 4) Identify the properties of the tiniest particles and their principles of formation and function. 5) From the inside out, find the relationships between components at various levels, some causal, some parallel, and some independent. 6) Use inductive logic for derivation, abstractly summarizing the laws of existence and movement of things, commonly known as theorems or laws. 7) Explain and disseminate the discovered truths and realities in a manner understandable and convincing to the public. Accepted theorems are applied to subsequent research and practice through deductive logic, thus promoting the continuous progress of humanity.

However, the discovery and summarization of laws is an endless journey. Beyond exploring more fields and complex problems, many accepted, unquestioned realities, common sense, and theorems also need to be questioned, challenged, and expanded due to their limitations. This is also where the interest and responsibility of scientists lie. For example,

the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, a common sense and an unquestioned theorem of Euclid. This theorem, applicable to plane geometry, is extended in astrophysics by Riemannian space, whose understanding of space curvature inspired the birth of Einstein's theory of general relativity.

Montesquieu believed that law should be the embodiment of regularity, hence he said: “In the broadest sense, law is the necessary relation arising from the nature of things. In this sense, everything that exists has its laws. God has His laws; the material world has its laws; beings higher than humans have their laws; animals have their laws; humans have their laws. It is extremely absurd to say that everything we see in the world is produced by a blind fate. There must be a fundamental reason in the world, and law is the relation between this fundamental reason and the various beings, as well as the relation among the beings themselves.” Therefore, since the natural world composed of matter has recognizable and summarizable laws, the social world composed of human beings must similarly do so. However, compared to the former, the latter's endeavor is far more difficult!

Compared to social sciences, natural sciences can be considered a favorite subject of study in all societies. Aside from a period of suppression by extreme religious forces due to challenges posed to theology, it has faced increasingly less human intervention. This is related to its own advantages: its variables are controllable, processes are repeatable, and results are verifiable, hence it has immediate persuasive power. Moreover, it can directly guide or apply to the production of material goods, from food to weapons, where cost savings, productivity improvements, and quality optimizations can have immediate effects, thus inevitably winning the welcome and support of politicians and all other stakeholders.

Social sciences, however, are not so fortunate and are inevitably subjected to various forms of helplessness and hardship. They need to keep up with the latest advancements in natural sciences and use the achievements of natural sciences as support for their propositions, such as Darwin's theory of evolution in "The Origin of Species", Vesalius's study on the morphology of the human organ system in "De humani corporis fabrica", and Hawking's discussion on the relationship between the beginning of space-time and the existence of God in "A Brief History of Time". The objects of their study are complex, and the assumptions at the starting point are often dynamic variables. The variables included in the study often become uncontrollable, plus the processes are not repeatable, and the results are difficult to verify in the short term, making it hard to deliver direct benefits, thus lacking intuitive persuasive power. Therefore, for scholars engaged in social science research, even if they have presented unique viewpoints and achievements, calling them scientists is a difficult matter, and the most appropriate titles are still literati or scholars. Chinese popular sayings like "A scholar is good for nothing" and "A scholar making a revolution will not succeed in ten years" reflect the perennial contempt of the general public for social science researchers.

In reality, true sages who have mastered the laws are versatile, only that they have extraordinary aspirations and refuse to bother practical utility. In ancient Greece, Thales, who was hailed as the "father of science and philosophy", was a merchant in his early years. However, he was not interested in making money but always liked to wander around, observing and studying things that seemed trivial, thus was ridiculed as a useless person, a poor man who did not understand business. One year, he rented all the olive presses in the area because he predicted, using his astronomical knowledge, that there would be a great olive harvest for the Athenians

the next year. By raising the price of pressing olives, he made a large sum of money. He only wanted to prove that philosophers are wise people and could earn more money if they wished, but he had more important things to do. Thus, he made pioneering contributions in the fields of astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, and more throughout his life.

Once major social science achievements are applied appropriately, over time, they can lead to revolutionary changes, contributions that can surpass any in the natural sciences. The rise of Qin monarch under Duke Xiao due to the adoption of Shang Yang's theory, the dominance of Qi monarch under Duke Huan at the advice of Guan Zhong, the golden age of Tang dynasty under Emperor Taizong at the advice of Wei Zheng, and Marxism with the socialist revolutions in many countries are all living examples. On the other hand, unlike natural sciences, the subjects of social science research are extremely complex and variable, and their findings are difficult to replicate in the short term. Therefore, since the results of social science can produce significant effects only when they are recognized and adopted by those in power, researchers can easily turn out to be dependents on these authorities.

Even if a finding in social science can justify itself, regardless of the quality, researchers with different positions and purposes can easily arrive at different or even opposite conclusions and strategies. When comparing the comprehensive national power of China and the United States, some say China has surpassed the United States, others see a considerable gap, and still others think it will be difficult to catch up in the foreseeable future. With the habitat of "scholars despising each other" among peers, social scientists rarely work in large teams. Due to these reasons, coupled with political interventions, either overt or covert, eroding the independence of their research, and the urgent societal expectation for

technological innovation, social science researchers, including today's "experts" and "public intellectuals", inevitably face disdain from those in power and radicals, even suffering from derogatory labels like "useless scholars" or "scholars harming the nation". Thus, the social status of social scientists is far lower than those engaged in natural science research and technological innovation, although both belong to the intellectual class.

In 2019, the total funding for annual and youth projects by the National Social Science Fund was 977.75 million yuan[10], while the funding for the Natural Science Foundation was 30.724 billion yuan[11]. The Chinese government's priorities between the two are clearly evident.

Social scientists also face the frustration of unfulfilled ambitions and can even provoke disasters by angering those in power. This does not include scholars like Fang Xiao-ru[12], who were persecuted for their political stance, but only discusses those honest scholars dedicated to pursuing social truths. The material world, as the subject of natural science research, is indestructible, and the changes it undergoes are traceable; the spiritual world, as the subject of social science research, is not so fortunate. The historical materials it relies on for research can be destroyed or altered in an instant, and viewpoints can be suppressed at any time. The truths revealed by researchers may be deliberately concealed by those in power who are well aware of them, their rational deductions of social theorems or truths may be shelved due to the stubbornness of those in power, or

[10] Annual Report by National Social Science Fundation (2019), http://xxcb.xuexisd.com/

[11] Final Annual Account by the Committee of National Natual Science 2019, http://www.nsfc.gov.cn/Portals/0/fj/fj20200717_01.pdf

[12] A renowned imperial scholar who refused to serve the usurp Zhu Di emperor in the Ming dynasty resulted in extermination of ten familial clans.

their research fields may initially be marked with a “no trespassing” warning. Some dictatorial authorities would rather have them abandon the pursuit of truth and instead sing their praises or help slander their enemies, even though this is not beneficial to the authorities in the long run. The imprisonment of Socrates in Athens, the suffering of Jesus in Jerusalem, and the successive expulsions of Rousseau and Marx by the Prussian and Parisian governments were all because the truths they discovered offended narrow-minded rulers. No wonder when asked what was most astonishing in the world, Thales replied, “The longevity of dictators”.

Interestingly, those countries that tolerated different political opinions and welcomed thinkers considered dissidents by their authorities, such as England's acceptance of Rousseau from France and Marx from Germany, Japan's acceptance of Sun Yat-sen and Liang Qi-chao from China, France's acceptance of Cai He-sen and Zhou En-lai, and the United States' acceptance of Ivan Bunin from Russia, each became world powers due to enlightened politics. In the current era of information explosion and knowledge economy, those regimes who attempt to capsulate their people from global information, exclude and suppress diverse thinkers and actors shall accelerate their alienation or marginalization from the rest of the world.

Without the progress and enlightenment of social sciences such as philosophy, history, ethics, psychology, sociology, political science, economics, and law, natural science could not possibly journey far alone. The development of applied technologies would become a sourceless water, losing both direction and meaning. Europe's Industrial Revolution owes its success to the paths paved by the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and the roaring engine of technological innovation in the United

States last century could not have functioned without the auxiliary fuel provided by the social sciences.

2.3 Microscopic Study on Human Attributes

Starting from Plato's "theory of recollection" to Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology, the philosophical community has never ceased to explore memory, consciousness, knowledge, and the problems of the mind. Following the steps of epistemology mentioned above, research on human society gradually delves into the microscopic world. Some start with human anatomy, attempting to clarify whether it is the heart or the brain that performs the functions of memory and thought; others start from hormones, studying the impact of libido on human emotions, motivations, and behaviors. With the emergence of Franz Brentano's empirical psychology, Herbart and Müller's experimental psychology, and Freud's psychoanalysis, the simple philosophical context formed by observation and conjecture dissipated into the mist, as successors provided more scientific verification and more rigorous argumentation.

Regarding the composition and attributes of humans, based on different criteria, metaphysics includes both dualists and trialists. Dualism believes that humans are composed of a material body and an immaterial mind; trialism believes that humans consist of the body, mind, and soul. Both admit the body is the carrier or dwelling of the other parts. Some trialists divide humans into biological, social, and spiritual attributes. The biological attribute of humans is no different from other living beings, all seeking survival, growth, and reproduction, and all experiencing a brief journey from birth to death. The social attribute of humans, i.e., identity, needs to be affirmed in relationships with others, adjusted and

consolidated through interactions. The spiritual attribute falls within the study of philosophy of mind, including the essence, properties, functions, activities of the mind, and its relationship with the physical entity, with researchers holding different positions, including physicalism, idealism, and mysticism. Plato, through the mouth of Socrates, stuffed desires, reason, and passions all into the soul's pouch. Descartes was the first to separate the mind from the brain with the concepts of consciousness and self-awareness, implying that the brain is only responsible for the cognitive functions of the mind. In short, the spirit is a condensation and sublimation of psychological consciousness, including emotions, aesthetics, will, faith, ideals, etc., with the most prominent feature being the consciousness of value.

Don't you see the bright mirror in high hall lamenting your white hair, turning from pitch dark in the morning to snow white by the twilight? This is the verse from the famous poem by Li Bai, the most outstanding poet in the Tang dynasty. Almost everyone laments the brevity of life, thus death constitutes the greatest threat and the most helpless fear for humans. Since the physical demise is irresistible, the notions of the soul's independence and immortality offer great consolation. Socrates is a prime example of someone who went to his death generously because of his firm belief in the immortality of the soul. People pray for the great deceased to ascend to heaven and remain immortal; they curse the wicked dead to fall into hell, never to be reborn.

Based on the desire for life and the fear of death, simple superstitions and systematic religions have found ample space to step in. Without exception, all religions advocate the immortality of the soul, emphasizing the power of faith and the judgment of deities. On this basis, Christianity believes in God and the Bible, Islam believes in Allah and the Quran, and

Buddhism believes in Buddha and teachings such as the Three Marks of Existence, the Four Noble Truths, and the Noble Eightfold Path. They all recognize the netherworld as the soul's destination, dividing it into heaven and hell. The soul needs to be judged based on its earthly deeds to decide whether it ascends to heaven or is cast into hell. Although all orthodox religions admonish people to promote good and suppress evil in the world, most start from the assumption of self interest inclination. It is believed that this goal can be achieved through the coercion and temptation of soul judgment, repeatedly emphasizing the absolute authority of a single deity over panoramic surveillance and scrutiny over all the activities of every being. For example, the Bible says, “Love given is love returned; blessings sent are blessings received”. In contrast, Chinese religious thought is more open-minded, generally polytheistic, emphasizing enlightenment and cultivation in this life, measuring the quality of life by vital energy, and determining the value of the soul based on the evaluations of contemporaries and posterity. The deseased ancestors are offered with food, drink and joss paper both at the graveyard and familial shrine, with or without flowers. Laozi’s saying, “He who does not lose his place (principle of life) endures long; death without extinction is longevity”, encapsulates this principle.

2.4 Economic and Ethical Debate on Value

The term “value” entered classic economics as a core concept of academic debate. In economics, value is synonymous with utility which refers to the ability to satisfy needs. A masterpiece of art has no value in the face of people suffering from gruntling stomach. Once veered to market exchange, the value of goods or services is quantified by the price paid on

the demand side, known as exchange value. Since needs are driven by desires, the intensity of needs is determined by the size of desires, which in turn determines the value of the means of satisfaction. Since human desires are limitless, especially in terms of possessiveness and curiosity, the pursuit of satisfying these desires knows no bounds. If human nature, characterized by such desires, does not undergo fundamental changes, Marx's vision of need-based distribution system of communism can only remain a fantasized utopia. This is because the objective material supply can never be rich enough in quantity, quality, and variety to simultaneously satisfy everyone's subjective desires.

At a specific moment and in a particular environment, human needs are always prioritized, and thus, there is a need to assess the value of different satisfying entities. In desperate situations, the value of food and drink is inevitably higher than that of gold and silver treasures. Satisfied needs cease to motivate people's efforts until new needs arise or get aroused, which is almost an instant matter though.

However, economics adopts the guiding principle of instrumental rationality, focusing solely on the efficiency of optimizing resource allocation, production, and exchange to maximize the satisfaction of human needs. It has little interest to attend to questions of normative ethics, namely the moral values of an economic actor, the act, its purpose and impact. This is precisely why economics can only serve as a tool for market economies since it fails to comprehensively guide fundamental reasons for human life and social development. While the rules of a market economy are irreplaceable for efficient utilization of resources to create material wealth, they also play a role in exacerbating human greed and fueling the notion of survival of the fittest in interpersonal relations. Negative externality of business operations, wealth polarization and

consumerism derived from pure market mechanism erode fairness and justice in society, deviating from the optimal outcome of overall morality, i.e., social benefit in its entirety. Especially under conditions where material needs are essentially satisfied, the alienation caused by contemporary capitalist systems to human society repeatedly proves the limitations and destructive nature of a purely economic value perspective. Therefore, for the well-being of individual humans and society as a whole, the objectivity of material values necessitates constant moral scrutity and correction in a holistic manner.

According to Harry Frankfurt's viewpoint, the distinctive feature that sets humans apart from animals is not desire and motivation, not even the ability to choose, but rather the unique "second-order desires" or "second-order volitions". In his expression, first-order desires or volitions are a person's primal desires or thoughts, while second-order desires or volitions are desires for one's own first-order desires, i.e., the ability to reflect on and evaluate first-order desires. Through this evaluation, first-order desires are classified as desirable or undesirable.[13]

In fact, in addressing the question of life's meaning through autonomy, self-reflection, and self-discipline, Socrates' famous saying is truly thought-provoking: "An unexamined life is not worth living". Confucian principles like "reflecting on oneself three times a day" and "one can act to his desires, but only within moral bounds" emphasize the restraining and corrective role of human reason and morality on primal desires, effectively epitomizing Frankfurt's second-order volitions.

In the face of wealth and prosperity, Confucius did not advocate asceticism. The Master said, "If wealth can be sought, I'm ready to go for it

[13] Frankfurt, Harry, 1971, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person", Journal of Philosophy, p.68, (Jan. 14), pp.5-20.

even though in the position of a horse groom. If it cannot, I will pursue what I like". The term "can or cannot be sought" should not be interpreted as an issue of objective capacity. Instead, it is a subjective accessment drawing a moral distinction by second-order volitions between the two options, which extends to mean "seekable" when it benefits oneself and others, and "not seekable" when it harms others for personal gain. Mencius further elaborated on such value-based choice guided by this principle, "You can't have both the fish and the bear's paw" when he said, "Life is what I desire, and righteousness is also what I desire. If I cannot have both, I would abandon life and choose righteousness. Life is what I desire, but there is something I desire more than life, so I will not do anything just to stay alive. Death is what I detest, but there is something I detest more than death, so I will not shun the peril of death" (Mencius, Gaozi Chapter).

In summary, for an ideal society to be truly virtuous, values must possess a dual nature of ontological significance and ethical evaluation. This means achieving a high degree of unity between objective concrete utility and subjective universal benefits. It can be seen that, from a semantic perspective, the term "efficacy" (utility and benefit) aligns more closely with this ideal state.

2.5 Needs and Happiness

Gao Zi presented to Mencius a fundamental proposition: "Food and sex are the desires of human nature". Food is necessary for the continuation of individual life, while sex is essential for the intergenerational continuity of humanity. Both are primal desires bestowed upon all living beings by the Creator, immutable and inviolable. The "Book of Rites" states,

"Drinking and eating are the rudimental desires of men and women, and therein lies persistence in human nature". Sima Qian, in the section of "Biographies of Merchants" in his Records of the Grand Historian elevated this to a societal level, saying, "As shown in the accounts of the Poems and Books from the time of Yü and Xia dynasties onwards, the ears and eyes desire the utmost beauty, the mouth desires the tastes of grains and livestock, and the body seeks comfort and joy, boasting of the prestige of human power. People have grown so accustomed to this pattern over generations that no visible alteration can be effected even by door to door austerity rhetoric".

Strictly speaking, "need" is a composite concept that can be broken down into three progressively deeper layers of meaning: "desire", "need" and "want". Humans are born with desires. Desire prompts need, and need propels want. Desire originates from the physiological functions bestowed upon humans by the Creator. People commonly refer to the six senses of "eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and brain" as the six desires among the classic definition of "seven emotions and six desires". In reality, they serve as carriers of the six desires and receptors of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and information in the human perceptual system. The true counterparts, namely "visual desire, auditory desire, olfactory desire, gustatory desire, tactile desire, and ideational desire", represent the authentic six desires. "Need" refers to a state of deficiency, such as a lack of water, food, or the inability to reach another place within a short period due to the absence of transportation. This state of deficiency is conveyed through perceptual functions to the nerve system, causing the individual to experience a sense of tension or discomfort, which is known as "anxiety". For example, due to the aforementioned deficiency, a person may

feel thirsty, hungry, or restless due to difficulty in traveling, all of which fall under the category of anxiety resulting from unsatisfied needs.

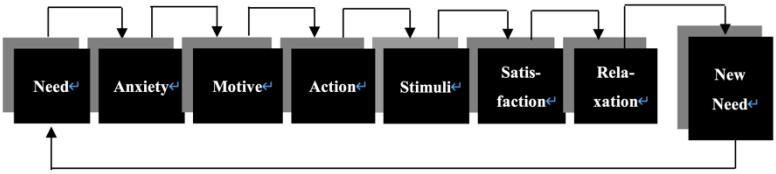
While anxiety is a physiological response made by the individual consciousness to "need", "want" is an outward expectation or inclination driven by the "need" for the purpose of alleviating or eliminating anxiety, equivalent to "seek". For example, in response to the aforementioned anxiety, a person consciously seeks beverages, food, or express route and fast-moving vehicles. Whether conscious, subconscious, or unconscious, this attempt to alleviate anxiety constitutes a "motive". The degree of anxiety directly determines the intensity of the motive. When anxiety surpasses the absolute sensory threshold, the agent will inevitably seek some means to alleviate it. After the formation of a motive, an individual may face two choices: either mobilize subjective consciousness to repress it, or identify a target and move toward procurement as an objective solution. This includes both overt and covert behavior.

However, the ability of subjective consciousness to repress is limited, as some rigid needs cannot be extinguished in the long run. Moreover, for most people, self-control quickly collapses under external stimuli. In the Three Kingdoms era (220-228 A.D.), on the route to conquer warlord Zhang Xiu, seeing his soldiers were absolutely parched under the glazing sun, Cao Cao, head of the Wei Kingdom, falsely claimed, "Ahead lies a vast forest of abundant plums, sweet and sour, suitable for quenching thirst". Upon hearing this, tens of thousands of soldiers' mouths all watered. This classic story of satisfying thirst through anticipation illustrates three principles: first, people can adjust their needs through conditioned reflexes; second, expectations of future satisfaction help suppress current needs; third, stuck in the middle of nowhere, the only hope is to bet on finding water by marching forward. The army was lucky enough and

eventually found a spring across the valley. Imagine if, by circumventing the valley, there were neither a plum forest nor a spring to be found; what price would Cao Cao pay for his deception?

Once the desired goal is achieved, satisfaction is obtained, leading to the relaxation of the anxiety caused by needs. However, the state of satisfaction is often short-lived because human interest is riding on a rolling stone; happiness always hangs in the unattained. The inclination of fickleness as a normal psychological trait pushes people to generate fresh needs and seek new ways for satisfaction. The concepts of contentment, being satisfied with what one has, and the emptiness of worldly pursuits either serve as psychological comfort in the face of unavoidable circumstances or reflect different priorities in the pursuit of satisfaction. Under the influence of subjective and objective factors, new needs emerge, leading to a recurring state of anxiety. This cycle continues, propelling individuals towards new goals. As depicted in Figure 2-1, this process is referred to as the "Need-Motivation-Action Model (NBA Model)".

Figure 2-1 Needs-Motivation-Action Model (NBA Model)



The chapter of Endearing Life in the Annals of Master Lü[14] emphasized that true fulfillment of human life entails satisfying all six desires.

[14] Spring and Autumn of Master Lü (Lüshi Chunqiu), is an encyclopedic Chinese classic text compiled around 239 BC under the patronage of the Qin Dynasty Chancellor Lü Bu-wei.

The satisfaction of desires that contributes to a person's happiness stems from three possible situations: 1) obtaining what one desires, 2) eliminating what one dislikes, and 3) engaging in activities one enjoys. The driving force behind these actions originates from one's internal needs and sensored by his value system, while external stimuli can either inhibit (positive reinforcement) or enhance (negative reinforcement) this drive.

The discussion so far has primarily focused on lower-level physiological desires. Satisfaction of these desires brings sensory pleasure but may not necessarily lead to rational and emotional happiness. Additionally, when faced with choices among different satisfiers, individuals exhibit varying preferences, inevitably reaping different outcomes. With the golden apple presented to the goddess of love Aphrodite, Prince Paris of Troy made his choice for what he considered the fairest one among the ruling power over Eurasia, undefeatable wisdom and the world's most beautiful woman Helen, thus planted the seeds for the protracted and brutal Trojan War.

Regarding the relationship between desire and capability, Rousseau acknowledged in Emile that desires act as the driving force for behavior. He believed that if desires fall short of capabilities, an individual cannot fully enjoy their existence. However, an increase in desires proportionate to capabilities can also lead to suffering. Thus, true happiness lies in achieving a fine balance between desires and capabilities. Rousseau emphasized that genuine happiness can only be achieved on the basis of correct understanding. This requires individuals to rationally develop emotions, expand knowledge, and discern between good and evil based on conscience. He rejected stern rationalism, advocating that morality results from the interweaving of reason and emotions. According to him, without the support of emotions, rationality is incomplete because errors in

judgment stem not from sensations and emotions but from rational judgment. Rousseau's thoughts to some extent resonate with the relationship between virtue and position (similar to capability) identified in the Divination section of Book of Change: "Virtue that fails to match the position will bring calamity; thin virtue versus high position, small wisdom versus grand plan, feeble strength versus heavy responsibility, rarely escape such consequence". However, Rousseau encouraged active deployment of one's capabilities to fully appreciate the value of life, rather than adopting a conservative and retreating attitude, which is a strong rebuke to those who advocate austerity, as it often signifies a loss of confidence and ambition. Correspondingly, a society that suppresses people's desires cannot drive the wheels of civilization forward. Conversely, a society that allows unrestrained indulgence in personal desires will inevitably usher in chaos.

In a survey conducted in 2016, when Americans were asked whether they would rather "achieve great things or be happy" and 81% said that they would rather be happy, while only 13% opted for achieving great things (6% were understandably daunted by the choice and weren't sure). Despite the ubiquity of happiness as a goal, it's hard to know how to define it or how to achieve it.[15]

To clarify the definition of happiness, we can draft a simple formula as follows:

$$H=f(C-E)$$

Where: H = happiness, C = capability, E = desires, and f = the function.

This formula can be expressed as: Happiness is a function of the difference between capabilities and desires. Happiness is positively

[15] Nat Rutherford . "Why our pursuit of happiness may be flawed"，6th January 2021，https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20210105-why-our-pursuit-of-happiness-may-be-flawed

correlated with capabilities and negatively correlated with desires, implying that enhancing capabilities and taming desires can both contribute to an individual's sense of happiness. The function is to assign value on the choice based the actor's vision, reason and emotion, serving as a regulator that can either amplify or diminish the sense of happiness. The pursuit of satisfaction constitutes the driving force behind people's endeavors because fulfilling desires brings happiness. However, since desires are insatiable, once fulfilled, they cease to motivate. Hence, people need to continue striving because the next marginal happiness always hangs unattainably. More precisely, happiness always dandles within the unreached but reachable sight. Instead of fixating on unattainable goals regardless of ultmost efforts, it is more gratifying to accomplish a goal that is attainable through reasonable diligence. With visible temptations that are out of reach, asserting "the grapes are sour" is a wise approach to maintain a psychological balance. In real life, very few can awaken to the philosophical height of carefree tranquility as espoused by Zhuang Zi: "The wagtail nests deep in the forest occupying no more than one branch; the mole drinks from the river for nothing more but to fill its belly".

Canadian psychologist and behavioral scientist Victor Vroom assumes that behavior results from conscious choices among alternatives whose purpose it is to maximize pleasure and to minimize pain. Based on which, he proposed a concise motivation theory in his 1964 book Work and Motivation, expressed by the formula: The motivation for an individual's efforts is equal to the product of valence, instrumentality and expectancy.[16]

[16] https://www.yourcoach.be/en/employee-motivation-theories/vroom-expectancy-motivation-theory/

$$M=V*I*E$$

Where M = motivation, V = Valence, I = Instrumentality, and E = Expectancy

Valence refers to how much value the outcome of an action holds for oneself. For someone in urgent need of earning money for their child's tuition, a job with ordinary pay has a higher valence than for someone with considerable savings. Similarly, a librarian's job, despite its low pay, may have higher valence for someone who enjoys reading than delivering takeout. Instrumentality is the belief that good performance shall be rewarded. The boss promised that completing a sales quota of $10 million would result in a bonus of $100,000. Even though the salesperson highly values this bonus and is capable of achieving it by putting in extra effort, before deciding to take action, he also need to consider to what extent this boss will fulfill the promise. Expectancy is the likelihood of achieving a goal. A tempting job with 100 applicants versus a less enticing job with 10 applicants presents different success probabilities for an individual applying for the position. Therefore, the higher the valence, instrumentality and expectancy, the more motivation is generated for the pursuit, and vice versa.

Aristotle divided human life into three categories: The first is the pleasure-seeking life, pursuing wealth and satisfying various desires; the second is the political life, engaged in public affairs and seeking honor; the third is the contemplative life related to spiritual cultivation. (Table 2-1) Throughout their lives, people need all three types of living, but the proportion of each varies, determining the quality of life. According to his judgment, “the things that are always desirable for their own sake and never for the sake of something else are the most perfect”. Happiness in life belongs to this category, stemming from conclusions reached through

rational thought and inner conviction. All wealth and honor serve as means to this end. He further analyzed that a successful life depends on physical, external, and spiritual assets. True happiness can only be achieved by following the principle of the "Golden Mean" and maintaining a proper balance. He regarded happiness as the highest good, including physical well-being, external goods, and the goodness of the soul, and believed that "the goodness of the soul is the most appropriate and truest form of goodness".

Table 2-1 Aristotle's Three Kinds of Goods

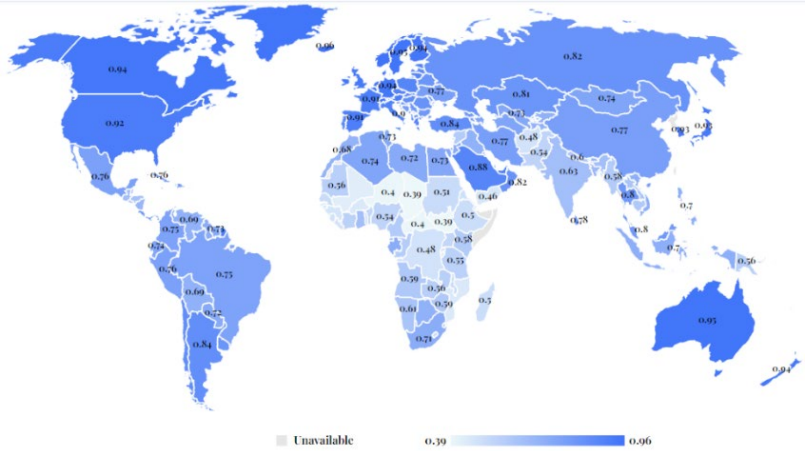
Physical Goods	External Goods	Goods of the Soul
Health	Wealth	Temperance
Strength	Noble Birth	Courage
Beauty	Friendship	Justice
Agility	Good Fortune	Wisdom

Source: Aristotle (Greece). "Nicomachean Ethics," The Commercial Press, 2003, p. 22.

The United Nations Development Programme uses the Human Development Index (HDI) to measure a country's socio-economic development level, categorizing them into four tiers: very high, high, medium, and low. The HDI includes three indicators: 1) Life expectancy and health level per capita; 2) Educational attainment per capita; 3) National income per capita. (Figure 2-2) In 2021, China ranked 79th among 191 countries worldwide, placing it at a medium level but up 19 places from 2015.

In fact, since the first edition of the index in 1990, China's ranking has improved annually by 1.5%, while the USA fell from the top position to 21st. In setting weights, due to changes in the Engel coefficient, the proportion of per capita income has shown a gradually decreasing trend, emphasizing the importance of health and education. This is a rough indicator of national happiness and does not include more detailed ones like freedom, wealth disparity, or national security. However, it is an important reference for many governments and international organizations in determining aid recipients.

Figure 2-2 Map of HDI distribution by UNDP, 2021



3

CIVILIZATION AND CULTURE

3.1 The Essence of Civilization

Civilization encompasses a broad spectrum of human life including politics, economy, technology, collective consciousness, theoretical ideas, organizational methods, ethics, morals, customs, and habits, defining the essence of human collective progress. The beginning of civilization is a topic of debate, with some attributing it to the emergence of states, while historians typically cite the development of cities, writing, and bronze artifacts as key indicators, distinguishing them from prehistoric societies.

The development of prehistoric civilizations underwent an extensive and protracted process, the veracity and nuances of which can only be ascertained or refuted through the ongoing discoveries of archaeologists, set against a backdrop of numerous vibrant myths and legends. The concentration of populations within urban centers led to the emergence of social stratification, division of labor, market exchanges, and the development of sophisticated social organization and governance models. The advent of writing significantly enhanced the dissemination and preservation of information and experiences, crucially facilitating the intergenerational transmission and accumulation of knowledge.

While pottery represents a notable advancement from the Stone Age, contributing primarily to the simplification of daily life, bronze artifacts serve as a more pronounced indication of humanity's ascendancy, achieved through the subjugation of wild fauna. This capacity to alter the natural environment, augment production capabilities, and engage in organized conflict catalyzed the establishment of social hierarchies, thereby laying the foundational elements necessary for effective clan management and the governance of nascent states.

Despite the complexity and wide-ranging interpretations of the concept of civilization, there exists a fundamental agreement on its key components: 1) Civilization is inherently a social construct, pertaining to collective human entities rather than individual endeavors. 2) Civilization is grounded in tangible reality, supported by historical evidence and factual contexts as opposed to unfounded myths or speculative reasoning. This is encapsulated in the adage, "Without cultural artifacts, there is no emergence of civilization; without cultural mediums, there is no transmission; without cultural artifacts, there is no essence; without cultural mediums, there is no spirit". Notably, legends that are substantiated by evidence also contribute to our historical understanding. 3) Civilization comprehensively includes material, spiritual, and institutional dimensions, evident in various production modes and social interactions. Broadly, it represents the aggregate of production, living standards, and organizational structures, alongside their evolution across humanity or specific human collectives. Civilization is distinguished from concepts such as primitivism, barbarism, and ignorance, denoting a significant advancement in tool utilization, living conditions, organizational practices, and philosophical ideologies, thereby transcending a mere subsistence. Nevertheless, the criteria for defining the transition into a civilized state remain a subject of debate,

underscoring the complexity in delineating the precise moment when a society achieves civilization.

In a comprehensive sense, civilization encapsulates the entirety of the productive capacities and ways of life of a human community. The genesis of civilization is marked by the transition of a substantial primitive tribe from a state of barbarism, characterized by subservience to nature, to a refined socio-political, technological, and economic framework. This transformation is typically underscored by three fundamental developments: the advent of written language, the establishment of urban centers, and the creation of bronze artifacts. Written language plays a crucial role in the dissemination and preservation of knowledge, facilitating the sharing of experiences and supporting the educational process across generations. The densification of populations in certain areas leads to urbanization, characterized by sophisticated architectural developments and the provision of social services. The emergence of specialization, a direct result of the division of labor, enables a segment of the population to engage in political and cultural endeavors, moving beyond mere subsistence. Moreover, advancements in metallurgy enhance productivity and expansionist capabilities, thereby contributing to a notion of human dominance.

The progress of civilization has neither been uniform nor rectilinear; it is punctuated by episodes of turbulence and tranquility, and very often embroiled in similar whirlpools of impasse. After the classical era of cultural advancement, Europe took a wrong turn and went through 900 years of dark ages with little progress before the Renaissance brought about explosive contributions to art, science, philosophy, architecture and political systems. Many glorious civilizations either declined or disappeared. External invasion is only the consequence. The rudimental cause lies in the erosion from inside. Indulgence, ethnocentricity, corruption, power

rivalry, reckless ambition at top of the reign are typical sources of political and social decadence. Therefore, from individuals, groups to nations, it is naïve to flaunt superiority merely on account of their age or history. Old soil uncultivated with rationality can hardly grow crops of knowledge, let alone fruits of truth.

The criteria for classifying civilizations can be divided into static and dynamic. Static civilizations often refer to the developmental footsteps and historical heritages of a group, akin to a museum-style display. In this realm, there still lie many wonders waiting to be discovered by archaeologists. We refer to Egypt, Babylon, India, and China as the four ancient civilizations mainly due to their long history and rich cultural heritage. From this perspective, we could say that the United States as a nation, with less than 250 years since its founding, is a very immature civilization. But the earliest Paleoindians living in what is now Ohio can trace their arrival on this land at the end of the Ice Age (11,000-8,000 B.C.).

The British philosopher Bertrand Russell once said, “China is better described not as a political entity but as a civilization entity — the only civilization that has survived to the present day”. In his view, despite China’s meanderings outside of modern administrative governance, it is the continuous history and rich ethical culture of the Chinese nation that have always maintained a vibrant Eastern power.

Dynamic civilization refers to an advanced state of social and cultural development, a fundamental sign of a group’s transition from ignorance to progress. In other words, the distance withdrawn from a state of ignorance determines the level of civilization. The American sociologist Lewis Henry Morgan more straightforwardly divided social evolution into three stages based on technological advancement: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. By this standard, the United States, as a country of

just two and a half centuries with a leading position in the field of technology, undoubtedly belongs to the most advanced civilization.

Material civilization indeed has distinctions between the advanced and the backward, reflected in a group's ability to expand and liberate itself by transforming and conquering the external environment. The Neolithic civilization, dating back about 5,000 years, is considered superior to the Paleolithic civilization, which lasted from about 3 million years ago to about 10,000 years ago, because the latter primarily used chipped stone tools while the former began using polished stone tools extensively. Compared to chipped stone tools, polished stone tools like stone knives and axes were more finely made and could be fitted with wooden handles or made into arrowheads. However, from a moral perspective, mistreating members of one's own group, oppressing other groups, and damaging the environment shared with other groups with advanced tools constitute a regression of civilization.

Many European scholars, such as Norbert Elias (1939), pinpoint the divide between civilization and barbarism to the 15th and 16th centuries. During this period, the social form evolved from a feudal court society dominated by monarchies and manorial systems into early modern state governance models. The process of civilization changed people's behaviors and promoted the formation of modern states. After monopolizing what Elias referred to as the "absolute mechanism" of legitimate violence, the state became the supreme authority coordinating relationships between different social groups, with individual identities transitioning from being vassals of medieval lords and landowners to citizens of modern society. According to this popular definition, the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment, these three major social movements,

served as catalysts for Europe to step out of feudal society and stride into modern civilization.

Friedrich Engels, drawing on the historical periodization method of the historian Lewis Henry Morgan, divided human developmental history into three eras: savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Each of the first two eras was further divided into lower, middle, and upper stages, with the criteria for these divisions based on advancements in productive skills, because he believed that all great eras of human progress were marked by the expansion of resources for survival. In this process, the development of commerce driven by three major instances of social division of labor undoubtedly played a key catalyzing role. He noted that "in the initial stage of the barbaric era, people produced directly for their own consumption", and exchange activities occurred only occasionally with surplus goods; in the middle stage of the barbaric era, a division of labor emerged between more developed and less developed tribes, leading to regular conditions for exchange; in the advanced stage of the barbaric era, a further division of labor occurred between agriculture and handicrafts, with people increasingly producing goods directly for exchange, "making the exchange among individual producers a pressing social need". The era of civilization consolidated and strengthened the divisions of labor from previous eras, especially exacerbating the opposition between cities and the countryside.[17]

The academic community broadly divided civilizations into two types: one being the independent and isolated continental civilizations, and the other being the exploratory and open maritime civilizations. In their view,

[17] "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State", in "Selected Works of Marx and Engels", Volume 4, People's Publishing House, 1972, pages 161-162.

the formation of a civilization depends on the natural conditions on which a nation thrives, while its growth and evolution are influenced by historical conditions and interactions with the outside world. Ancient civilizations that grew around the Mediterranean Sea, such as ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, ancient Babylon, ancient Rome, and the later countries on the western coast of the Atlantic, belong to maritime civilizations. They have always been in mutual communication, infiltration, competition, disturbance, and conquest, leading to exploration and colonization around the world after the Age of Discovery, thereby possessing a higher degree of cultural unity.

The religious ideas of the ancient Hebrews were clearly influenced by the mythological stories and religions of Mesopotamia in the Tigris-Euphrates river basin. In the Bible's Old Testament, Noah's Ark and the Tower of Babel can be directly traced back to the Sumerians' legends about the Great Flood and the ziggurat temples they built in Babylon. These revelations came from their first-hand observations during the "Exile Period" when they were captured and imprisoned in the city of Babylon in the late 5th century BC. During the Exile, Ezekiel emerged as a prophet for the Jews, providing great spiritual comfort through his preaching to his compatriots who were far from home, and strengthening their endurance and cohesion. The Book of Ezekiel, as a prophetic book in the Hebrew Bible, was also included in the Bible.

Scholars have delineated continental civilizations into two primary categories: agrarian civilization and nomadic civilization. Unlike their agrarian counterparts, nomadic civilization relies on the land not for farming but for the pastures necessary for their livestock, migrating in accordance with the availability of water and grass according to the seasons. Considered to be later entrants in the annals of human civilization,

nomadic societies have typically experienced a slower pace of progress. The earliest nomadic tribes recorded in history emerged in the mid-8th century BC, situated west of the Altai Mountains and known as the Scythians.

There exists a complex relationship of interdependence and antagonism between nomadic and agrarian civilizations. Driven by the imperatives of survival and the pursuit of wealth, the history of human civilization is replete with instances where nomadic groups have plundered agrarian societies. From the initial formation of nomadic groups to the development and evolution of nomadic states, these societies have significantly influenced the historical trajectory of the Eurasian continent. The Han Chinese, primarily an agrarian society, have historically endured numerous raids and acts of plunder by various nomadic tribes from the north, culminating in two complete conquests that resulted in dramatic changes of dynasty.

3.2 Culture versus Civilization

Culture represents the way of life that a nation forms over a long period of survival and development, summarized and refined by generations of wise individuals and passed down through social practice, as well as through encounters and integration with other cultures. It gradually evolves into a complete value system and behavioral norms used to judge and guide the cognition, attitudes, and behavior patterns of the nation. It is seen as the genetic code and lifeblood of a nation, the spiritual home on which people rely for communal living, cooperation, and united effort. It underpins the national quality and state character that are internalized

in belief and externalized in action, becoming the "daily habits that go unnoticed" in every citizen's actions and words.

While culture and civilization can often be used interchangeably, a deeper exploration reveals their differences. Many consider culture to be static and factual, representing a state and portrayal of material and spiritual life of an era; whereas civilization is dynamic and normative, signifying the marks of progress through the ages. Practices ranging from manual irrigation to mechanical spraying, from raw food consumption to sophisticated culinary arts, and from slavery to democracy, all fall within the realm of culture, without a distinction of superiority. In contrast, when measured by the progress of civilization, a distinction between the advanced and the primitive emerges.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in his esteemed work "Emile", posits that civilization is largely driven by rationalization and socialization, thus not fully aligning with human's natural essence. He suggests that only by returning or coming close to a pre-rational or idealized natural state can human completeness be manifested. His praise of the "noble savage" aligns with Laozi's Daoist philosophy of "embracing simplicity", wishing humanity to return to an unadulterated, premordial state. Inspired by this notion, German philosophers such as Herder and Nietzsche attempted to explain the distinction between culture and civilization. They viewed culture as a natural organism, a pre-rational traditional spirit (folk spirit), rather than a conscious, rational deliberate action. In contrast, civilization, though more rational and highlighting material progress, is unnatural and prone to lead to social decay, such as deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and greed.

Regardless, civilization is primarily placed on a ladder of material progress, prominently manifested through technological innovation and tool improvement. As illustrated above, the Neolithic Age is considered more

civilized than the Paleolithic Age because human tools evolved from knapped to polished stone. Civilization is the crystallization of human knowledge accumulation and inheritance, facing increasingly complex and diverse elements of production and living, including social organization and mobilization. It requires the application of more knowledge and wisdom to understand, master, and allocate these elements, aiming for an optimal state close to Pareto efficiency. Practically, the pace of this process determines the level of civilization.

However, the progress of material civilization does not necessarily advance in tandem with spiritual civilization; the former's progress may even come at the expense of harming or sacrificing the latter. This concern is central to philosophers and ethicists, including those mentioned above, and highlights the difference in perspective from scientists, economists, politicians, and entrepreneurs.

The value system of a nation is primarily the result of historical inheritance, while also constantly being influenced by numerous external factors during its development. As a nation gradually forms, the culture embedded within it exhibits an increasingly strong cohesion and centripetal force, thus becoming the bond that maintains the nation. The culture that serves as a national identity refers not only to the current common psyche and value pursuit of the nation's members but also includes the traditional culture on which the nation was formed.

With the development of society and progress in technology, especially with the deepening interactions and cooperation between different nations, the tools people use, the goods they consume, and even the rules they follow are gradually converging through mutual penetration and blending. The significance of regional and bloodline factors, which were

previously used to distinguish different national characteristics, is becoming increasingly blurred.

Based on these observations, the American economist Thomas L. Friedman, in his best-selling book "The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century" published in 2005, emphasized that globalization has entered a rapidly ascending trajectory, with various factors of production highly integrated. He divided globalization into three stages and pointed out their driving forces: 1) "Globalization 1.0" from 1492 to 1800, during the era of geographical discoveries and colonial movements, powered by nations; 2) "Globalization 2.0" from 1800 to 2000, during the two industrial revolutions, powered by multinational corporations; 3) "Globalization 3.0" starting from 2000, primarily driven by information technology, powered by individuals. For "Globalization 3.0", he cited ten forces he calls flatteners, including: the fall of the Berlin Wall, Netscape going public, workflow software, open-source software, outsourcing, offshoring, supply-chaining, third party logistics, information searching, and the amplification of communication technologies. Most of these phenomena are new breakthroughs in the context of globalization in the 21st century, encompassing significant changes in geopolitics, information technology, and modes of production. "The World is Flat" has thus become a classic slogan representing globalization.

However, Friedman's subsequent editions, particularly the chapter "The Untouchables", drew fierce criticism. Pankaj Ghemawat of Harvard University, in the Foreign Policy magazine article, argued that 90% of the world's phone calls, internet traffic, and investments occur locally[18], implying that Friedman greatly exaggerated the trend of globalization

[18] Pankaj Ghemawat (March 2007). Why the world isn't flat. Foreign Policy.

flattening the world. Indian journalist P. Sainath was even more scathing, suggesting not that the world is flat, but rather that Friedman's brain is flat. They prove that culture still has an irreplaceable identity in terms of deeper value concepts. In fact, just as people value their privacy more in a society with open information, a nation's self-esteem and sense of independence are strengthened, not weakened, in an open world. Therefore, it is a paradox produced under the context of globalization where many state leaders tend to inspire nationalism and patriotism among its members by further strengthening their unique national cultural identity, with the aim of bringing them closer together around a prominent core.

3.3 Culture and Civilization in the Chinese Context

Thrived on the Yellow River and later spread to the Yangtze River, China as one of the oldest and most precocious civilizations enjoyed high level of sufficiency with abundant agricultural supplies, rendering little real need to explore and interact with rest of the world. Although China boasts a big family of many ethnic minorities, unlike Europe, it has maintained a unified nation since the Qin Dynasty (221-207 B.C.) with neither frequent power shift nor division among different ethnic groups. With the Hans occupying absolute majority, its solidity is further entrenched by mandarin as a standardized nationwide language, Confucius doctrine and vertical pattern of governance under highly centralized imperial throne. Separated by vast ocean to the east and mountain terrains to the west, bordering flaccid kingdoms in the south, the only threat left was the Mongolian nomads who incessantly plagued the Hans with skirmishes. This led to the construction of the Great Wall as a human miracle to fend off their constant thrust from the north. In a large sense China chose to

complacently capsulate itself in most parts of history even when it was a gigantic superpower conditioned by its geographic location and guided by its ethnocentric philosophy.

Despite its extensive 18,000-kilometer coastline, China is quintessentially an agrarian civilization that has flourished predominantly on the continent. The sustenance and reproduction of the Chinese nation have historically hinged on the fertile offerings of the Yellow and Yangtze rivers. Its material production has been deeply rooted in self-sufficient agricultural practices. The relatively limited social mobility has led to a society where interpersonal relationships are predominantly governed by kinship-based clan systems. Dynastic policies that traditionally favored agriculture over commerce have curtailed the social division of labor and the dynamics of commodity exchange. In contrast to maritime civilizations, which prioritize commerce underpinned by contracts among equals, Chinese society, despite valuing honesty, has historically lacked the ethos of contractual equality.

The fusion of clan ideologies and a unified feudal system has ensured that ethics and moral principles, centered around familial loyalty and administrative governance, constitute the backbone of traditional Chinese culture. Furthermore, the agrarian nature of Chinese civilization has fostered a profound reverence for nature, often epitomized as “Heaven”. This has given rise to fundamental cultural and ethical tenets such as “the unity of Heaven and man” and “respecting Heaven and honoring ancestors”, shaping the core worldview of the Chinese people.

In the realm of interpersonal relations, values like “filial piety”, “benevolence”, and “harmony” are celebrated as the classical virtues of the Chinese nation, reflecting the deep-seated moral and ethical convictions that have guided social conduct throughout its history.

In fact, within the Chinese linguistic context, "culture" (文化) itself is a dynamic noun which conveys the meaning of "to cultivate or civilize". The original meaning of "文" (wen) referred to the patterns on animal skins, which gradually extended to imply mechanisms, relationships, decoration, and beautification; "化" (hua) denotes transformation, dissolution, reform, reconstruction, and evolution. The "I Ching" (Book of Changes) states: "The pattern of heaven is formed through the interweaving of the hardness with the softness; the ultimate pattern of mankind is cultivated via civilization. By observing the patterns of heaven, one can understand the changes of time; by observing the patterns of mankind, one can transform the world". Here, the patterns of heaven are contrasted with human culture, where the former refers to the natural world's mechanisms and laws of operation, and the latter embodies human relationships and morality. "The ultimate pattern of mankind" emphasizes the height of civilization where humans, as the most dynamic actors in the natural world, move away from ignorance and savagery through the acquisition of knowledge and etiquette, and on this basis, find the right boundaries and measures among everything. Moreover, civilization in Chinese culture also highlights the importance of proactive endeavor, emphasizing that a noble person must not only cultivate their own moral character but also bear the innate mission of "civilizing people" with a benevolent heart, enlightening the masses to move away from ignorance towards enlightenment. Especially from a Confucian perspective, this "wen" used for educating and establishing personal character first and foremost teaches people to understand and practice the standards of "propriety, righteousness, integrity, and shame" in their behavior.

Chinese people pay more attention to enriching and managing the emotional world of joy, anger, sorrow, and happiness, and are committed to practicing the way of inner sainthood and outer kingship in this world. Inner sainthood is primarily about self-cultivation and self-discipline, and setting ambitious goals; outer kingship is about being diligent and striving for success, with the hope of standing out in this world, making achievements, bringing glory to the family and the country, and benefiting future generations. If one can persist in practice without slackening, achieving harmony within and responding to the outside world, then that is the way of the sage king. This also reflects the singularity of social values. In a society dominated by political power, the bureaucratic ladder monopolizes the steps of advancement. Farming, doing business, studying, or joining the army can be lifelong pursuits, but if one cannot find support from the political power at critical junctures, one will inevitably find obstacles everywhere and cannot achieve honor and distinction solely through professional skills.

Chinese historical materials are generally elaborate in recording ideas of those dignitaries but brief in recording details of specific events and the life of ordinary people, with a lot of minutiae scattered in anecdotes that are considered crotchety rumors. From Confucius to Kang Youwei[19], scholars tend to select and even distort facts in order to build their arguments. Latent scholars pay more attention to the authoritative positions of those previous scholars other than delve into verification and criticism except for certain political agenda; it would be dangerous to challenge an established authority.

[19] Reformation leader at the end of Qing dynasty.

This has encouraged people to adopt a pragmatic view of history. For history, people only need to understand a general outline, while they are more fascinated by various thrilling romances and dramas. They might regard Luo Guanzhong's novel "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" from the Ming dynasty as historical truth, while showing no interest in Chen Shou's "Records of the Three Kingdoms" from the Western Jin dynasty, Fan Ye's "Book of the Later Han" from the Southern dynasties, or Pei Songzhi's "Annotations to Records of the Three Kingdoms" from the Eastern Jin dynasty. Due to the abundance of historical materials, opera, storytelling, TV dramas, and reportage literature often like to incorporate some historically true characters and events into stories, erasing people's knowledge of the truth and creating an intriguing "Mandela effect" (referring to collective memory that does not match historical facts). Partially influenced by the national quintessence of Peking opera, iconic figures from ancient to modern times often appear in people's minds in a stylized form. People always want to see clear-cut characterizations and conclusions of success or failure, either to be remembered or denounced in history, without bothering to discern their personality traits and specific circumstances.

First, they are characterized politically and ethically, and then a systematic propaganda machine is activated to either praise or denigrate them. This frivolous trend can be traced back to the early Western Zhou dynasty, with King Cheng of Zhou, whom Confucius idolized, being the initiator. Regarding the last monarch of the Shang dynasty, Di Xin (King Zhou), Zigong once said, "King Zhou's wickedness was not as extreme as people say. But once repugnance is established upon him for some of his wrongdoings, all the evil in the world is attributed to him". During the Wanli era of the Ming dynasty, regarding Zhang Jüzheng, who held a high

position during his lifetime but whose family was raided after his death, the upright Minister of Rites, Yu Shenxing, commented, "When he was in power, the whole court competed to praise his achievements and dared not speak of his faults. Now that he has fallen, the whole court competes to seek his crimes and dares not speak of his achievements. Neither is true to the facts".

The rolling Yangtze River flows eastward, and the waves wash away the heroes.

Right and wrong, success and failure, turn to emptiness. The green mountains remain, how many sunsets are red.

White-haired fisherman and woodcutter on the riverbank, accustomed to watching the autumn moon and spring breeze.

A pot of turbid wine for a joyful meeting, how many things from ancient and modern times, are all in laughter and talk.

This poem is well-known, and almost everyone can hum its melody as the theme song of the TV series "Romance of the Three Kingdoms", but how many people know that it is "Immortal by the River" written by Yang Shen, the leading talent of the Ming dynasty, during his exile to Yunnan? And this is just one of his more than two thousand existing poems. They would say, what's the use of knowing so much truth? For this reason, as expressed in "Immortal by the River", the eyes of the Chinese people may not be sharp, but their minds are open and broad. For the thousands of years of history, they can take lightly the ups and downs, the rights and wrongs, thus always maintaining an optimistic attitude and a happy mood in real life.

The Chinese descendants nurtured by the two mother rivers - Yellow River and the Yangtze River - gradually merged together through the long struggles and cooperation of multiple tribes and ethnic groups, and the land of China also experienced numerous divisions and reunifications. Since the formation of the Chinese empire in the 2nd century BC, to resist the repeated invasions of several nomadic tribes from the north, the Great Wall of the northern country, stretching for thousands of miles, buried the bones of millions of laborers, and the sorrowful and majestic frontier poems narrate the heroic deeds of countless ethnic heroes who sacrificed their lives.

Do not raise sons recklessly, feed daughters with breast milk. Below the Great Wall, corpses support each other!

——Qin dynasty folk song: "Great Wall Ballad"

The moon shone in Qin times, the pass was guarded in Han times, a long march of ten thousand miles, and people have not yet returned. If only the flying general of Dragon City were here, he would not let the Hu horses cross Yinshan.

——Wang Changling: "Out of the Frontier"

Furious hair rises to the crown! Leaning on the railing, the drizzle stops. Looking up, I howl at the sky, my heart filled with fierce passion. Thirty years of fame, dust and soil, eight thousand miles of road, clouds and moon. Do not wait idly for your youth to turn white, lamenting in vain!

The shame of Jingkang, not yet avenged; the hatred of the ministers, when will it be extinguished? Driving the long carriage, breaking through the Helan Mountain pass. With heroic ambition, I dine on the flesh of

the Hu enemies, and laughingly drink the blood of the Xiongnu. Waiting to reorganize the old mountains and rivers, facing the heavenly palace.

——Yue Fei: "Man Jiang Hong"

The land of China has witnessed countless battles and also suffered several invasions by foreign tribes, but the Chinese nation has always shown the tenacity of "wildfires cannot burn it out, and the spring breeze brings it back to life", becoming more resilient with each setback, just like the never-ending flow of the Yellow River and the Yangtze River, day and night, and even occasionally with towering waves. Faced with the aggressive bullying of foreign invaders, the people, caught off guard, were often shrouded in a fog of endurance, confusion, and sorrow, struggling helplessly, just as on the eve of the American War of Independence. Instead of invoking individualism and liberal values like Patrick Henry's loud cry of "Give me liberty or give me death!" to awaken the people's independence consciousness to fight against the British colonizers, Chinese men of virtue relied on their values of dying for a righteous cause and their expressive style of fierce passion, extracting a heroic spirit of "everyone must die, but let my loyal heart illuminate the annals of history", and then igniting the national consciousness of defending the homeland, with a firm collective will to resist together. Influenced by Chinese culture, the conquerors from the north soon abandoned their curved swords and Mongolian yurts, replacing them with bird cages and tea houses, bringing vast lands and exotic customs, and becoming inseparable members of the Chinese national family.

Every conquest by a relatively barbaric nation, it goes without saying, hindered economic development and destroyed a large number of

productive forces. But in the long term of conquest, the relatively barbaric conquerors, in the vast majority of cases, had to adapt to the higher economic conditions that existed after the conquest.

——Engels: "Marx and Engels Collected Works", Volume 6, Page 199

Until the eve of the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century, China, as one of the important sources of human civilization, with its thousands of years of glorious history and profound cultural heritage, as well as its vast territory and abundant resources, had enough capital to proudly look down upon the world as the Celestial Empire. However, this sense of superiority also hindered China's ability to track the great changes in the world and absorb the achievements of other civilizations, so much so that it was left outside the door of modern civilization by the wheels of the Western Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, without realizing it. However, the "Sick Man of East Asia", which seemed like a loose sand in the eyes of Japanese and Western colonial invaders, was able to harbor its own schemes while internally united and resist humiliation externally, and the invaders eventually had to lower their proud heads, taking away the myth of the enigmatic Oriental sleeping lion.

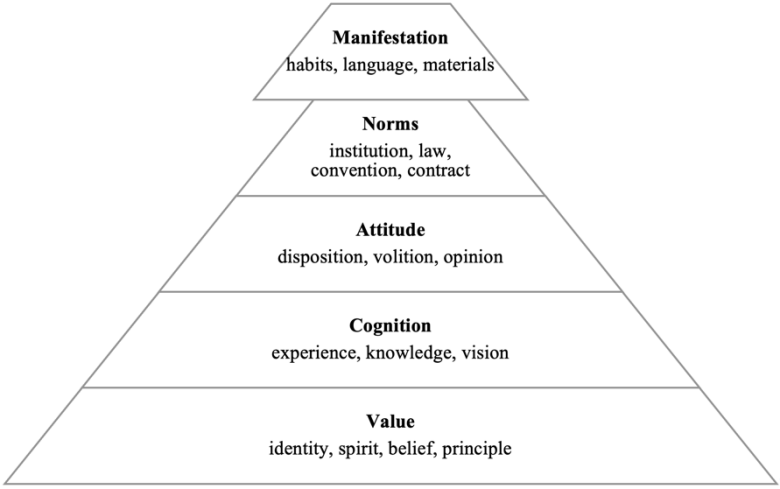
3.4 Hierarchical Cultural Construct

In a nutshell, culture is a dynamic process that provides distinctive identity and viable orientation to a particular group of people, or largely, a society. It is nurtured through socialization process among particular groups, attested in material and behavioral presentations, supported by cognitive construct, anchored in the value universe, and sanctioned by

norms. It distinguishes human groups without and binds individuals within.

Culture can be expounded in a hierarchy composed of multiple interwoven and auxiliary layers. People's habit or pattern of behaviors, including actions and inactions, speech, tools used, attire, gestures, expressions, cuisine, art, music, and even scents, are visible external manifestations that surface in interactions with others, thus easily attracting attention, judgment, and response. Singular behavior can be erratic since it can be easily adjusted either by instinct or deliberation for momentary risk avoidance and benefit pursuit. Beneath these behaviors lie a hierarchy of determinants, including norms, attitudes, cognition, and values. (Figure 3-1) Therefore, to understand or predict the behavior of an individual or a group, it is necessary to analyze these underlying determinants.

Figure 3-1 Five-Layer Cultural Hierarchy



The four layers beneath the manifestation can be briefly defined as follows:

- Norms - normative judge and guide with regard to what is acceptable, praiseworthy or otherwise.
- Attitude - learned tendency to respond in a consistent way to a given object or entity.
- Belief - an organized pattern of knowledge that an individual holds to be true about the world.
- Value - enduring belief or feeling that a specific mode of conduct or form of relationship is personally or socially preferable to others.

3.5 Behavior Norms

Norms, encompassing customs, principles, contracts, disciplines, institutions, and regulations, serve as the value scales that shape public opinion and operational rules. They play a critical role in motivating and regulating behavior. Norms can take four shapes with different degree of pressure and scope of jurisdiction: moral, institutional, legal, and contractual.

Moral norms, typically folklores, social customs and conventions, are soft and persuasive, from which deviation invokes opprobrium. Although it permeates every facet of social life, it is "circumstantial" wherein judgment is often dependent on the standpoint and interest of a particular party involved. Institution is "integrated systems of rules that structure social interactions".[20] As formalized mechanisms of social order created by government, organization, community and even families, it regulates

[20] Hodgson (2015), Journal of Institutional Economics (2015), 11: 3, p. 501.

behavior of individual members within a given community - a structured collective - in the form of explicit rules or disciplines, deviation from which shall invoke reprimands. For example, absentee from workplace without notice and approval shall lead to salary reduction, demotion or dismissal. Hard and compulsory norms are enactments of laws and rules, enforceable by public power. Violation of which inflicts punishment deployable by governing apparatus - police, judiciary, prison and even army. Contract is voluntary agreement between individuals for the exchange of promises, based on which mutual expectations are established among parties involved. It can be social contract as informal as an appointment for a meeting, to which punctuality is valued as virtue and tardiness as vice. While only creditability and accountability are at stake for social contract, formal contract binds the behavior of parties with specified rights and responsibilities, repudiation of which shall entail penalty on the strength of governing laws. Except for contract between individuals, the rest of cultural dimensions possess collective purpose transcending individual interests.

3.6 Human Attitude

Attitude is a psychological construct, a mental and emotive entity that inheres in, or characterizes an individual or a human group. It is formed by an evaluative structure precipitated through a responsive expression towards an object or entity. Influenced by the innate personality, temperament, knowledge, life experience, and worldview, it unavoidably possesses emotional and prejudicial tendencies. Opinion over a particular person, idea, event, environment, for example, can be described on various degrees over a spectrum between the extreme ends of positivity and

negativity, passivity and proactivity, optimism and pessimism, humility and arrogance, favor or disfavor, as well as love and hatred. It is highly subjective depending on one's disposition, personality, knowledge, standpoint, reference line, and circumstantial mood.

Apart from cognitive capacities derived from experiences, perspectives, knowledge, and wisdom, health status is also a contributing factor to one's attitude. Hippocrates (Ἱπποκράτης), the father of ancient Greek medicine, believed that an individual's temperament is determined by his physical constitution. Although everyone is composed of four bodily fluids - blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile - the proportion of these fluids varies, leading to different temperamental types: sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic, with corresponding external manifestations like irritability, optimism, indifference, and melancholy. The "seven emotions" summarized in the "Book of Rites" and "Three Character Classic" - happiness, anger, sorrow, fear, love, disgust, desire - and the "seven emotions" in traditional Chinese medicine - joy, anger, worry, rumination, sadness, fear, shock - exert direct impact on one's attitude. This aspect is particularly crucial during the early stages of personal development.

Attitude in turn directly affects the formation of norms and behavioral compliance. In a society that upholds male supremacy, polygamy is revered, and women's chastity is considered a supreme virtue. In Chinese ancient patriarchal societies, crueler than the burqa requirement in the fundamentalist Islamic world, women in bound feet were seen as "delicate and amiable beauty walking in tottering steps". During the Ming-Qing dynastic transition, to conquer the will of the Han people, the Manchus, after breaking the Great Wall, forced the Han to adopt Manchu hairstyles, clothing, and unbinding of feet, as they saw these as symbols of Han

cultural independence, encountering bloody resistance from the Han. Ironically, a Ming Dynasty official, Qu Jiusi, firmly believed in the beauty of foot binding in women. He absurdly proposed the strategy of "taming the barbarians" by persuading the invading northern Huns to adopt foot binding among their women, mistakenly thinking that this practice would mitigate their ferocity.

Generally speaking, the law can only regulate behavior, but because attitudes constitute direct motives for behavior, legislators often pay close attention to the expression of attitudes. In view of the anti-Semitic wave unleashed by Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 6 million Jews in the Holocaust, European and American countries have continuously enacted legislation to curb anti-Semitic speech and actions. The European Union's "Framework Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia", Germany's "Public Incitement Law", and France's "Gayssot Law" prohibit denial, distortion, and trivialization of the Holocaust. The "Antisemitism Awareness Act of 2023", being considered by the U.S. Congress in May 2024, decides to address attitudes by defining "anti-Semitism" as "certain views about Jews, which may be manifested as hatred towards Jews", behaviors that may result from this include "holding Jews collectively responsible for the real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or Jewish group", "incitement to harm or kill Jews in the name of radical ideologies or extreme religious beliefs", and "making false, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations against Jews or Jewish groups", etc., thus proposing to further include behaviors that "attack the state of Israel".

The functional attitude theory suggests that in order to affect attitudinal change (e.g., via persuasion), appeals must be made to the function(s)

that a particular attitude serves for the individual. As an example, the "ego-defensive" function might be used to influence the racially prejudicial attitudes of an individual who sees themselves as open-minded and tolerant. By appealing to that individual's image of themselves as tolerant and open-minded, it may be possible to change their prejudicial attitudes to be more consistent with their self-concept. Similarly, a persuasive message that threatens self-image is much more likely to be rejected.[21]

Experience through direct observation and actual engagement is the primary source of information that shapes attitude. Notwithstanding the importance of direct experience, most knowledge is gained from secondary sources through reading and hearsays since physical energy and sensual ability are very limited, leading to the confinement to one's exposure. Immanuel Kant made very limited travels and maintained rigidly scheduled habits in his entire lifetime; it is reading, thinking and reasoning that elevated him onto the great philosophical height.

3.7 Cognitive Capacity

Cognitive biases towards oneself and external entities can profoundly impact existing viewpoints and beliefs, leading to psychological stress or anxiety that may prompt extreme behaviors. This phenomenon is known in psychology as "cognitive dissonance". A classic manifestation of cognitive dissonance is the contradiction between new experiences and existing beliefs. For instance, in the fairy tale "Snow White", the new queen would ask her magic mirror every morning, "Who is the fairest of them all?" Initially, the mirror always affirmed her beauty, bringing her great

[21] Lapinski, Maria Knight; Boster, Franklin J. (2001). "Modeling the Ego-Defensive Function of Attitudes". Communication Monographs. 68 (3): 314–324.

joy, as it never lied. However, when her stepdaughter Snow White grew into a beautiful young woman, the mirror presented a different truth about her actual self, stating, “You, my queen, are fair; it is true. But Snow White is even fairer than you.” Immersed in her illusory self, the queen neither chose to improve herself through fair competition nor smashed the mirror to feign ignorance. Instead, she was consumed by the rage of jealousy and designed various sinister plots to kill her stepdaughter, eventually receiving her deserved punishment - dancing in red-hot iron shoes until she fell dead, as commanded by the prince. (Figure 3-2)

Figure 3-2 Mirror on the Wall



In the cognitive process, the foremost aspect is self-cognition, manifested through one’s role positioning in various domains such as society, family, and profession. The concept of self can be categorized into four types: the actual self, the ideal self, the promotional self, and the illusory self. The actual self represents one's true role, the ideal self is the role one aspires to become, the promotional self is an image one may not believe in but tries to present to others, and the illusory self is an unrealistic role that one falsely believes to be true. The fourth one is a typical cognitive

bias, as depicted by Figure 3-3 when the cat sees a tiger of itself in the pond. When a person simultaneously holds contradictory perceptions over oneself or/in relation to the external world, he likely experiences psychological discomfort, referred to as cognitive dissonance.

Figure 3-3 An Illusory Self



How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,' when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye?

——*Matthew 7:3-5 NIV*

A primary source of cognitive dissonance is the bias in self-referential criteria. Presently, both the United States and China, standing before the metaphorical wall mirror, perceive themselves as the fairest, thus attributing their domestic problems to the other. Acknowledging one's shortcomings requires confidence and courage. However, in the face of mutual discomfort, each country expects or forces the other to change, aiming to

realign bilateral relations. In the protracted trade spats, both sides resort to escalative retaliations to penalize the other at the cost on their own economy and the livelihood of their own constituencies. Since 2018, when Trump took office, the United States has been continuously imposing punitive tariffs on Chinese imports under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974. The rationale is that China has long maintained unfair trade practices, including the theft of American intellectual property and currency manipulation, leading to a huge trade deficit for the U.S. and unemployment for its workers. However, China insists that the trade imbalance is due to differences in the industrial and consumption structures of the two countries, and is the result of fair competition. They argue that U.S. trade protectionism is aimed at containing China's peaceful rise. In response, China has reciprocated with a series of equivalent retaliatory measures. (Table 3-1)

Table 3-1 Differences of Cultural Hierarchy at Play in the U.S.-China Trade War

	United States	**China**
Behavior	Punitive duties on Chinese exports.	Punitive duties on U.S. exports.
Norm	Principle of power divison with check and balance; §301 of the Trade Act of 1974, Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) granted to China under the Internal Revenue Service Restructuring and Reform Act.	Principle of one party rule; PRC Foreign Trade Law, PRC Anti-Foreign Sanction Law.

Cognition	Chinese unfair trade practice results in large U.S. trade deficit; China is a strategic adversary. China's mercantilist trade policy needs to be penalized.	U.S. trade deficit is the result of fair competition based on each other's divergent industrial and consumption patterns; U.S. is a hegemon, attempting to arrest China's peaceful rise. U.S. protectionist behavior violates free trade rules and must be retaliated.
Attitude	Preemptive; Competition when it should be, colaboration when it can be, and confrontation when it must be.	Defensive; Mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win relationship.
Value	National interest supremacy; Democracy, free market, liberal internationalism.	National interest supremacy. Patriarchy, harmony, managed market.

Similarly, on one hand, China incessantly detests the British government and its merchants who used such despicable means for their opium exports to China that rampantly jepodized the physical and mental health of the Chinese people two centuries ago, while on the other hand, it shows a contrasting attitude towards the issue of rampant abuse of the highly toxic drug fentanyl in the United States originated largely from China. Regarding the U.S. consistent blame on China for lax regulation in exporting chemicals used to produce fentanyl and its analogs (such as ANPP, NPP, and 4-AP), Mao Ning, the spokesperson for China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs took an entirely opposite view. She commented in a press

conference on April 6, 2023: "The root cause of the overdose lies in the US itself. The problem is completely 'made in USA'. The US needs to face up to its own problems, take more substantial measures to strengthen domestic regulation and reduce demand. It cannot relapse into the illness of 'letting others take the pill for his own sickness'".[22]

Another example to illustrate the divergent interpretation and application in cultural hierarchy is the dispute between China and Japan over China's unilateral export control of its rare earth, a critical industrial material in which China maintains a lion's share in the global market.

As a major producer and exporter of rare earths, key raw materials for electronic products, accounting for over 90% of the global supply, China announced in 2010 that it would impose export quotas on rare earths. This decision was justified by citing the environmental protection exception clause under Article XX of the 1994 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), aimed at preventing over-exploitation, reducing environmental pollution, and conserving rare earth resources (nothing in this Agreement shall be construed to prevent the adoption or enforcement by any contracting party of measures relating to the conservation of exhaustible natural resources if such measures are made effective in conjunction with restrictions on domestic production or consumption). China asserted that this measure was an essential part of its sustainable development policy. However, an undisclosed reason for this action was the resurgence of the dispute over the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands (Senkaku Islands) between China and Japan. Japan deviated from the established principle of "shelving disputes and pursuing joint development", claiming territorial sovereignty over the islands and detaining Chinese ships and crew in

[22] https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/nanhai/eng/fyrbt_1/202304/t20230406_11055468.htm

nearby waters, leading to deteriorating Sino-Japanese relations. China sought to exploit Japan's heavy reliance on rare earths, using control over rare earth exports as a retaliatory measure.

Using economic and trade means to advance its geopolitical agenda is a common practice in China. This action drew continuous complaints from countries like the United States, the European Union, and Japan, accusing China of violating the World Trade Organization's (WTO) principles of fair trade by restricting exports of rare earth elements such as alumina, magnesium, tungsten, and molybdenum. On August 7, 2014, the WTO ruled against China in its appeal, stating that China's export restrictions gave Chinese companies an unfair competitive advantage because its domestic companies continued to enjoy unrestricted access, forcing foreign companies to pay multiples of the price for these raw materials, thus violating the WTO's principles of fair trade. The ruling emphasized that a country's sovereignty over its natural resources does not constitute a reason to control the international market or the global distribution of raw materials.

Table 3-2 Differences of Cultural Hierarchy at Play in the China-Japan Dispute on the Rare Earth Trade

	China	Japan
Behavior	Assigns restrictive export quota on rare earths	Aligns U.S. and EU for compaints with WTO
Norm	Sovereign supremacy on its own natural resources; GATT rule §XX of WTO provides exception for environmental protection.	WTO fair trade principle disallow discirmatory policies between domestic and foreign companies.
Cognition	Japanese aggressive behavior over the disputed	Japan is highly reliant on Chinese rare earths.

	Diaoyu Islands has jepodized bilateral relations. Japan is highly reliant on Chinese rare earths.	
Attitude	China can retaliate Japanese behavior by imposing export restrictions on rare earth export.	Japan can rely on the multilateral treaty to demand its rights of trade. Japan can leverage its alliance with U.S. and EU with similar interest for Chinese rare earths.
Value	Holistic approach combining economic strength with diplomatic relations. Export restriction is wirhin Chinese sovereign rights and rights granted by WTO for the protection of natural resources.	Case by case approach based on multilateral agreement.

The "Four Pests Campaign" in the late 1950s in China intriguingly reflects the evolving cognitions of the sparrow and the interplay between emotion and reason, faith and science. Mao Zedong, keenly concerned about agricultural production, heard from farmers about the swarms of sparrows ravaging crops, reportedly causing significant grain losses. In response, he specifically included in the "Draft Program for Agricultural Development from 1956 to 1967" the goal to "eliminate four pests", meaning the eradication of rats (and other harmful mammals), sparrows (and other harmful birds, although the status of crows was yet to be studied), flies, and mosquitoes within seven years.[23] On February 12, 1958, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the State Council

[23] Mao Zedong: Seeking Opinions on the 17 Points on Agriculture, "Selected Works of Mao Zedong", Volume 5, People's Publishing House, 1977, Pages 260-263.

issued an "Instruction on Pest Control and Hygiene", viewing the elimination of these pests as "an important step in conquering diseases and eradicating harmful insects, mammals, and birds to humans", thus sparking a nationwide patriotic health campaign. The entire population was mobilized to exterminate sparrows. Methods included shooting them with guns and slingshots, destroying nests, breaking eggs, killing young birds, and creating noise with drums and pots to keep the sparrows in constant flight until they died from hunger or exhaustion. Experts estimated that tens of millions of sparrows were killed during this campaign. (Figure 3-4)

Figure 3-4 Nationwide Campaign on Eliminating Sparrows



On November 27, 1959, Zhang Jinfu, the Secretary of the Communist Party group at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, synthesized opinions from the biological community. Although his approach did not elevate to

the level of advocating for biodiversity, his report to Mao proved that sparrows were beneficial to grain production. In their diet, artificially cultivated grains comprised less than 50%, and the extermination of sparrows almost eliminated their natural predators in the fields, leading to a severe shortfall of grain the following year and a catastrophic famine. In March 1960, Mao Zedong, in a directive on the work of hygiene drafted for the Central Committee, stated: "Another thing, do not kill sparrows anymore, replace them with bed bugs. The slogan is 'get rid of rats, bed bugs, flies, and mosquitoes'". On April 10, 1960, the second session of the second National People's Congress passed a resolution to modify the "Four Pests" campaign to target rats, bed bugs, flies, and mosquitoes. This campaign nearly led to the extinction of sparrows in China. Facing a growing locust plague, the government had to import sparrows from the Soviet Union. This should have marked the end of the policy shift regarding the role and value of sparrows. Unfortunately, during the Cultural Revolution that started a few years later, scientists who opposed the campaign against sparrows were still persecuted. They were accused of various "crimes" such as using sparrows to oppose Mao Zedong, the Great Leap Forward, and his "supreme instructions", and suffered brutal persecution. Biologist Zhu Xi, who had died in 1962, was posthumously accused of equating Mao with Frederick the Great and openly opposing Mao. As a result, he was subjected to the indignity of having his grave desecrated and his remains exposed by Red Guards.[24]

This tragic episode in history underscores the complex dynamics between political ideology, scientific understanding, and the value placed on nature and its creatures. In the eyes of these fervent Red Guards, what

[24] Xue Pangao, "The Difficult Journey of Rehabilitating Sparrows", "Yan Huang Chun Qiu" magazine, 1998, Issue 8: Pages 9-15.

prevailed was a steadfast yet blind value belief. Mao Zedong, who had once adjusted his directives based on scientists' advice, had now been transformed into an all-knowing, all-powerful, wise, and infallible deity in their perception.

Since the 1970s, developed countries in the West, in pursuit of a high-quality living environment, have extensively relocated their highly polluting industries to developing countries. Conversely, they demand these developing nations control carbon dioxide emissions, realizing that pollution in the atmosphere and oceans by the latter also compromises their quality of their life on a shared planet. Developing countries, in accepting these high-pollution industries from the West and even importing industrial waste, do so not out of ignorance of the dangers or the immense future costs of the "pollute first, manage later" approach. Rather, in their value prioritization, they are compelled by reality to place employment and economic income above environmental quality. The relocation of industrial enterprises from major cities like Beijing and Shanghai to Hebei, Anhui, and even more distant regions follows the same principle of value prioritizations and inequitable bargaining powers. Rather than criticizing the hypocrisy of the developed regions and the ignorance of the less developed, this should be seen as a phase of voluntary trade. As income levels rise, regions that initially accepted polluting industries will inevitably readjust their value prioritization, driving these industries to even more backward areas. Observing the migration of high-polluting industries from Europe and America, a cascading trajectory is evident: first moving to Japan and South Korea, then settling in China and Mexico, and now gradually heading to India, Vietnam, Cambodia, and even coveting the distant African continent. Reducing production costs is a constant goal for businesses, and one could argue that their moral values are neutral.

The host countries' value decisions will adjust according to changes in income levels. Indeed, both rational judgment and the lessons of industrialization in developed countries tell us a simple truth: the "pollute first, manage later" development model is ultimately counterproductive in the long run. However, just as young people often ignore advice from the elderly on preserving a healthy lifestyle, developing countries eager for material wealth find it difficult to accept this wisdom. It can be asserted that as long as there is a corner of the Earth where quality of life is not a priority value, polluting enterprises will always find a place to thrive.

3.8 Human Value

Value, as the term suggests, is the ideological notion formed through the evaluation and determination of the nature, implications, categories, and scope of the external world in relation to the individual. It is a fundamental criterion distinguishing humans from other species, as it defines the meaning and purpose of life. For a group or nation, value manifests as collective ideologies.

Value constitutes the bedrock underneath that provides motivation and purpose to attitude, cognitive process, deliberation on norms, and ultimately determines consistent pattern of behavior. Behavior can change and adapt to new situations, but value is persistent and coherent. For instance, in the US congress, Republican Party and the Democratic Party can work together defending a common notion of freedom, democracy and national interest, but differentiating value systems between the two parties often cause their members to be pitted against each other. Measured by ethical norms on a personal level, we can say one's value system is molded by his virtues or vices.

Value system is established and woven together by consciousness in the process of acculturation over time, space, nature, organization, others and oneself, in which ideal, belief, spirit, and overarching principles are deeply embedded. According to Edmund Husserl, consciousness is our direct openness to the world, one that is governed categorically (normatively) rather than causally; that is, intentionality is not a property of the individual mind but the categorical framework in which mind and world become intelligible. His nuanced phenomenology assumes that consciousness living its own stream of experience is primary, and consciousness reflecting on those experiences as object of phenomenological viewing is secondary. French philosopher Maurice Jean Jacques Merleau-Ponty's under the strong influence of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger use the results of psychology and cognitive science to inquire into the foundational role perception plays in understanding the world as well as engaging with the world. He expounded on the naturalistic view that consciousness is inhabitant genesis. Such natural stance, however, do not follow the same way as naturalization. The naturalization implies a process of conversion, that is, the translation of something derivative and secondary into something considered epistemologically basic and grounded. The natural stance, he concludes, reveals the necessity of an immersion in the broad context of nature, a process required if we want to give a full and authentic account of these "things" that phenomenology aims to describe from a morphological point of view.

The study of values, while still within the domain of philosophy, has gradually refined into the fields of ethics and aesthetics, eventually focusing as a subject of meta-ethics. In the early last century, French philosopher Paul Lapie, drawing on Greek roots, coined the term "axiology", which has been widely accepted in academic circles. Value judgments and

determinations can be broadly divided into idealistic and materialistic perspectives. The former asserts that the value of things is determined by their attributes and capabilities to subjectively satisfy human needs, while the latter contends that the value of any object is objectively inherent, with humans merely discovering, not inventing, the value within. These two viewpoints each hold their ground; the former, being relativistic, focuses more on the actual needs within specific contexts under the premise of established cognitive abilities. Although comforting to existing psychological frameworks, this approach can render the value of specific objects fluctuating. On the other hand, the latter, an absolutist stance, advocates for the expansion of cognitive abilities, thereby fostering innovation.

Commonly, individuals set their value centered around their own interests. Anything beneficial to them is assigned a positive value, often at the expense of overlooking or distorting ethical standards like justice and fairness. In the current Russo-Ukrainian war, many Chinese people support Russia not because they have forgotten about the plunder of China by Imperial Russia in modern history, nor because they approve of Russia blatantly violating the United Nations Charter by annexing Ukrainian territory as a matter of justice, but because they believe Russia is challenging the Western hegemony they detest, and otherwise China would be the next target of attack by Western powers.

Intuitively, people categorize insects into harmful and beneficial ones. With the dual desire to consume meat and protect animal diversity, humans have classified animals into killable livestock and wildlife that need protection. Further, based on their affinity to humans, livestock are divided into pets and edible animals. Clearly, these distinctions are measured by which align with human self-interest. This is why Confucian teachings advocate self-cultivation as the starting point. More enlightened

individuals gradually expand this radius of interest, becoming benevolent and considerate of others. The renowned Chinese philanthropist Chen Guangbiao stated: Wealth is like water. If you have a cup of water, you can enjoy it alone; if you have a bucket, you can store it at home; if you own a river, you must learn to share with others. Those who can step out of the confines of personal interest and evaluate things from an independent bystander perspective are termed philosophers; those who forsake personal gain for the welfare of others are regarded as sages.

3.9 Socialization and Stratification

Human society is stratified, and this stratification benefits the dominant groups, who also hold the mainstream discourse. The dominant groups surrounding the ruler never openly admit or advocate for this stratification, instead they go to great lengths to cloak it in legitimacy, aiming to brainwash the disadvantaged groups conceptualize and willingly accept such reality.

Socialization refers to the process by which people become familiar with social norms through mutual interactions. Group pressure often causes individuals to unconsciously accept certain popular values, otherwise, they risk being marginalized. These values regulate people's attitudes and behaviors, manifesting as one's persona. For example, living in a predominantly Christian area, if one does not attend church services on Sunday, they may be seen as an outsider and face rejection from those around them. The personal aspect of values further limits people's tendency to freely change and adjust their inherent ideas. Social stratification locks people into different reference groups, defining the range of

strategies they can optimize, while also isolating them from potential role models outside their immediate vision.

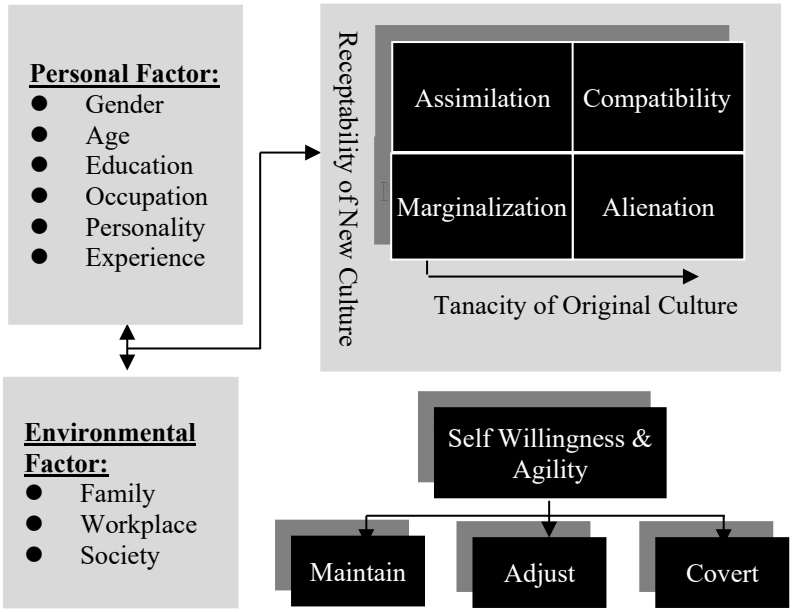
The more rigid the stratification, the narrower the scope for social learning, role model diffusion, and active choice. The way of life derived from long-term experiences and lessons provides considerable psychological comfort, hence it is highly stable. People are unlikely to change unless they encounter significant events or shocks, such as betrayal by a loved one or strong external stimuli. Additionally, societal norms have a "cage" effect, continuously exerting pressure and subjecting individual deviations to social punishment.

However, human thought is not entirely programmed; people also adjust their values according to changes in social conditions. The younger generation is more open to adopting foreign or new values, as old notions and models are less deeply rooted in them. They are not deterred by the cost of seeking novelty, making it easier for them to break free from traditional confines. New lifestyles create new social milieu and interactive environments, necessitating new values and social norms to match. Different social circles interweave and influence each other, leading to the diffusion of new values and the evolution of social norms. The conservative forces still in power, who are apprehensive about such changes in the new generation, may either attempt to educate and persuade them to revert to old values or outright strengthen the younger generation's gratitude and loyalty, hoping they will emulate their ways, even going as far as directly intervening in their decisions and behaviors in extreme cases. This is a corrective movement dubbed in love and care, but in essence, it is a contest for dominance of values between the glow of sunset and the dawn of a new day.

3.10 Cultural Collision and Amalgamation

For an individual, the cultural system based on values is gradually formed and evolved through the interaction between one's own conditions and the living environment. Personal conditions include factors such as age, gender, race, education level, personality, occupation, experiences, etc., while the living environment encompasses the objective conditions of one's family, work, and society. During the growth process, activities like schooling, employment, and migration mean that an original culture carried by an individual will inevitably encounter the need to adapt to the mainstream culture of the new environment. At this time, regarding their original culture, individuals, whether consciously or not, always have to face three different options: to maintain, adjust, or conversion. In the new environment, depending on the tenacity of the original culture versus the receptability of the new culture, a person with different levels of willingness and agility will reap four possible outcomes: assimilation, alienation, compatibility, and marginalization. Assimilation means giving up the original culture and fully integrating into the new cultural system in terms of values, cognition, attitudes, norms, and behaviors, that is, joining the mainstream. Alienation means sticking to the original culture and being rejected by the mainstream culture as an outsider. Compatibility means striving to maintain the original culture while understanding and accepting the mainstream culture, flexibly switching according to different occasions and needs. Marginalization means having discarded the original culture and hovering outside the new cultural system, like a leaf drifting in a foreign land, rootless and unsettled. (Figure 3-5)

Figure 3-5 Value Orientation in a New Culture



Wang Fu-zhi, having received imperial grace in his lifetime and considering himself an adherent to the Ming dynasty, retreated into a thatched cottage in western Hunan after all efforts to restore the Ming dynasty failed. He devoted himself to studying and writing until he died at 72, becoming an encyclopedic scholar and expanding the mainstream Confucian cultural thought. More than 200 years later, Wang Guo-wei, who also considered himself an adherent to the Qing dynasty, chose a different path. After the Democratic Revolution (1911), as a master of Sinology at Tsinghua Academy and a celebrated author, he remained loyal to the dethroned Emperor Puyi. He was so overwhelmingly proud of his service on the imperial advisory board that he chose to drown himself in Kunming Lake in the Beijing Summer Palace at the age of 49 after the Emperor was

driven out of the Forbidden City by commander Feng Yu-xiang. Among various unverified stories about his death, according to Chen Yin-ke's highly praiseworthy account, Wang chose to die for his sorrow over the decline of Sinology and the dreadful decay of Chinese culture.[25] Regardless of the reason, holding onto his original values led to the lamentable end of life. Across eras, both Wangs chose to cling to their original ideas, yet under the pressure of new environments, one chose alienation, reaching the realm of "inheriting the ultimate studies of past sages" and dedicating his life to promoting orthodox Chinese culture; the other chose marginalization, abandoning the greater potential of his later life.

This pattern is not only applicable to new immigrants stepping out of their indigenous cultural circles but also offers insights for companies undergoing mergers with large corporations and nations making their debut on the global stage.

At the micro level, like any other organism, humans can adjust their demands and lifestyles to maximize their own life value in response to changes in the objective environment. Given the wide range of individual understanding and response capabilities, in the absence of unified planning and centralized calls to action, people's specific behaviors are bound to vary widely, with some being radical, some conservative, and some indifferent. Similarly, the organizational methods and development directions of a society also undergo repeated natural selection in the test of the living environment. According to the theory of evolution, this is a process of passive selection. However, due to their strong learning ability, humans can make purposeful choices, and their value systems and social norms can evolve more rapidly than those of other organisms. While other

[25] Chen Yin-ke: Prelude to the Elegy to Mr. Wang Guan-tang.

organisms may need thousands of years to adapt to environmental changes, humans can adapt to climate change in an instant by simply changing clothes or pressing an air conditioner button. Moreover, within two to three decades, the new generation has already established different aesthetic standards and lifestyles amidst the complaints of their elders.

The adaptation to passive selection initially starts sporadically, with pioneers who respond first possibly being seen as heretics and facing rejection. Over time, however, as public awareness increases, a collective consciousness and social trend emerge. This type of adaptability is not centrally designed from the top down, nor is it socially planned: there is no central entity controlling it. At a certain point in history, every society makes its own unique choices regarding development and governance models, such as state bureaucracy, market capitalism, welfare states, authoritarian rule, electoral democracy, etc. Whilst all current rulers manage to present various reasons to justify the legitimacy and superiority of their choices, placed in nearly identical spatiotemporal environments, some societies thrive because they find more optimized models by reviewing history, examining the present, and looking to the future, and are able to overcome resistance and inertia at specific historical moments to make decisive changes in their political and economic systems. There are loads of cases such as the Prussian reforms of 1811-1813, Japan's Meiji Restoration in 1868, and China's Reform and Opening Up in 1978.

The evolution of society occurs on different levels, one of which is the society itself, where social elites make collective choices in accordance with the order of history, including political systems, economic orders, international relations, policy orientations, etc. Through the test of environmental adaptability, a myriad of individual life strategies come together. When more effective strategies are selected, changes can be

created for the entire society at the macro level. Changes in strategy imply that the underlying consensus values supporting them also change. An invisible hand, following the logic of adaptability, guides those capable of making choices to adopt better strategies, enabling them to seize opportunities to meet greater and higher needs.

Meeting needs is necessary for survival, and seizing opportunities allows for more rapid development. Value systems must adapt to the demands and opportunities in a specific environment, whether actively or passively. The formation of new values is established by eliminating those practices proven ineffective and failed. This process of passive selection does not require elite design, as anything that does not adapt to reality will be eliminated by reality itself. In a given period and context, even though many ways of living may all have their rationality, there will always be one, or at most a few, that are the most effective. Those who quickly adopt these values and master adaptive strategies will outcompete those laggards clinging to the outdated ways of thinking and action. This stimulates a process of active selection. People no longer wait to be naturally eliminated after failure but instead turn to those who are successful as models, learning from their successful trajectories to consciously and actively change their own values and life strategies.

4

ORIGIN OF CHINESE VALUES

4.1 Chinese Genesis and Its Impact on Beliefs

Both Eastern and Western myths believe that the original world was full of darkness and chaos, and that everything in the world was created by gods. The difference is that the "Old Testament" of the Bible attributes all creation to the one God, Jehovah; God, as the creator, is eternal, always protecting and managing the world, and making the final judgment on the good and evil of human behavior with his legislation. In Chinese mythology, the work of creation was done by multiple gods, who disappeared after creating their miracles and no longer managed the affairs of the world. The "Bible" created by the Jews, the "Quran" created by the Arabs, and the "Buddhist scriptures" created by the Indians, all have highly concentrated beliefs and unified worship of gods, supplemented by scholastic doctrines and strict religious rituals, allowing for organized and systematic dissemination. Christianity and Islam have long been widely infiltrated into secular power, possessing huge assets, and even resorting to violence to mutilate heretics and even to war to conquer heretical nations. Buddhism, originated in ancient India, advocates equality of all beings, and its ideas of dependent origination, emptiness, karma, and

reincarnation provide great spiritual consolation for the hardworking masses who cannot control their own destiny. Rulers in East Asia also found it useful to offer spiritual comfort for ordinary people who endure all sorts of hardship in the life.

China regards Pan Gu as the ancestor who created heaven and earth, but does not worship him as a deity like the God of Genesis in the Western world. This has led China to reject a unified fundamentalist belief system. People are forever grateful to ancestors like Sui Ren, who drilled wood to make fire, Shen Nong, who tasted hundreds of herbs, and Yü the Great, who regulated the floods, for their contributions to the welfare of the people, as they created practical value for the world. It is evident that Chinese religion has always been polytheistic, with flexible and practical beliefs.

In Chinese mythology, there is no unified all mighty lord who created and perpetually looks after everything. The universe and everything in it had been created by different figures at different times. Many different versions have evolved with time for want of systematic works comparable to Homeric epic poems or the Old Testament. The cosmos was originally an enormous egg-shaped entity in which the first living being by the name of Pan Gu was incubated for 18,000 years. When he grew to a gigantic size, he was flustered with his containment in the mess of darkness, salience and loneliness. He conjured a massive axe and split the entity. Those heavy and dark elements sank down to form the earth, and those light and clear ones drifted up to form the sky. Standing on earth and holding the sky, he was able to push them farther apart as his height grew day by day. After another 18,000 years when the separated realms finally got stabilized, he died in collapse. His breath turned into winds and clouds around four seasons; his voice into rumbling thunders; his eyes into the sun and the moon and his teardrops into stars; his skin into the vast land

and flesh into fertile soil; his tendons into geographical map; his blood into rivers and seas; his bones into mountains and marrows into minerals; his hair into grassland and forest; his sweat into raindrops and dews. Ultimately, his stretching limbs set the four directions. With all living conditions set ready, all sorts of worms from his body was turned into various living creatures was catalyzed by wind. (Xu Zheng: "Chronicles of the Five Elements")

Although Xu Zheng from the Three Kingdoms period described the common people as originating from the maggots that formed from the decaying flesh of Pan Gu, the most popular belief identifies Nüwa as the mother of humanity. Feeling lonely, Nüwa molded many men and women from clay by the water's edge in her own image, and later, she mass-produced them using a method of flinging mud with a grass rope. However, those she crafted by hand became emperors and generals, while those created with the grass rope became commoners. Nüwa also established marital relationships for humans, allowing them to reproduce and thrive generation after generation. Another legend views Fu Xi and Nüwa as a married couple, similar to Adam and Eve. The East Han dynasty murals discovered in Henan province depicts the mating of Fu Xi and Nüwa, both with human heads and serpent bodies, leading to the belief that they were the ancestors of humanity. (Figure 4-1) Nüwa not only created human being, but also patched the big hole in the sky to stop the deluge.

Figure 4-1 Fu Xi and Nüwa in Human Production



For the Chinese, creators only established everything and the conditions for creatures to survive on Earth. However, they neither own nor shepherd any beings. In fact, Laozi says, “Heaven and Earth are not benevolent; they treat all of creation as straw dogs”.

Like any myth, they are early human efforts to use imagination to solve origin problems. The cultural concepts of the ancient Chinese and the ancient Greeks had similarities in that they attributed the creation of civilization to personified gods, but they celebrated them as epic heroes without systematically worshipping them or using them as tools to rule

the people through the pretensions of ambitious individuals. Chinese myths show a series of unique worldviews and humanistic views.

First, they are scattered and disordered, and scholars and the public do not take them seriously. Since they are not considered historical records, researchers cannot verify them, so everyone can freely imagine and elaborate, or even create new theories. Even as myths, they are not endowed with the authority of the Bible, Homer's epics, or the Theogony, forming a fixed lineage of characters and plots, giving later generations a relatively unified and coherent source to amplify in literature and art.

Second, Chinese myths are filled with romantic realism. Although imaginative, they start from a materialistic perspective. They reject subjective presuppositions such as the existence of God or the immortality of the soul and instead reason by analogy from objective phenomena, such as comparing the early universe to the shape of an egg, or combining prominent features of various animals to form the image of a dragon as the totem of the Chinese nation. This shows that China's exploration and interpretation of things are open, hence appearing chaotic. "One story based on the same origin is transformed into various appearances due to different interpretations."[26]

Third, China is polytheistic, with no single and omnipotent god to create and dominate everything. According to the "Rites of Zhou", China worshipped the Supreme Deity of the vast heavens and the deities of the five directions. The deities of the five directions are: Taihao Fu Xi of the east, Yan Emperor of the south, Yellow Emperor of the center, Shaohao of the west, and Zhuan Xu of the north. Additionally, the gods belonged to different eras, playing extraordinary roles in their respective domains.

---

[26] Wang Guowei, et al. "100 Lectures on Chinese History", China Overseas Chinese Publishing House, 2014, page 9.

Pan Gu created heaven and earth. Sui Ren invented fire by drilling wood with stone. Fu Xi invented a host of utilities like recording by making knots, fishing nets with rope, string music instrument, the Actogram (Bagua or Eight Trigrams) for prediction. The Yellow Emperor created the calendar. Shen Nong was the inventor of farming tools, herbal medicines, and calendar and irrigation system. He also taught people how to weave, make pottery and domesticate animals. Nüwa mended the sky with colorful pepples. Jing Wei filled the sea with stones. Cang Jie created writing. Hou Yi shot down nine blazing suns out of ten that scorched the earth, and so on. These creators are joyfully created and taken as legendary characters rather than incarnations of divinity.

Fourth, Chinese people are more ready to pay tribute to those discoverers and inventors of practical utility. In the minds of the Chinese, they are better regarded as superhumans than as gods, so people can admire them infinitely but will not worship them. It is their division of labor that has led to the founders of various professions being revered. There are more inventors of their industries that are deified by later generations in the particular profession as patriarchs or first teachers. For example, Lei Zu in the textile industry, Confucius in education, Lu Ban in carpentry, Cai Lun in papermaking, Lu Yü in tea, Du Kang in alcohol, Liu An in beancurd (tofu), and even Dongfang Shuo in crosstalk.

Fifth, unlike the God who insists on being the only one and even has a jealous heart, gods in the Chinese mind are perfect and selfless, with an unconditional spirit of sacrifice. In contrast, in Sumerian mythology, the gods created humans to make their lives more comfortable, so they created servants in their own image out of clay. In the “Old Testament”, Yahweh (later called Jehovah after the rise of Christianity) made a covenant with Abraham, granting the land of Canaan to the Hebrews on the

condition that they worship him as the only true God and perform circumcision as a sign of the covenant. Moses further consolidated this belief with the "Ten Commandments" while leading the Hebrews out of Egypt and returning to Canaan: "I. You shall have no other gods before me; II. You shall not make for yourself an idol. I will show mercy to those who love me." In Greek mythology, Zeus, the embodiment of justice, had many lovers and frequently committed adultery, and his wife Hera, the mother of final judgment, was also a jealous woman.

Sixth, the hierarchy of deities is often based on their contributions rather than their powers, aiming to shape them as examples in the human world, so the enshrinement of gods has a strong utilitarian preference. Moreover, to highlight or borrow their names for easier dissemination, people often attribute all the miracles and good deeds of the same era to one god or hero.

Amongst the ad hov myths and legends on genesis, it is observed that Creators in the Chinese eyes do not necessarily carry a divine will. Therefore, no monotheistic seed was sown in the national belief at the very onset. People choose to enshrine those real-life characters who brought them substantive benefits. As a matter of convenience, they are also eager to continually heap all virtues and merits to glorify an individual into a sacred incarnation and elevate him as a celestial being, wherein those in power enjoy the privileged candidacy.

Therefore, these antediluvian figures may not accurately refer to specific individuals who actually made those groundbreaking contributions but rather powerful tribal leaders in a collectivity. They possess paranormal might, but are filled with human sentiment. They are commemorated as the ancestors of the Chinese nation, particularly for their sacrificial spirit, but they do not enjoy the authority of the gods; their mission is

already completed. They are more analogous to the multiple gods in the Greek mythology instead of Jesus or Allāh in formal religions. This way, people are relieved of the torments of religious taboos. Different to the Greek gods though, their character is impeccable, with neither sense of envy nor romantic affairs, thus presenting perfect examples for generations of secular elites to emulate.

Especially influenced by Buddhism, the Chinese also accept the concepts of rebirth and the afterlife. However, they are more concerned about how to lead a healthy and long life in the present, and how to realize justice over good and evil in this world. In the face of injustices that are difficult to resolve in their own lives, they believe in the principle of "heaven's justice is evident, retribution is certain" and patiently await that the "evil deeds of ancestors shall affect descendants since the retribution of karma is inevitable". They are unwilling to bear the burden of a heavy historical past. On the bridge of reincarnation, a bowl of Meng Po's soup[27] acts like a computer reboot, completely erasing memories of past lives. Focusing on the present has always been a core tenet of Confucianism, as Confucius taught his disciples, "Things that have already been done need no further explanation; things that have already been completed need no further advice; things that have already passed need no further blame." (Analects, VIII.13). This illustrates that Chinese culture has little interest in the afterlife, and Chinese philosophers are not inclined to conduct in-depth analysis or strict definitions of the divine path. Instead, they channel

[27] Meng Po, or Old Lady Meng, is the goddess of oblivion in Chinese mythology, who serves Meng Po Soup on the Bridge of oblivion or Naihe Bridge. This soup wipes the memory of the person at the bridge of rebirth so he can reincarnate free of the burdens of the previous life.

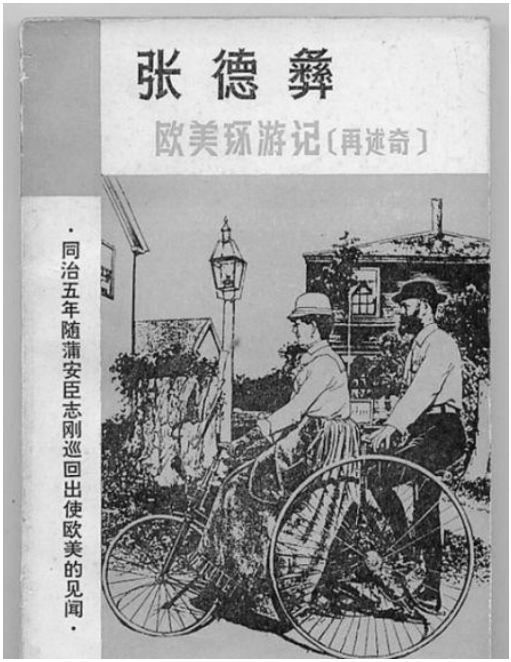
their energies into interpreting the human path along practical and utilitarian lines.

Therefore, Chinese philosophy and ethics are permeated with the rich fragrance of romanticism and humanism on the one hand, and on the other hand, the erosion of rational persuasiveness can leave rigorous readers in frustrating perplexity. Unlike Western scholars who lean on precise definition and dehydrated logic for analysis, Chinese thinkers are not adept at or disdainful of employing strict definition and tedious logic for reasoning. Instead, they prefer to use metaphors, examples and showcases before and after a concise conclusion, replacing rigorous argumentation. Traditional philosophical texts possess high literary value, with eloquent and rhythmic expressions that are enjoyable to read. However, a common drawback is the excessive use of tautology in rhetoric and circular reasoning in logic. Mozi and Han Feizi once criticized the harmful effects of eloquence in filing proposals to the rulers, arguing that excessive emphasis on rhetorical beauty hinders the elucidation of profound truths, causing rulers to be captivated by the language and forget its essense, misleading sound judgments. (Han Feizi, "On External Storage", Upper Left)

The essence of these profound thoughts is like concentrated saccharin; readers must dilute it with their own insights in order to resonate with their soul. Apart from the many differences in language and expression compared to modern languages, another characteristic of classical Chinese literature is the uninterrupted flow of writing without pauses or punctuation. This has caused confusion for others, especially distant descendants, in interpreting the texts, and has also allowed for the freedom to take passages out of context. It should be noted that it wasn't until the late Qing dynasty that punctuation marks were introduced to China, by Zhang Deyi in his "Travelogue in Europe and America" published in 1868.

(Figure 4-2) The pre-Qin era accumulated such an overwhelming cultural treasure that later scholars abandoned their ambitions to stand out with their independent school of thought, and thereto devoted all their energy to textual exegesis. The tightened mind control along Chinese dynasties also preempted their creative and critical thinking. On the one hand, it is precisely due to the continuous annotations, coupled with the tireless quoting of authoritative thoughts, that Chinese culture has been passed down without major fracture, and on the other hand, the original texts have become more ambiguous in the process of diverse interpretations.

Figure 4-2 Travelogue in Europe and America



4.2 Origin of the Chinese Nation

The Chinese nation mainstreamed by the Han ethnic group[28] originated from the alluvial plains of the Yellow River basin. The "Records of the Grand Historian" by Sima Qian states: "[People led by] the Yellow Emperor (Huang Di) was central, and the surrounding tribes paid homage; the Son of Heaven 'governed China and pacified the tribes around it.'" "The surrounding tribes" collectively refers to the various ethnic minority tribes around the Chinese nation, which were later subdivided into "Dongyi (Eastern Barbarians), Nanman (Southern Barbarians), Xirong (Western Barbarians), and Beidi (Northern Barbarians)". Although these cultures developed at different times, wars, marriages, and commercial activities promoted the amalgamation and integration among the tribes, gradually forming a multi-ethnic civilization system in China that dominates the eastern part of the world. Its geographical area is vast and unified, bordered by the Pacific Ocean to the east, the Pamir Plateau to the west, grasslands and deserts to the north, and the Himalayas, known as the "roof of the world", to the southwest, separated from the South Asian subcontinent. From geographical endowments to the origins of civilization, all these also indicate that the Chinese nation was bound to take a unique path of development.

Between 5000 BC and 2000 BC, the Chinese nation was in the Neolithic Age, which included the Yangshao culture (Yangshao Village, Mianchi County, Sanmenxia City, Henan Province) distributed along the middle reaches of the Yellow River from Gansu Province to Henan Province, the Dawenkou culture (Dawenkou Town, Daiyue District, Tai'an

[28] Properly referred to as Huaxia nation before the Han dynasty.

City, Shandong Province) on the Shandong plain, the Longshan culture (Longshan Town, Licheng District, Jinan City, Shandong Province), and the Erlitou culture (Erlitou, Yanshi, Luoyang, Henan Province) spread throughout the middle reaches of the Yellow River. By the late Neolithic period, the footprint of Chinese culture extended to the Huai River basin's Yue Shi culture (Luanchuan, Luyi County, Henan Province) and the Yangtze River basin's Shijiahe culture (Shijiahe, Tianmen City, Hubei Province). Agricultural production and daily life tools mainly included polished stone tools, pottery, bone tools, jade, lacquerware, and bronze.

Regarding who is the primal ancestor of Chinese nation, there are four different legends. The first one believes that it was Fuxi, whose contribution to civilization included "teaching people to weave nets, fish and hunt, domesticate animals, and create the Actogram"; the second one believes it was Pangu, who created the world; the third one believes it was the Yan Emperor and the Yellow Emperor, hence the Chinese nation has the saying "descendants of Yan and Huang"; the fourth one traces back to the Xia Dynasty as the appearance of the first national entity, hence the saying "sons and daughters of Huaxia". Cangjie, who invented writing, and Ta Nao who first created the calendar system (the Chinese lunar calendar) lived in the same era under the rule of the Yellow Emperor. More importantly, the Yellow Emperor formed a wide-ranging royal rule after defeating the Yan Emperor and Chiyou. Therefore, it is more appropriate to identify the Yellow Emperor as the original ancestor of the Chinese nation.

There has been protracted controversy in academia as how to measure the length of a nation's history of civilization, which also contain different political purposes. As mentioned above, scholars generally agree that the collective emergence of cities, writing and bronze as the dividing line of historical times, with the period before that being considered

"pre-civilization". By this standard, most scholars have long held that Chinese civilization spans over 2,700 years despite its far longer history which is popularly taken as 5,000 years. They believe that written language which appeared far earlier was only one of the criteria to ascertain civilization. What's more, earliest written language discovered in oracle bones was used mainly to worship nature, more specifically the Heaven, and its impact on people's life was minimal. Nonetheless, language aside, the rituals and ceremonies were conducted in the sense of witchcraft other than religious practices. This has left significant bearing on Chinese belief in natural surroundings that have immediate impact on their lives instead of worshipping an abstract deity in its complete unity.

More archaeological discoveries at the Erlitou historical site, which is a cluster of ancient relics representing the thriving capital of Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, show that China had entered the stage of civilization 5,000 years ago, so the statement "five thousand years of Chinese civilization" is not unfounded. Through continuous wars, alliances and mergers, scattered clans gradually transitioned to a state system.

According to the sexagenary cycle used during the era of the Yellow Emperor, the beginning of Chinese history is set in 2,697 BC. In the late Qing Dynasty, both the reformists and revolutionaries were committed to overthrowing the system of emperors naming years, but Kang Youwei advocated using Confucius's birth as the chronological reference, while Song Jiaoren, in the organ of the Chinese United League, the Min Bao, strongly advocated taking the year 1904 as the 4602nd year of the Yellow Emperor's era, thus establishing the mainstream Yellow Emperor era. After Sun Yat-sen became the Provisional President of the Republic of China, he officially announced that November 13, 4,609 of the Yellow Emperor's era (January 1, 1912) would be the New Year's Day of the first

year of the Republic of China, thus giving rise to the saying "the five thousand years of Chinese history".

4.3 The Cosmic and Worldly View in China

Regarding the origins of heaven and earth, Chinese people seem to be more interested in myths than in delving into the currently popular scientific question of the "Black Hole" or "Big Bang". In Chinese history, there has been extensive and deep research on astronomy, but there is little pure scientific inquiry. Instead, it is mainly mixed with divination, serving practical purposes such as auspicious and ominous predictions and agricultural production, thus abstracting heaven and earth as Qian and Kun.

Laozi believed that the Dao is the origin of the universe, which is very similar to the view of the contemporary Greek philosopher Parmenides, who called the entire universe an eternal, indivisible "One". However, Laozi's speculation is deeper, proposing the idea that "the Dao produces the One, the One produces the Two, the Two produce the Three, and the Three produce all things", highlighting that the development of things follows a process from simplicity to complexity. Given the profound statement in the "Tao Te Ching", "The Dao that can be told is not the eternal Dao; The name that can be named is not the eternal name", and since the Dao cannot be named, "Huainanzi·Astronomy Inquiry" simply integrates "Dao" and "One" together for explanation: "The Dao (known as the law) begins with the One. Since the One does not produce, it divides into Yin and Yang. Through the harmony of Yin and Yang, all things are born".

Zhuangzi's "Great One" refers to the universe in the modern sense ("The greatest is without exterior, called the 'Great One'"). In traditional Chinese concepts, the universe (Yu Zhou) refers to both space and time –

"Yu" is space and "Zhou" is time. As Zhuangzi explained: "That which has substance but no place to reside is Yu; that which has length but no beginning or end is Zhou". "Shizi" is even more explicit: "Up, down, and the four directions are called Yu; from primal beginning to the present is called Zhou".

In Chinese history, all schools of thought and sects have invariably emphasized the concept of "Heaven", as the ruler of all things in the universe, with a divine will of supreme authority. "Yi Zhuan" says: "Great indeed is the primal beginning, the source of all things, thus it governs Heaven". Heaven is endowed with various symbolic meanings, including the natural heaven, philosophical heaven, religious heaven, and political heaven. In traditional Chinese beliefs, it can refer to accidental events beyond human control, or objective laws that are not shaken by human will, such as "When Heaven is about to abandon this culture, those new borns will not be able to partake in this culture. When Heaven has not yet abandoned this culture, how can a mere mortal affect it!" and "The way of Heaven is constant; it does not preserve Yao (an ancient noble ruler) nor destroy Jie (a wicked ruler at the end of Xia dynasty)". "Mencius·Li Lou" says: "Those who follow Heaven will survive; those who go against Heaven will perish."

Chinese people do not lack faith, but their faith does not have a unified god. However, as a vague and polysemous concept, Heaven has always been an object of universal awe and worship. Therefore, many concepts such as Shangtian (Supreme Heaven), Huangtian (Imperial Heaven), Haotian (Vast Heaven), Tianyuan (Heavenly Origin), Tiangong (Heavenly Lord), Tianshen (Heavenly Gods), and Tiandi (Heavenly Emperor) carry and convey the ideas of Tiandao (the Way of Heaven), Tianli (Heavenly Principle), Tianming (Heavenly Mandate), and Tianyi (Heavenly

Will). Although Mo Zi placed Heaven at the top of all gods, he merely stayed on a presumption and did not establish a logical system to argue the existence of Heaven and the path of its will's transmission. Therefore, his focus was still on promoting his practical purpose through the discussion of ghosts and gods: "Those who follow the will of Heaven, love each other and benefit each other, must be esteemed; those who go against the will of Heaven, hate each other and harm each other, must be punished... The reason for the chaos in the world... is because they do not understand the will of Heaven."

In contrast to metaphysics, logic reasoning and abstract rationality aiming at truth finding among western thinkers, Chinese philosophers and ethicists are revolving around the core value of beneficence with accentuation on human temperament. The bulk of Chinese wisdom is drawn from the perennial accumulation of practical experience and commonsense deduction. Agile adaptability to a given environment is given higher priority than changing the environment. A particular focus is placed on interpersonal relations. Harmony based on moral duty other than justice sanctioned by law is highly preferred. Compromise becomes a part of legislative design and judicial deliberation even on principle of justice so long as it helps lower management cost and maintain political stability. Much of their approach was inward looking following the subjective principle. Empirical study and quantitative analysis were rarely employed, wherein Conficianism is a classic example. They were too eager to come up with moral guidance as "what should be" and what ought to do" before they were able to clarify "what it is" and "how it works".

Chinese language and its expression are highly condensed which requires resonation of the mind under specific context and in specifc mood. Its subtlety can hardly be grasped without tacit understanding and

appreciation of its rich and diverse culture - history, legend, fable and figures. A single vocaburary can carry multiple meanings. Tian, for example, can refer to sky, universe, heaven, God, fate, time and day. From medicine, artwork, poem, idioms and novels related to history, everything apprears a freehand creation absent of deliberate precision. Coresponding-ly, the aim of classic literature is not to reveal the hard truth or depict the real fact, but rather to stimulate philosophical and moral aprirations, leaving ample space for individual interpretation. When it comes to the meaning of heaven, despite of abundant legends and fables, there's no uniform or authority description as what it looks like and who is in control. Nonetheless, every school of thought would make reference to its mandate. Its notion broadly underpinned is the law of nature.

The German classical philosopher Hegel commented, "In China, the individual has no independence, so in religious matters, he is also dependent, dependent on various objects of nature, among which the most sublime is the material Heaven". The frequency of Chinese people exclaiming to Heaven in daily life is no less than that of Westerners saying OMG, except that they also alternately use the concept of "mother".

The "Book of Songs·Carol for King Wen" uses the mystique of the Way of Heaven as a backdrop - "The load of the Supreme Heaven, silent and odorless", and vigorously praises the legitimacy of King Wen of Zhou overthrowing the Shang dynasty and unifying the world by following the Mandate of Heaven: "The ceremonies and punishments of King Wen, all nations made faith". The "Collected Works of the Two Chengs" explains the original meaning carried by Heaven as: "Its essence is called Yi (Change), its principle is called Dao (Way), its function is called Shen (Spirit), its command to humans is called Xing (Nature), following nature is called Dao, cultivating Dao is called Jiao (Teaching)".

When Confucius was in trouble in the state of Song, he still took the opportunity to practice rituals with his disciples under a big tree. The Song official Huan Chui cut down the tree, intending to harm him, but Confucius remained calm and said to his disciples, “Heaven has endowed me with virtue; what can Huan Chui do to me?” Confucius never believed in ghosts and gods; it was the faith in the Mandate of Heaven that gave him such fearless confidence. This Mandate of Heaven, along with Laozi’s Dao, is called the Absolute Spirit or Absolute Idea in Hegel's idealist philosophy, which is the eternal origin of the world, and all human efforts are to understand and accept its command.

Since various legends did not endow these primitive gods with the ability to reward the good and punish the evil to dominate human affairs, people did not need to revere them for fear of punishment. People generally feared a vague concept of heaven, but did not endow it with a concrete deity. “Man acts, heaven watches”. “Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you”. “There is a god three feet above one’s head; good and evil will eventually be repaid sooner or later”. These popular sayings reflect the projection of individual conscience and the expectation of justice onto a vague concept. Secular rulers, however, opportunistically exploited this ambiguity, presenting themselves as the legitimate sons of heaven, similar to God's only begotten son, Jesus Christ. However, kings are ultimately short-lived mortals, and people fear their secular power of life and death, while admiring the actual benefits they bring to the people. For thousands of years, generations of kings have considered themselves the sons of heaven. In this respect, they seem to disregard the emphasis on seniority and hierarchy in Eastern ethics.

The term “Tian Xia (all under heaven)” literally means the world. As a political concept in Chinese, it is equivalent to the modern semantics

of "Jiangshan" (rivers and mountains). It does not refer to a specific geographical category but the area and people effectively governed by the imperial authority, similar to the contemporary concept of sorvereign territory. This concept can be traced back to the description in the "Book of Songs": "Under the vast sky, all lands belong to the king; within the borders of the land, all are the king's subjects". However, the concept of "Si Hai" (the Four Seas) is more loose, similar to the literary "Yu Nei" (the universe), and when connected with "Wu Hu" (the Five Lakes), it refers to the entirety of China. In the "Rhapsody on the Imperial Park", there is a mention of "the end of the six kings, within the Four Seas"; when used independently, it more often refers to the world outside of China's borders.[29] Since China and the world beyond are separated by the seas in the east, west, south, and north, we call foreign countries "Hai Wai" (overseas), people returning from foreign countries "Hai Gui" (returnees). All things introduced from foreign countries, such as goods, technologies, and ideas, are described as "Bo Lai Pin" (imported stuff by vessels). According to "Erya - Interpretation of Geography", the nine Yi tribes, eight Di tribes, seven Rong tribes, and six Man tribes) are referred to as "Si Hai" (the Four Seas), implying the Han Chinese is situated at the center of universe, which is exactly the literal meaning of China.

Confucius, in his "Record of Rites - Great Unity - The Progress of the Rites", outlined a world he called "cosmopolitanism" (the world of great unity), whose aspirations are so grand and ideals so lofty that they are

[29] Generally used for imagery, it refers to the whole world or the universe; some also propose that the Western Sea is Qinghai Lake, the Eastern Sea is the East China Sea, the Northern Sea is Lake Baikal, and the Southern Sea is the South China Sea (Chang, Chun-shu. The Rise of the Chinese Empire: Nation, State, and Imperialism in Early China, ca. 1600 B.C. - A.D. 8. University of Michigan Press. 2007, P1-2.). However, based on its common usage context, this interpretation seems somewhat far-fetched.

incomparable to the political constructions of the city-states by More and Plato.

The way of the Great Dao, compared to the sages of the Three Dynasties, I, Confucius, have not yet reached, yet I aspire to it. The way of the Great Dao, when practiced, sees the world as a commonwealth: selecting the virtuous and capable, promoting trust and harmony. Thus, people do not only care for their own kin, nor do they only provide for their own children; ensuring that the elderly have a dignified end, the able-bodied have employment, and the young have opportunities for growth. The widowed, orphaned, lonely, and disabled all receive care; men have their roles, and women have their homes. Wealth is not hoarded but rather used for the common good; strength is not kept for oneself but employed for the benefit of all. Thus, schemes are laid to rest and do not arise, theft and chaos do not occur, and doors remain unlocked. This is called the Great Unity (cosmopolitanism).

However, finding himself in an era where rites have collapsed and music has corrupted, what does he, the venerable elder, see in the reality of today as he reflects on the past?

Nowadays, the Great Dao has vanished, and the world has become private. People only respect their own parents and cherish their own children, dealing with finances and exerting effort only for themselves. The Son of Heaven and the feudal lords regard the hereditary succession of father to son and brother to brother as the ritual system. Moats outside the cities serve as defensive structures. Ritual and righteousness serve as the standards: using ritual and righteousness to rectify the relationship

between ruler and subject, to deepen the relationship between father and son, to harmonize the relationship between brothers, to harmonize the relationship between husband and wife, using ritual and righteousness to establish institutions, to establish household registration, and according to ritual and righteousness, to regard those who are brave and resourceful as virtuous (because at that time, thieves and robbers arose), and according to ritual and righteousness, to regard oneself as meritorious. Therefore, the heart of deceit arises from this, and wars and chaos also arise from this.

Confucius, ever persevering, depicted a society of moderate prosperity (Xiao Kang society) as the initial stage of a Great Unity society where the world is as one family:

Yü, Tang, Wen, Wu, King Cheng, and Duke of Zhou, were chosen for this reason. These six gentlemen, none of them were not careful with rites. They established righteousness, examined trustworthiness, corrected faults, emphasized benevolence and advocated yielding, showing the people constancy. If anyone did not follow this, those in power would be removed, and the masses would consider it a disaster. This is called moderate prosperity.

In Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 - 771 BC) that succeeded Shang, political and social institutions became well established. Territorial estate was distributed by a common emperor among kinship clans and people of honor who would rule feudatory states. It prospered on four pillars of institutional foundations: feudal system, land slot system, patriarchal system, protocol and music system. During its greater part, the Chinese

nation was largely ruled by virtue, thus people enjoyed internal prosperity and peace with neighboring states. Social order was clearly defined where hereditary peerages were assigned to a hierarchical class of nobility. The rest were left in serfdom - the working class as the case of European manorialism. That was the nostalgic era adored by Confucius as the most ideal society China should restore to. As a matter of fact, he spent his whole life with hundreds of his followers to canvass this modus operandi of political governance even knowingly it was a mission impossible at a time when a few ambitious states already began to fledge their muscles to challenge the authority of the common emperor.

Confronted with the turbulent reality of rampant selfish desires and rivalry among feudal lords during the Eastern Zhou period, Confucius was deeply concerned and strongly advocated for the revival of the political, economic, and cultural model of the Western Zhou era. He proposed, "The cultural and ritual system of the Zhou dynasty was built in reference to the Xia and Shang dynasties, how rich and splendid it was! (Therefore) I advocate following the model of the (Western) Zhou dynasty". "The Analects·Yao Yue" praised the policies of the early Western Zhou period: "Reestablishing the abolished states, continuing extinct lineages, promoting the idle people, the people of the world will show their allegience!" This means that after the Zhou dynasty overthrew the Shang dynasty, it adopted a "gentle and far-reaching" policy towards the defeated states, descendants of the kings and princes, and the remaining people. For example, land was allocated to the descendants of Shennong, the Yellow Emperor, Yao, Shun, and Yü. Even Lu Fu, the son of the dethroned King Zhou of Shang, received the fief of Yin (Anyang, Henan), the old capital of the Shang dynasty. The sages who chose to live in seclusion due to dissatisfaction with King Zhou of Shang were rehired in

official rank and file. The remnants of the Shang dynasty were treated favorably. In the ancient society bound by clan and blood relationships, this was a very popular practice, which not only reflected the superb political wisdom of the early Western Zhou rulers but also created the spirit of benevolence and inclusiveness in Chinese culture.

Table 4-1 summarizes the similarities and differences in Confucius's mind between the real society he observed and a moderately prosperous society as the initial goal, as well as the ideal society (cosmopolitanism) as the final destination, in terms of development drivers, political and economic systems, and social order.

Table 4-1 Social Forms in Confucius's Eyes

	Real Society	**Moderately Prosperous Society (Xiao Kang society)**	**Ideal Society (cosmopolitanism)**
Development Drivers	Self-interest	Ritual and Righteousness.	Benevolence
Political System	Mission: The world is for the family. Authority: Hereditary system. Feudal Lords: Hereditary system, valuing ability over virtue.	Mission: A prosperous society that emphasizes rituals and righteousness. Authority: Emerges as needed (revolution, hereditary, or trusteeship), following the people's will. Institutionalized rituals and	Mission: The world is for the public. Authority: Abdication system. Feudal Lords: Selection system, emphasizing both virtue and ability.

		righteousness, ensuring openness, fairness, and stability.	
International Relations	Feudal lords govern independently, preparing for war and defense.	Feudal lords govern independently, adhering to diplomatic etiquette.	Supporting a common ruler for the world, feudal lords maintain faith and peace.
Social Relations	Partiality and nepotism. Social relations regulated by rituals and righteousness.	The monarch practices self-restraint and adheres to rituals. Using fixed norms to punish evil and promote good, removing harm for the people. Social harmony.	Equality and universal love. Full coverage of social security. Live and work in peace and contentment.
Economic System	Selfishness and self-interest. Private ownership.	Private ownership. Respecting self-interest while promoting benevolence and righteousness.	Public ownership. Making the best use of resources and talents. Private ownership.
Social Order	Intrigues and plots, social unrest.	Abundance of food and clothing, stability and harmony.	Simple and honest folk customs, peace in the world.

4.4 The Chinese Worship and Rituals

From a materialistic perspective, grand sacrificial or commemorative activities are never for the deceased or the past, but to serve the many practical purposes of the organizers. Expressing gratitude for "one's own origins" is one aspect, but more importantly, it is about declaring one's identity and achievements to the public, reviewing the closeness of various relationships, and consolidating the sense of identity among the relevant parties. The regular rolyal worship and prayer to Heaven by the emperor - Son of Heaven - became the most solemn and grand sacrificial ceremony of the Chinese nation. Since the emperor and his ancestors are the sole decendents of the heaven (Procotol · Mourning Clothes), worshipping heaven is both the duty and the privilege of the Son of Heaven.

In the sacrificial rites, different classes not only differ in the complexity of the ceremonies, but also the objects of worship reflect the concept of hierarchy. As noted in the Book of Rites: "the Son of Heaven worships Heaven, the feudal lords worship the Earth, and the common people worship their ancestors". The accompanying ancestral temple system is also the same, as prescribed in the "Book of Rites · King System": "The Son of Heaven has seven temples, the feudal lords have five temples, the great officers have three temples, the scholars have one temple, and the common people worship in their house". This means that ordinary people do not have the right to establish temples to worship their ancestors outside their home. The reason provided by Cui Bao's "Notes to Time (Gu Jin Zhu)" during the Western Jin Dynasty is: "The temple names are based on the merits of the ancestors and the virtues of the clan, hence collectively called ancestral temples". The implication is that since the ancestors of ordinary people have not made any achievements, it proves that their

families are without virtue, so what is there for such families to worship in public?

The concept of the emperor as the "Son of Heaven" can be traced back to the Xia and Shang dynasties and was formalized during the Zhou dynasty. From then on, the role of the emperor as "mandated by Heaven" or "holding the mandate of Heaven" was established. This seems to be identical to the concept of "divine right of kings" in Western history. But in Western society, there objectively exists a religious pope who interprets and conveys the divine will. Because the pope enjoys the patronage from large followers and the church maintains tight organizational system in many countries, the pope can exert a real restraint on the power of the monarch, and even divide the secular power of the monarch in a considerable historical stage.

Just as the doctrine of papal infallibility was long upheld in Europe, the belief that "the respected cannot be wrong" is an ethical creed inherited from China's long history of autocratic rule. This brings to mind the story of Liu Xiu mistakenly designating the Ailanthus tree as the king of all trees. At the end of the Western Han Dynasty, Wang Mang usurped the throne, and Liu Xiu raised an army to challenge him, only to be defeated in a battle and forced to flee. While escaping, he rested under a tall mulberry tree. Exhausted and hungry, he ate the clusters of purple-red mulberries that provided him with the strength to escape. Later, when he became the emperor, known as Emperor Guangwu of Han, he mistakenly thought the tree was an Ailanthus. To repay the tree's loyalty for saving him, Liu Xiu issued an edict declaring the Ailanthus the king of trees, to be worshipped by the people for generations. Although the common people knew Liu Xiu had made a ridiculous mistake, they considered even the emperor's mistakes to be charming, turning the story into a popular

anecdote and creating a rhyme to mock the mulberry tree: “The mulberry tree burst with anger, the willow tree laughed so hard it bent over, and the Ailanthus tree was so happy it bubbled with snot”. To this day, when building houses or making coffins and other important uses of wood, people still prefer Ailanthus as the leader.

Similarly, a character mistake (an extra stroke in the character for “avoid”) handwritten by Emperor Kangxi remains displayed above the gate of the Chengde Mountain Resort. His inscription on the “Fish Viewing at the Flower Harbor” stele misses a dot in the character for “fish”, which people explain as a deliberate mistake. They believe that four dots represent fire, while three dots represent water, and the emperor, possessing a benevolent nature, wished for the fish to have water rather than be grilled by fire.

Until they are overthrown, rulers are not likely to easily admit their mistakes. Even when disastrous consequences occur, people are hesitant to directly blame the highest ruler, often attributing the problems to the influence of the imperial harem, eunuchs, or certain officials. Mao Zedong, particularly in his later years, made a series of major policy mistakes that pushed China to the brink of collapse. Yet, people chose to vent their anger on the “Gang of Four” who surrounded him. Successors to his power, rather than rebels or usurpers, could not openly condemn him. This cultural characteristic distinguishes China's model of regime change from that of the Soviet Union.

The interpretation of the mandate of Heaven has always been in the hands of the Chinese rulers. The Shang dynasty generally used the principle of clan and blood lineage to prove the legitimacy of the rulers, deifying the ancestors of the rulers as Heaven. The Zhou dynasty used “Heaven has no favoritism; it only supports the virtuous” to prove the

legitimacy of replacing the rule of the Shang royal family. The secular and the religious groups found a perfect space for cooperation: while the emperors of China's dynasties used the concept of the mandate of Heaven to clothe themselves in a sacred mantle, many branches of Chinese religion that are placed in a submissive position always considered receiving imperial seals or inscriptions from the Son of Heaven as a great honor. "Heaven" has always remained a vague concept, and the official worship of Heaven is just a way to announce its legitimacy through solemn ceremonies, further consolidating the secular society's awe of the imperial power. Therefore, compared to Western monarchs, Chinese imperial power lacks real checks and balances and possesses supreme freedom.

In a centralized patriarchal society, every person's life, death, honor, and disgrace are in the hands of the emperor. This long-standing dependency of body and spirit is why people lavish praise on those sage monarchs who have rescued them from calamities and created a peaceful and prosperous era. The "Book of Songs · Xiaoya · Sedges on the Southern Mountain" fully expresses the infinite gratitude and good wishes of the people of the Western Zhou era for the sage monarchs.

Sedges grow on the southern mountain, and goosefoot on the northern hill.

The calm and joyful gentleman is the cornerstone of the nation.

The calm and joyful gentleman, may you live a long and boundless life.

Mulberries grow on the southern mountain, and poplars on the northern hill.

The calm and joyful gentleman is the glory of the nation.

The calm and joyful gentleman, may your longevity be without limit.

Hawthorns grow on the southern mountain, and plums on the northern hill.

The calm and joyful gentleman is the parent of the people.

The calm and joyful gentleman, may your good name be forever passed down.

Hackberries grow on the southern mountain, and ash trees on the northern hill.

The calm and joyful gentleman, why not enjoy a long life?

The calm and joyful gentleman, may your good name flourish.

Trifoliate oranges grow on the southern mountain, and catalpas on the northern hill.

The calm and joyful gentleman, why not achieve a ripe old age?

The calm and joyful gentleman, nurture your offspring for generations to come.

——*"Book of Songs · Xiaoya"*

Since the fall of the Qing Dynasty, imperial system has been completely eliminated in China, but the style of glorifying leaders has stubbornly continued. “The East Is Red”, finalized in 1945 after repeated revisions, and “Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman”, which began to be sung in 1964 and was modified under the guidance of Premier Zhou Enlai. They both sing passionately of Mao Zedong and the Communist Party’s great achievements in leading the people to national independence and a new life:

The East is red, the sun is rising, and China has produced Mao Zedong. He seeks happiness for the people (Ho-ho-hai-yo), he is the great savior of the people.

Chairman Mao loves the people, he is our guide. To build a new China (Ho-ho-hai-yo), he leads us forward.

The Communist Party is like the sun, wherever it shines, it is bright. Wherever there is the Communist Party (Ho-ho-hai-yo), the people are liberated.

—— *"The East Is Red"*

The helmsman steers the ship, the sun nurtures all things, rain and dew strengthen the seedlings, the revolution relies on Mao Zedong Thought.

Fish cannot leave water, melons cannot leave vines, the revolutionary masses cannot leave the Communist Party, Mao Zedong Thought is the sun that never sets.

—— *"Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman"*

"The East Is Red" has been echoing in the vastness of space since 1970 when it accompanied China's first satellite, Dong Fang Hong I. Along with "Sailing the Seas Depends on the Helmsman", it became one of the most frequently sung songs during the Cultural Revolution. "The March of the Volunteers", the national anthem of the People's Republic of China, was effectively replaced by "The East Is Red" due to the downfall of its lyricist Tian Han, until it was restored in 1982. In 2016, "The East Is Red" was adapted and sung as "The East Is Red Again" to praise General Secretary Xi Jinping's leadership in leading the Chinese

people into a new era, but it was soon censored. Nonetheless, recent years have noticed a significant revival in such style.

The historic changes that have occurred in the past five years have written a brilliant chapter in the history of national rejuvenation. Under the leadership of Comrade Xi Jinping, the CCP Central Committee has set the direction, made strategic plans for both domestic and international affairs, governed the Party, the country, and the military with great resolve, and vigorously promoted reform, development, and stability. The political environment is clearer than ever before, the reform efforts are unprecedented, the continuous prosperity is unparalleled, the cultural confidence is stronger than ever, the ecological civilization is at its peak, the rule of law is more established than ever, the military construction is at its strongest, and the country's status as a major power is unparalleled. These historic changes and great achievements are comprehensive, groundbreaking, and fundamental, and they have very significant meanings. Historically, they represent a leap from standing up, becoming prosperous, to becoming strong for the Chinese nation, which has gone through hardships since modern times. In terms of the era, they signify the real implementation of a timeline and roadmap for national rejuvenation, marking the entry of Chinese socialism into a new era and the beginning of a new epoch for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Globally, Chinese socialism has expanded the path for developing countries towards modernization, contributing Chinese wisdom and solutions to global issues, thus raising the banner of Chinese socialism high in the world. The reason for such historic changes in the Party and the country lies fundamentally in the strong leadership core of General Secretary Xi Jinping, who steers the Party. General Secretary Xi Jinping, with his

great talents, vision, and firm belief as a Marxist politician, thinker, theorist, and strategist, stands at the historical height, skillfully applies the stance, viewpoints, and methods of Marxism, guiding us to carry out great struggles, build great projects, advance great causes, and realize great dreams. He has won the heartfelt support and love of the entire Party, the military, and people of all ethnic groups across the country, truly deserving the title of a wise leader, the chief architect of reform and opening up and modernization in the new era, and the core of the Party's leadership for this generation. At all times and under any circumstances, we must resolutely uphold the authority and centralized, unified leadership of the CCP Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core.[30]

——*Cai Qi*

Shenzi, legalist scholar living in the Warring Period at the end of the Zhou dynasty, believed in the principle that "achievement is warranted by one's authority". He thus advocated establishing and venerating the Emperor's moral authority, not for the sake of the emperor himself, but to endow him with legitimacy and authority to implement the heavenly principles. He said, "In ancient times, the establishment of the Emperor and his veneration were not for the benefit of one person. It was said: 'In the absence of a single authority esteemed in the world, then reason cannot be communicated, and reason is communicated for the sake of the world.' Therefore, the Emperor was established for the sake of the world, not the world for the sake of the Emperor; the sovereign of

[30] Cai Qi (CCP secretary of Beijing at the time of this speech, currently secretary-general of the politburo secretariat, and director of central government office). The 19th National Congress report points out the direction for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. - Beijing Daily, October 19, 2017.

a state was established for the sake of the state, not the state for the sake of the sovereign; officials were established for the sake of their offices, not the offices for the sake of the officials." (Shenzi·Virtue of Authority) The Book of Changes·Gua of Revolution says: "Since heaven and earth undergo change, the four seasons are thus established. The revolutions of Tang and Wu were in accordance with heaven and responsive to people, and the matter of revolution is great indeed."[31]

With this as a guide, some people-oriented thinkers tried to rectify the relationship between imperial power and the common people. They intend to establish a moral legitimacy for those revolutionaries who admonish the oppressive imperial throne justified by their adherence to the duty of harmonizing with heaven and responding to will of people. Mencius proposed a theory of benevolent governance that "the people are the most valuable, the state is next, and the ruler is the least", and "what the people desire, heaven will surely follow". Mencius's belief in the people was unwavering. In his dialogue with King Xuan of Qi, he clearly advocated that overthrowing a tyrannical government and killing an unrighteous ruler is not only exculpatory but also a righteous act because it helps eliminate harm for the people. As a torchbearer of Confucianism, he even abandoned the Confucian concept of pacification merely by cultivating benevolence within the rulers, believing that warfare to rescue oppressed people in other countries and meet their legitimate expectations of escaping from dire misery was a just act. King Xuan of Qi state narrowly defeated the state of Yan and claimed that there was divine help from the unseen

[31] King Tang overthrew the last Xia emperor and founded the Shang dynasty; King Wu overthrew the last Shang emperor and founded the Zhou dynasty. These were all considered just revolutions because they acted in accordance with heavenly mandate, i.e. the will of people.

heaven. Mencius counter proposed an objective standard of right and wrong with regard to the question of ensuing occupation stating the principle that the will of the people is the will of heaven. Here is the conversation between King Xuan of Qi state with Mencius:

The people of Qi attacked Yan state and defeated it. King Xuan asked, "Some say I should not occupy it, others say I should. Using a state of ten thousand chariots to attack another state of ten thousand chariots, and conquering it in fifty days, human effort cannot achieve this (implying the assistance of heavenly blessing). If I do not occupy it, there will surely be a heavenly calamity. What is your view on my occupation?"

Mencius replied, "If such occupation pleases the people of Yan, then do it. There were ancient people who acted this way, King Wu (founder of Zhou dynasty who conquered the Shang state and dethroned its emperor) was one of them. If the occupation displeases the people of Yan, then do not do it—there were ancient people who acted this way, King Wen[32] was one of them. When you used ten thousand chariots to attack another state of ten thousand chariots, why the people over there welcomed your army with food and drink? Is there any other reason but expect to be lifted out of misery of water and fire? If your occuption gets the water deeper and the fire hotter, people will take their back on your and seek alternative means of livelihood."

——Mencius·Gaozi II

[32] Father of King Wu, lord of the Zhou state, who thought conquering the Shang dynasty that was not completely abandoned by their people was premature.

Dai Sheng of the Western Han Dynasty, also proposed in the name of Confucius that "when the Great Way (Dao) is followed, the world is for the public". On the basis of affirming that "the great origin of the Way comes from heaven", and combining with the Book of Changes' statement that "heaven hangs its images, showing good and bad fortune", Dong Zhongshu in the same period proposed the idealistic doctrine of conscious correspondence between heaven and humankind. He believed that heaven, similar to God, not only consciously created all things but also constantly pays attention to earthly affairs, and every word and deed of humans will touch heaven, which will make a fair judgment based on whether it conforms to the great origin of the Way and indicate good or bad fortune through heavenly signs. The Book of Rites by Dai the Elder (Da Dai Liji), written in the middle of the Eastern Han Dynasty by the ritualist master Dai De, further developed this into the ethical order of "Heaven, Earth, Sovereign, Kin, Teacher": "Ritual has three roots: Heaven and Earth are the root of nature; ancestors are the root of mankind; sovereigns and teachers are the root of governance. Without Heaven and Earth, how can there be life? Without ancestors, how can there be offspring? Without sovereigns and teachers, how can there be governance? If any of the three is missing, there will be no peace for people. Therefore, in rituals, serving Heaven above, serving Earth below, serving ancestors along the family, and honoring sovereigns and teachers, are the three roots of all rituals."

These statements found strong resonance in the widely circulated divination. For rulers, it had a dual function: first, it cloaked their legitimacy in a divine mantle; second, those who held to righteousness hoped to use the interpretation of heavenly signs to admonish and deter licentious and unrighteous rulers. This concept can also be traced back to the "Five

Blessings and Six Curses" proposed in the Book of Documents Hong Fan: "If the ruler follows the Way of the King, heaven will bestow the Five Blessings; if he does not follow the Way of the King, heaven will bring the Six Curses." The "Five Blessings" refer to "longevity, wealth, peace, virtue, and a natural death", and the six Curses include "short life with misfortune, illness, anxiety, poverty, wickedness, and weakness."

4.5 The Notion of Central Kingdom

After the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi), the most famous tribal leaders in the Central Plains region were Tang Yao, Yu Shun, and Xia Yü in succession, which was highly regarded by many scholars, most notably Confucius, as the era of peace and prosperity in ancient time. Yü, as the leader of the Xiahou tribe, accepted Shun's abdication and became the common ruler of the tribes in the Central Plains, and then established Xia as the first dynasty in Chinese history (approximately 2070-1600 BCE). The Xia Dynasty gradually formed the unique form of the Han nationality by successively absorbing the neighboring tribes of Bashu, Jingchu, and Baiyue. The territory and people under his reign were called Huaxia, literally meaning manificance and large[33]. The ancestors of the Huaxia established their country in the middle reaches of the Yellow River. With limited view of that time, they believed they were situated in the center of the world, hence the name "China" - the central kingdom.

Some also seek to verify how the concept of China originated from the perspective of civilization advancement. The "General Interpretation to the Law of Tang Dynasty" states: "Zhonghua, is China. Those close to the royal teachings belong to China, with clothing and dignity, customs

[33] The debate over how this name was originated is offered in later paragraphs.

of filial piety and brotherly respect, and living with propriety and righteousness, thus it is called Zhonghua - Center of Magnificance". The tribes around it were called the "Four Barbarians", and the "Book of Rites·Kingdom Governance" further subdivided them into four ethnic groups: Yi in the east, Rong in the west, Man in the south, and Di in the north.

However, the term "Four Barbarians" first appeared in the late Western Zhou period. The Zhou royal family used blood lineage as the standard to distinguish between Huaxia and the barbarians. The monarchs branched out from the Zhou royal family and revered the Zhou rituals belonged to Huaxia, while the tribes in the four directions outside of this realm were called the Four Barbarians. The "History by States · State of Zheng" says: "If they are not the sons, brothers, nephews, or uncles of the king, then they all belong to the Four Barbarians. If they are not kin, they must be uncultivated, and thus made impervious (to the central plain) ... Those who have accomplished great deeds in the world, their descendants have always been distinguished, such as Yu, Xia, Shang, and Zhou." This is, of course, a dynamic concept. Han Yü, thinker and writer in the Tang Dynasty, believed: "When Confucius wrote the 'Spring and Autumn Annals', if a feudal lord used barbarian rituals, he would be considered a barbarian; if a barbarian got immersed in the rituals of the Central Plains, he would be considered part of China". As the Huaxia expanded in the process of ethnic integration, the term "Four Barbarians" came to refer to other more distant ethnic groups outside of the Nine Provinces mapped out by Huangdi, which is still a synonym of China in Chinese literatures.

Apart from geographical and blood lineage, the distinction between Hua nation and ethnic groups is also reflected in cultural separation. The "Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals (Zuo Zhuan · Xiang Gong Fourteenth Year)" records the words of Jiang Rong's son Jü Zhi,

who came from the ethnic group in the west mountains: "We, the Rong, have different food, clothing, currency, and language from the Huaxia." Its "Ding Gong Tenth Year" quotes Confucius's words – "The barbarians should neither conspire against nor disturb the Huaxia". Where "Huaxia" clearly refers to the Zhou Dynasty in the Central Plains and its vassal states, the barbarians refer to the non-Zhou ethnic groups. The "Strategies of the Warring States · Volume XIX · Zhao Strategy Two" fully elaborates on the sense of superiority of Huaxia civilization: "China is where the wise and intelligent reside, where all things and wealth gather, where the virtuous and sage teach, where benevolence and righteousness are practiced, where poetry, books, rituals, and music are practiced, where different skills and arts are shown, where people from afar come to observe, and where barbarians emulate in admiration." The "History of Han" by Ban Gu frankly expresses outright disdain for foreign ethnic groups: "The Spring and Autumn Annals include the Xia but exclude the Yi and Di. The people of the Yi and Di are greedy and profit-seeking, with disheveled hair and left-lapelled robes, with human faces but beastly hearts. They are distinct from China in their clothing, customs, food, drink, and language. Therefore, the sage kings treated them like animals, refuse to make covenants or oaths with them since it would lead to bribery and deception, nor to attack them sine it would exhaust the army and invite bandits. Their land cannot be cultivated for food; their people cannot be placated and raised. Thus, the wise kings kept them distant and did not reach rapprochment."

As for the origin of the name "Xia Dynasty" as a national title, one theory is that the Xiahou clan was the most powerful among the twelve tribes at the time, and another theory is that Yü was enfeoffed in the land of Yangdi Daxia, with the honorary title "Earl Xia". This leads to the

concept that China is called Huaxia, and the Chinese people call themselves the sons and daughters of Huaxia. The term "Huaxia" first appeared in the "Book of Documents · Zhou Dynasty": "Huaxia and barbaric ethnic tribes were all submissive to King Wu of Zhou." "Xia" is almost certainly derived from the Xia Dynasty, while "Hua" has different explanations. One theory is that it originated from the earlier matrilineal clan leader Huaxü, who is believed to be the mother of Fuxi and Nüwa. Another theory is related to the place of origin of the Xia clan, as the tribes of the Yan Emperor and the Yellow Emperor were concentrated around Mount Hua and the Xia River. The "General Interpretation to the Law of Tang Dynasty", however, offered a literal interpretation: where Hua means "magnificent" and Xia means "large". China has the magnifance of rituals, the beauty of attire, hence it is called Hua (similar to the splendid and colorful "flower"). Indeed, the Huaxia civilization, composed of ritual music, the I Ching, the Actogram, and sophisticated writing, was highly developed at the time, with apparent reason to stay dignified over the surrounding tribes. Before the Han Dynasty, the people of the Central Plains were called Xia people, and the concept of Han people or Han nationality appeared after the Han Dynasty. After the Tang Dynasty, they were also called Tang people, and overseas Chinese are still collectively called Hua people.

4.6 The Concept of Clan in China

An agrarian society requires no more than the cooperation of family members and neighbors in production and daily life. When large Chinese population were attached to small plots of land and lived self-sufficiently within a very limited range of activities, social mobility was very weak,

unless they were forced to leave home and seek refuge elsewhere due to natural disasters or wars. At the social relationship level, this mode of production and lifestyle encouraged selfless mutual assistance and exchange of courtesies among acquaintances, particularly blood lineages, while rejecting transactions with strangers for profit. Interpersonal interactions were highly contextual and flavored with strong emotional bond. If one had to deal with strangers, people would also try to find various reasons to incorporate the stranger into the network of acquaintances. The ethical consciousness and rules formed in this way gradually extended to clans, neighborhoods, communities, the nation, and even the concept of "the whole world as one family". In this context, being familiar with complex and subtle social etiquette is a sign of maturity. Compared to professional capability, interpersonal skills in such a web of relationship becomes a stronger determinant to one's path to success. To ordinary people, while these social etiquettes bear warmth in social network, it can sometimes be annoying and burdensome.

Since the beginning of the patrilineal clan system, the inheritance of surnames through the male line has been a significant invention passed down through generations in Chinese culture. This practice was a great leap forward in genetics, as it established a cultural standard to prevent inbreeding. For populations with low mobility, this boundary is particularly important for maintaining the health of the community. On the other hand, culturally, it also reinforced the recognition and identification of blood relationships, allowing the concept of the clan, tied together by family genealogies, to be passed down through generations. Prominent families maintained strict generational naming rules, with each member's name consisting of a predetermined series of characters between their

surname and given name to indicate their generation. This system clearly defined the hierarchy of seniority within the family.

Engels pointed out in "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" that the monogamous family is not the result of individual sexual love. Marriage is a decision based on weighing pros and cons, not based on natural conditions but on economic conditions, marking the victory of private property over primitive communalism.[34] In a super stable agricultural civilization like China, interpersonal relationships are first established within the family, and the structure of society and the ideology that governs it are direct enlargements and extensions of family culture. This mode of production and living has shaped the Chinese concept of home, and various social relationships have unfolded from the source of family ethics, imbued with the strong scent of blood relationships. Folk customs such as the five-degree kinship system, including the adoption of godparents and sworn brotherhood among different surnames, the mourning system including official mourning leave, the collective punishment system in criminal law, and the Baojia system[35] in rural communities, firmly solidified the bonds and community of fate based on patrilineal kinship. The "Book of Rites · Da Zhuan" states that everything can change except for "the affection for kin, the respect for the noble, the reverence for the elder, the distinction between male and female, these are unchangeable for the people." Indeed, this family-based ethical concept has deeply embedded itself in people's thinking and discourse. For words

[34] "Selected Works of Marx and Engels", Volume 4, People's Publishing House, 1972, page 60.

[35] A rural household management system where neigbors were grouped as a unit of shared responsibility. While neighborhood policing was incentivized, unity among neighborhood was also strengthened to conceal individual wrongdoings whenever possible.

like "affectionate", "beloved", "amicable", and "benevolent", it is difficult for Western dictionaries to capture the original meaning of "kin" in these terms. Contemporary philosopher Feng Youlan said, "Loving people is a moral value, loving God is a value beyond morality".[36] However, Chinese emotional practice completely negates his assertion. Instead of abstracting collective consciousness into religious belief, it is more realistic and reliable to control the deified potential image at the level of secular ethics and amplify the love of kinship.

"Since ancient times, Chinese society has emphasized the family over the individual and the family before the state. The individual is not highly regarded, hence the liberalism of the West has never been prominent here; the state is secondary, hence modern nationalism has never been a traditional practice. ...Thus, the family-oriented nature is one of the characteristics of Chinese society."

——*Chen Guyuan: History of Chinese Legal System*

Even in a rapidly modernizing society, this traditional consciousness of kinship revolving around family still maintains a strong vitality. Until the 1980s, the redistribution of collective land to individual household in the country and the permission to set up proprietorship in cities unleased immense passion among family members to work together to raise income.

In political discourse, patriarchy has been embraced by elites and accepted by the general public as a commendable form of benevolence, thereby laying a solid foundation for authoritarianism in both micro-

[36] Feng Youlan. "A Short History of Chinese Philosophy", New World Press, 2004, page 5.

management and national governance. The "Doctrine of the Mean" in the "Book of Rites" states: "The common people are the children". The Western Han literary figure Liu Xiang explicitly proposed the popular concept of "loving the people as one's own children" in "New Sequel: Miscellaneous Affairs I": "A good ruler will reward the good and remove the people's sufferings, love the people as his own children, cover them like the sky, and embrace them like the earth". For those upright officials who adjudicated cases fairly, the people not only compared them to the clear sky but also added the title "great lord". The song "Sing a Mountain Song for the Party" performed by Caidan Zhuoma in 1963 represents the people's gratitude to the Communist Party as a leading collective: "Sing a mountain song for the party, I compare the party to my mother; my mother only gave birth to my body, but the party's glory illuminates my heart".

Deng Xiaoping once affectionately said: "I am the son of the Chinese people". On Tiananmen Square in 1984, during the parade for the 35th anniversary of the founding of the nation, a banner saying "Hello, Xiaoping" held up by a bedsheet on mosquito net poles by students from Peking University unexpectedly caused a strong reaction both domestically and internationally. On the one hand, it expressed the people's heartfelt gratitude to Deng Xiaoping, the mastermind of reform and opening up that has improved livelihood of the entire nation. More epoch-making, however, was that it marked the end of personal worship with a gentle and respectful tone, forming a stark contrast to the worship of monarchs throughout history. It broke the traditional taboo of naming great figures, without words like "great leader" or "chief architect", omitting a long list of titles, and even lacking the politically popular neutral appellation "comrade" (actually because the bedsheet was not long enough to write it). Addresing him by first name reflects his amiability, but using the word

"respectable you" was to show respect for a loyal and honest elder in Chinese culture.

Xi Jinping reversed the ethical order but still sticked to the notion of family by saying: "Treat the common people as parents and relatives."[37] Correspondingly, the people call officials "parent officials", soldiers "sons and brothers in arms", and refer to the supreme leader Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan as "Big Uncle Xi" and "Mom Peng". In "The Analects: Yan Yuan", Zi Xia comforts Sima Niu, who is unhappy because he is an only child, by saying: "A gentleman is respectful without fault, courteous and polite to others, and within the four seas, all are brothers. Why should a gentleman worry about having no brothers?" During the period of Sino-Soviet friendship, the people called the Soviet Union "big brother"; for former British Prime Minister Theresa Mary May and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the public affectionately called them "Aunt May" and "Big Mother Merkel".

In the folk culture, the bonds between relatives and hometowns are intertwined, weaving a dense network for every Chinese. An invisible mutual aid account is established with exchange of gifts, greetings and various types of favor, ready to be withdrawn whenever needed in a warm and affectionate manner. Ancestral worship by decendents from the same family tree in ancestral halls and cemeteries in the hometown attracts the gathering of wanderers far from home like magnets and kite strings. The famous lines of Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei, "Alone in a foreign land, I am twice as homesick on this festive day", and Su Shi of the Song Dynasty, "Though miles apart, we still share the same moon together",

[37] Fu Biao. "General Secretary's Interpretation of Treating the Common People as Parents' as the Essence of Being an Official", China Communist Party News Website, March 18, 2014.

resonate in the hearts of countless Chinese people, no matter how far they are from their hometowns and kin.

The “Records of the Grand Historian” recount that Xiang Yü, the Hegemon-King of Western Chu, refused to establish his capital in Guanzhong after conquering Xianyang, reasoning, “What is the point of wealth and honor if one cannot return to one's hometown? It would be like wearing brocade in the dark, unnoticed by anyone”. Liu Bang surrounded Xiang Yü's Chu army at Gaixia, using the tactic of playing Chu songs to evoke endless homesickness among his soldiers, leading to their disintegration. Xiang Yü, facing immediate defeat, chose to commit suicide at the Wu River bank rather than flee back to his hometown, because he could not bear the shame of facing his fellows at home. Li Qingzhao's poem “Summer Day Quatrain” – “To live as a hero, to die as a ghost hero. To this day, I think of Xiang Yü, unwilling to cross east of the river” - echoes as a historical finale in the starry sky admired by patriots. Although Liu Bang was far superior to the Hegemon-King of Western Chu in strategy, his glorious return as an emperor to his hometown after establishing his dynasty in Guanzhong is considered a pinnacle of traditional Chinese sentiment towards hometowns and clan concepts. However, behind this deep affection, there still exists an implicit reciprocal relationship, as reflected in popular folk sayings, “When poor, one does not visit relatives; when rich, one does not return to the hometown”, and “When poor, no one greets you in the streets; when rich, distant relatives seek you out in the mountains for favors”, revealing people's experiences of the harsh realities behind the warm relationship.

The 2024 Spring Festival witnessed 900 million people traveling across regions, most of who are returnees to their hometown. Memorial

Day (April 3) is the day to sweep the ancestrial tombyards and burn joss paper with rich offerings to the ancenstors.

There are more than 60 million Chinese living overseas. Many of them cluster in the Chinatowns and maintain a strong linkage with their hometowns in China even after they are naturalized. The Chinese population in Italy is approaching 300,000, and some local indigenous people believe that Chinese people never die because they rarely see Chinese funerals. In fact, most overseas Chinese still hold the traditional concept of returning to their roots when they pass away, making efforts to return to their hometowns for burial in their ancestral graves, as the saying goes, "a fox dies with its head pointing towards its den".

In addition, gatherings for weddings and funerals accompanied by the crowd funding model of gift giving, visiting relatives during holidays, officially recognized and folk-initiated sacrificial ceremonies, all play a cohesive role in Chinese clan culture. They also serve as important opportunities to continue depositing favors into the mutual aid account of the community of shared interests. This model has a certain religious tint, but its ethical cohesion as a social fiber is more pronounced. It first extends to friends in the form of sworn kinship or foster relationships, where two or more families or individuals without blood ties form a quasi-kinship relationship, commonly known as "adding kinship to friendship". Elders and juniors are respectively called foster parents and foster children, with the former responsible for discipline and care of the latter, who in turn have the duty to respect and support the former, albeit weaker than in an adoption relationship. There is also a form of sworn brotherhood among friends, where they take oaths to become brothers-in-arms, committing to live and die together. Both forms involve certain ceremonies, with more formal ones requiring the exchange of tokens as proof.

The difference is that sworn kinship is mostly arranged by parents, emphasizing emotional bonds, while sworn brotherhood is led by the younger generation, emphasizing loyalty.

This model further extends to many professions requiring skill transmission, hence the saying "Once a teacher, always a father". The ability of Chinese professionals to form guilds or alliances is weak, but industry governance largely follows the ethical model of the family. Almost every established industry venerates a founding master, and the transmission of skills follows a hierarchical order based on the granting of names, with the master followed by disciple sons and and disciple grandchildren, peers addressed as elder or younger brothers and sisters, and different generations called master, uncle, or nephew.

This model and its philosophy are further amplified at the national level. Sun Yat-sen's call for "Expelling the Tartars and restoring China" was so powerful because it tapped into this clan root. For decades, the tangled relationship between mainland China and Taiwan has been a sensitive issue for both sides, consuming significant resources and military strength, and remains a major stumbling block in international relations for both sides across the Strait. Without recognizing the nationalist sentiment behind the desire for reunification as people of the same Chinese nation, any judgment of this inseparable relationship based solely on modern standards of sovereignty will perpetuate misunderstandings of Chinese culture.

The idea of unifying the country has become so ingrained in people's minds that even Mencius, who emphasized the importance of the people over the ruler and even advocated for the killing or overthrowing of unjust rulers, did not hesitate to insist on establishing the absolute authority of

the monarch and the principle that "the world should be unified under one".

Mencius met with King Xiang of Liang. After leaving, he spoke to someone and said, "Looking at him, he does not seem like a sovereign; approaching him, there is nothing to fear".

Suddenly, he asked, "How can the world be stabilized?"

I replied, "It should be unified under one."

——Mencius met with King Xiang of Liang

4.7 The Concept of Filial Piety in China

The family ethics in which paternal kindness is reciprocated by children's filial piety is naturally transformed into political ethics in which ruler's benevolence is reciprocated by loyalty from the subjects. Paternal authority in the family henceforth is translated into the ruler's authority in the state. However, when paternal authority conflicts with monarchic authority, that is, when loyalty and filial piety cannot be fulfilled simultaneously, paternal authority must give way to monarchic authority, because the ruler is the head of a far larger family composed of multiple small families. Since no one can choose their parents, neither can they choose their ruler.

Infants and young children are dependent on the protection of their parents, and thus must obey their will. To prevent children from rebelling as they grow older, parents deliberately establish a set of rules centered around filial piety and infiltrate them into their consciousness in daily life, aiming to maintain the continuity of this inertia. In an agricultural society

lacking horizontal division of labor and public services, this method plays a decisive role in maintaining the growth of a family and there is also fairness imbued. This is an ecological cycle formed by vertical intergenerational exchange - the older generation nurtures the younger generation, the younger generation supports the older generation, and the younger generation also intentionally sets an example for their own offspring, in hopes of receiving the same or even higher returns as their elders, because otherwise, people have no one to rely on in their childhood and old age. Economically, this is an investment decision based on an implicit contract of mutual obligations. Given that the older generation has a natural instinct to care for the younger generation, while the latter does not, and that there is a probability that the older generation may not receive returns from a single offspring due to poor upbringing or family management, the rational decision is to have more children to diversify the risk. Of course, there is also the consideration of ensuring the inheritance of private property. Given the physical advantage of men over women in agricultural production and potential conflicts, having more sons represents a further rational choice. Hence, the popular saying “raising sons for old age” and “more sons, more blessings” are summaries of people's simple experiences.

This is a typical mode of social production and reproduction determined by the level of productive forces in a specific period, which necessarily requires a certain set of production relations to match it, first rationalizing it with public moral consciousness, and then legalizing it with institutional norms. As Marx stated in the “Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy”: “In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development

of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."[38]

To this day, rural areas still refer to families without male heirs as "extinct households", even if there are several daughters under the roof. In terms of social significance, aside from gender discrimination that values men over women, the ancient systems of concubinage and divorce were mechanisms for family reproduction and inheritance, while the systems of adoption and taking a husband into the wife's family were remedial measures. The system of one husband with multiple concubines (different to polygamy) lasted from the Yin and Zhou dynasties over a thousand years ago until it was abolished in the Civil Code "Section on Relatives" issued by the Nationalist Government in 1930, and it was not until the "Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China" in 1950 that it was completely prohibited.

Based on the family ethical norm summarized by Mencius in "Li Lou I" – "There are three unfilial acts, the greatest of which is to have no descendants."[39] The Han Dynasty "Rites of Senior Dai" stipulated the

[38] Marx, K. "Preface to A Critique of Political Economy", in Selected Works of Marx and Engels, Vol. 2, People's Publishing House, 1972, p. 82.

[39] Commentaries on the Thirteen Classics - Commentary on Mencius: "The three unfilial acts include: (1) unprincipled obedience to the will of one's parents, even if it leads them into unrighteousness; (2) being in a poor family

"Seven Grounds for Divorce", which include "disobedience to parents, childlessness, promiscuity, jealousy, serious illness (typically leprosy), blabbermouth, and theft". Adoption and taking a husband into the wife's family are both products of traditional clan concepts, ensuring that a family without male heirs can continue the lineage and inherit its ancestral property and titles. Adoption is a form of taking in, generally limited to male children within the kinship, because of the ancient belief that ancestral spirits do not accept worship from outsiders ("Gods do not delight in the non-kind, people do not worship the non-clan"). As this is a friendly practice among relatives, adopted children can still move between the two families and bear certain moral responsibilities to their biological parents. There are also cases of childless families adopting girls, intending to achieve this goal by taking a son-in-law into the family when the girl grows up. Taking a husband into the wife's family refers to a man marrying into and changing his surname to that of a family without male heirs, commonly known as "reverse insertion". For men, this is a disgraceful act of helplessness, hence the saying "An incompetent son changes his family name".

The imperial harem system was originally an expansion of the concubinage system in folk life, as in addition to having a legitimate heir to inherit the throne, there were too many territories and subjects in the "family under heaven" that needed to be governed by numerous pure-blooded princes and grandsons. Moreover, to ensure the purity of the bloodline and prevent adultery in the harem, the eunuch system was specifically employed. The "Book of Rites: Wedding Ceremony" of the Zhou Dynasty

---

situation, with elderly parents, yet not taking an official position to earn a salary to support them; (3) not marrying and having children, thus cutting off the lineage. "

states: “In ancient times, the Son of Heaven established six palaces, three consorts, nine concubines, twenty-seven wives, and eighty-one imperial consorts.” This system later evolved into the well-known “Three Palaces, Six Courtyards, and Seventy-Two Concubines”. But for most emperors, this was just a conservative statement of a customary system, with actual numbers ranging from hundreds to thousands. The Tang Dynasty had a quota of 120 women for the harem, but Emperor Xuanzong of Tang set a historical record. Bai Juyi once wrote, “Three thousand beauties in the harem”, while Du Fu said, “The previous emperor had eight thousand maids”. According to the “New Book of Tang”, during the Kaiyuan and Tianbao years (713-756 AD), Emperor Xuanzong had as many as forty thousand concubines in the main palace and other palaces in various localities!

4.8 The Root of Totalitariam and National Unity

“Subordinates seek guidance but superiors do not communicate; this is called blockage (Guanzi · Transparency of Law).” In a centralized ruling society, the upward transmission of information from the bottom to the top is accomplished through a hierarchical reporting system within the bureaucracy. The grassroots populace does not have direct channels to express their opinions to the higher-ups. Petitioning, marching, striking, and sitting-in, and other non-violent collective protest activities have always been seen as an offense to the regime and are severely suppressed. Due to the lack of communication with the people and the unwillingness to lower their status to listen to the public's demands, the handling of people’s rally of discontent by the emperor basically reflect a trilogy: initially, they advise kindly and try to divide and dissolve; after losing patience,

they hastily define the situation as a crime and forcefully disperse the crowd, then find a few leaders to severely punish.

Because the nature of the incident is determined prematurely and due to the face of authority, even if there are targeted improvements afterward, the emperor is unwilling to publicly admit its mistakes. The experience gained is often to invest more resources to further strengthen the ability to prevent and control collective incidents. Long-term suppression of public discontent weakens the people's trust in the legitimate authority. Local magnates, bandits, and religious coups will take the opportunity to form a shadow government among the people. Any major natural or man-made disasters can become the spark that ignites their rebellion. On the other hand, historical experience has repeatedly shown that any bottom-up non-violent mass movement is like a frost in late autumn, which not only fails to meet the demands of the initiators but also agitates the emperor to become more conservative and tough, thereby slowing down the pace of further reforms. In this case, the people are left with only two options: to endure or to rebel.

Chinese politics has been conducted through alternating cycles of division and unification, chaos and order. Division leads to chaos, chaos leads to conflict; unification leads to order, but prolonged order leads to corruption and decay, which in turn causes internal strife. Foreign tribes also take advantage of the situation from skirmish to invasion. Then again, heroes rise, and after a desperate struggle, they eventually restore a unified state with a mere change of rulers. Whenever a centralized tyranny is overthrown or foreign invaders are driven away, the various forces that have grown up in the chaos find it difficult to compromise and reach a mode of co-governance to concentrate on healing the wounds of war. Instead, they always fight to the end until one force defeat the rest and

monopolize power before chaos can be put to rest. Then, once the comrades-in-arms who have shared life and death on the battlefield step into the palace, they inevitably engage in court schemes until a supreme ruler with absolute authority is established. The court political rivary entails massive conspiracy and purgery. The supreme ruler turns the whole world into the private property of one person and one family, realizing the ultimate ideal of "all under heaven belongs to the king; all within the borders are the king's subjects". The Book of Rites · Questions of Zengzi states: "There is only one sun in the sky, only one king on the land, only one master in the house, and only one supreme in respect."

Unlike the transformative upheavals that occurred in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, including the complete repudiation of Cold War-era political strongmen, Mao Zedong, although gradually demystified, still retained the reverence of most people; the Communist Party collectively admitted to having made major policy mistakes, yet the Chinese people did not lose confidence in its leadership abilities. The fundamental reason is that Mao led the Communist Party to overthrow the 'Three Mountains' of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism that were oppressing the people of old China, eradicated bandits and bullies who were exploiting the villagers, and ended the miserable situation where people's lives and property were at the mercy of others. The Chinese people, having endured years of warfare, longed for governance and stability, and have historically held the belief that it's better to be a dog in a peaceful era than a human in a chaotic one. Moreover, although people's material lives did not significantly improve, many aspects such as public health, equal distribution, and women's liberation made visibly remarkable progress, and the integrity of leaders from the highest echelons to grassroots cadres made the people feel that the party and the state always

shared weal and woe with the people. In a value system where inequality is feared more than poverty, equal poverty is not terrifying. Furthermore, value judgments depend on available information, so information control also played an important role in rallying the people's hearts. In a state of information closure, people could only make vertical comparisons, and by continuously reminding them of a worse past through the "remembering bitterness and thinking sweetness" campaign, they could more deeply appreciate their current happiness and understand whom to be grateful to. The propaganda machine made them believe that people in other countries were still struggling in dire straits, waiting for the Chinese people to save them. This not only created an illusory sense of superiority for the Chinese people but also aroused their traditional passion for justice and righteousness, while also strengthening their centripetal force towards the party and government.

4.9 Culture Characteristics and Personality Traits of the Chinese Nation

The special national conditions and history of China have shaped the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture, which can generally be summarized as: the dialectics of Yin and Yang, contentment with one's fate, the unity of heaven and humanity, collectivist family and national sentiments, kinship among all people, the establishment of religion through divine teachings, secularization of beliefs, moral education through rites and music, strict distinction between Chinese and barbarians, advocacy of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith, emphasis on agriculture over commerce, emphasis on rites over laws, seeking harmony

through compromise, valuing trust and righteousness over contracts, prioritizing literature over science, and so on.

In the book Essentials of Chinese Culture first published in 1949, Liang Shuming, a comtemporary philosopher, summarized the seven unique characteristics of traditional Chinese culture as follows: (1) Chinese culture was independently created and not derived from others; (2) Chinese culture has its own characteristics and forms a complete system; (3) Only China has been able to maintain its independent national life through its self-created culture, which remains unique to this day; (4) It can absorb foreign cultures without being shaken or changed; (5) Due to its great assimilative power, it has absorbed several neighboring ethnic groups and formed the larger Chinese nation; (6) Chinese culture reached maturity in the pre-Qin period, and there has been little change or progress in the following two thousand years; (7) The influence of Chinese culture is far-reaching and significant.

For the Chinese nation, which was civilized very early, its culture has been "passed down without replacement and still exists today" because of fourteen fundamental reasons: (1) vast territory and large population; (2) assimilation and integration of a large nation; (3) a long history unparalleled in the world; (4) the existence of a great power beyond knowledge, economy, military, and politics; (5) an unchanging society and stagnant culture; (6) almost no religious life; (7) the family is the most important aspect of life for Chinese people; (8) Chinese scholarship does not advance toward science; (9) demands for democracy, freedom, and equality are not raised, and the legal system is not formed; (10) the foundation of the state is based on moral norms and education, not on law, with a strong emphasis on moral atmosphere; (11) a multicultural society with Confucianism as the main body is a stable force in Chinese society, allowing it

to survive countless disturbances without disintegrating; (12) the integration of soldiers and civilians, with the whole country as soldiers; (13) a culture of filial piety; (14) the "hermit" is a unique product of China.

Liang also combined the works of Pan Guangdan's "National Characteristics and National Hygiene" and "Humanistic Historical Perspective", Zhuang Zexuan's "National Character and Education", the Japanese official "Study of the Psychology of the Chinese People", and discussions by Japanese folk scholars to summarize ten major characteristics of the Chinese national character: (1) selfishness, which refers to a heavy emphasis on personal interests, lack of public morality, disunity, inability to cooperate, lack of organizational skills, lack of responsibility toward the state and public organizations, prioritizing personal interests over public interests, and corruption; (2) hardworking and thrifty, which refers to a habit of being hardworking, enduring hardships, tireless, frugal to the point of stinginess, and possessing a strong spirit of pragmatism and utilitarianism; (3) polite, which on one hand refers to being overly formal, insincere, emphasizing form over substance, and caring about face to the point of deceit, while on the other hand, being willing to sacrifice real interests for the sake of face and going bankrupt for the sake of pride; (4) peaceful and weak, which refers to being gentle, peaceful, ashamed of using violence, emphasizing literature over martial arts, being elegant but somewhat weak, and preferring harmony and compromise; (5) content with one's lot, which refers to being content with one's fate, having a sense of self-satisfaction, being poor but happy, poor without complaints, keeping to oneself, doing one's best and leaving the rest to fate, enjoying natural scenery, not valuing power, and having little desire to conquer nature with human effort; (6) conservative, which refers to preferring the old over the new, following traditions for safety, having little spirit of innovation and

adventure, being attached to one's native place, and preferring stability over change; (7) careless, which refers to being vague, not seeking precision, not valuing time, not caring about numbers, being perfunctory, not thorough, not distinguishing clearly, and lacking a definite pattern; (8) enduring and cruel, with endurance referring to the ability to endure self-discipline, self-encouragement, bearing humiliation, and suffering to a very high degree, and cruelty referring to a lack of sympathy for people and objects; (9) resilience and flexibility, with both physical, mental, and historical aspects being tenacious and enduring, and having a large degree of flexibility; (10) mature and sophisticated, being calm and unhurried, steady, mature and prudent, having a lot of insight, being reasonable and fair, not showing off, and having the greatest adaptability and potential."[40]

After nearly a century of historical changes, although the Chinese culture and national characteristics summarized by Liang have undergone significant changes, many of his observations remain valid in today's era, which is a reflection of its historical and cultural resilience.

[40] Liang Shuming. "Essentials of Chinese Culture", Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2005, pages 7-8; 10-23; 24-25.

5

THE SOURCE OF CHINESE PHILOSOPHY

People often describe the basic characteristics of traditional Chinese culture as profound and extensive without much thought. Indeed, over thousands of years, a vast array of thoughts and cultural classics have been born on the land of China, especially the philosophy, ethics, politics, and literature of the pre-Qin period, which, like bright latterns hanging in the night air, have illuminated the path of generations of scholars and heroic actors in their search for truth. No wonder Su Dongpo once lamented: "Just by contemplating the three books of I Ching (Book of Changes), Shang Shu (Book of Documents), and Lun Yu (Analects), I feel that my life has not been wasted."

Although traditional Chinese culture has many schools and branches, it can be summarized as "Three Teachings and Nine Streams". Cai Yuanpei attributed the origin of Chinese ethical thought to the three classics of Yi Jing, Shang Shu, and Shi Jing (Book of Poetry), stating that "Yi Jing is cosmology, from the aspect of knowledge, it determines the scope of human affairs based on the way of heaven; Shang Shu is political history,

from the aspect of will, it states the ideal of morality; Shi Jing is lyricism, from the aspect of emotion, it reveals the purpose of teaching lessons."[41]

However, in terms of its development that continues to this day, its basic composition can be summarized as "one source, four streams", namely Taoism, Confucianism, Legalism, and Buddhism, that dominate the currents of Chinese thought and culture. Including the highly localized Buddhist tradition, the source of all four streams can be traced back to the Yi Jing without a doubt. Except for Legalism, the other three main currents each consist of a combination of thought, religion, and magic, although Confucianism has a relatively bland religious flavor.

In terms of thought, Taoism advocates naturalness and inaction, holding a strong nihilism in political governance and social morality. Confucianism follows the moral principles of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faithfulness on the individual level, and the ethical concepts reciprocal relationship between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, senior and junior as well as between siblings. It advocates the realization of a harmonious world through self-cultivation and moral education, thus having a strong humanistic sentiment. Legalism insists on the goal of enriching the country and strengthening the military by the monarch through legislation and punishment, belonging to an authoritarian doctrine of governance; Buddhism is a complete institutionalized foreign religion, advocating transcendence and enlightenment to dissolve the endless worries of the mundane world, belonging to a typical doctrine of transcendence. Although the four streams each have their own banner, they have borrowed from each other in constant debates, and even become interdependent, repeatedly waxing and waning as the dominant

[41] Cai Yuanpei. "History of Chinese Ethics", Shanghai Century Publishing Group, 2011, page 3.

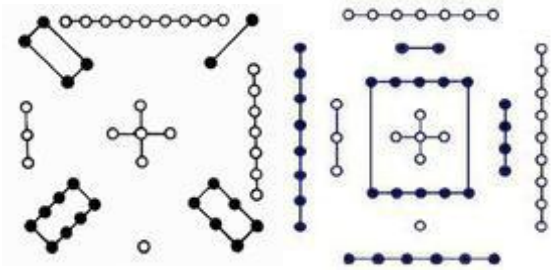
thought in different historical periods, with both overt and covert changes occurring within the same school. However, the continuity and inclusiveness of the development history of the Chinese nation have established a strong sense of subjectivity, with various ideas continuously converging, precipitating, and merging, gradually forming a resilient and flexible value system, deeply permeating people's thinking patterns and behaviors. In this regard, the modern thinker Ma Yifu's summary of "seeing through that the Three Teachings are of one nature, and Yao, Shun, Confucius, and Buddha are one person" indeed simplifies and hits the essence of Chinese culture.

5.1 The Mystic River Map and Incription

The traditional culture of China can be traced back to the legendary River Map (Hetu) and Incription (Luoshu), which are shrouded in mystery to this day. They appeared in the Central Plains of East Asia, the birthplace of Chinese civilization, and are named after their respective appearances in the Yellow River and the Luo River. As for their specific origins and creators, it remains an unsolved mystery. The simplest explanation is to categorize them as "heavenly objects". According to legend, during the time of Fuxi, a dragon horse emerged from the Yellow River carrying the Map and a divine turtle emerged from the Luo River carrying the Incription (Figure 5-1). Both are recognized as the origins of Chinese culture. They are known as the "cosmic Rubik's cube" because they consist of patterns made up of three mysterious arrays of even and odd lines and dots. They inspire endless imagination, but fundamentally, they represent the Five Elements and Yin and Yang. The Narative chapter of the "I Ching" states: "The Yellow River brought forth the Map, and the Luo River

brought forth the Incription; the sage followed them". Fuxi observed the celestial phenomena and the earth, and through observing the natural world and all things, he understood the mysteries of the universe. He categorized a diverse world into eight categories and used combinations of long and short lines representing Yin and Yang to form the Actogram (2 to the power of 3), hence the saying "The River Map emerged and the Actogram were drawn" (from the "Collected Works of Zhu Xi", Volume 78). Therefore, there is a historical saying: "Fuxi was bestowed the heavenly mandate as king, received the River Map, and drew it, thus forming the Actogram" ("The Book of Han · Records of Five Elements"). King Wen of Zhou, Ji Chang, further developed this into the Sixty-four Hexagrams (2 to the power of 6) while imprisoned by King Zhou of Shang in Youli. In 2006, an archaeological team discovered a black pottery spinning wheel with an Eight Trigrams pattern in Huaiyang, Henan, dating back 4,500 years. The Incription is the nine major laws bestowed by the Heavenly Emperor to Yü for governing the world, hence called the Nine Categories.

Figure 5-1 The River Map and Incription



It is speculated that the well-known Yin-Yang double-fish like diagram also belongs to the same ancient period of the Yellow and Luo rivers as a "heavenly object", initially representing the natural vortex formed by the confluence of the Yellow and Luo rivers, later interpreted as Yin and Yang, the Five Elements, and the Actogram. It was not made public until the Song Dynasty by Taoist Chen Tuan, and its current form was released by Zhou Dunyi. The basic concept is that Taiji (the Ultimacy) generates Yang when in motion and Yin when still; Yin and Yang depend on, penetrate, contain, and balance each other, waxing and waning, transforming at their extremes, and merging to give rise to the Five Elements: water, fire, wood, metal, and earth. The Narative chapter of the "I Ching" states: "There is the Way of Heaven, the Way of Man, and the Way of Earth, combining the three powers and harmonizing them". Thus, the sage aligns their virtue with heaven and earth, their brightness with the sun and moon, their order with the four seasons, and their fortune with the spirits. The noble person cultivates good fortune, while the petty person brings about misfortune. Therefore, it is said: "The Way of Heaven is called Yin and Yang; the Way of Earth is called softness and hardness; the Way of Man is called benevolence and righteousness".

The relationship between Yin and Yang displayed in the Taiji diagram (Figure 5-2) reflects the inclusiveness of Chinese culture and a mellow and lenient attitude towards life, fundamentally denying the tendency towards extreme radicalism. The dialectical concept of Yin and Yang supports a balanced epistemology for all things, with the idea that fortune and misfortune depend on each other, and things will reverse when they reach an extreme ("Reversal is the movement of the Dao"). The practical rationality derived from this view, along with admonitions such as moderation, sorrow born from excess joy, preparedness in peace, knowing when

to stop, and moderation in all things, provides people with a flexible and practical way of life. On one hand, it cautions people not to be overly demanding in their dealings with others and not to relentlessly pursue those who are clearly at a disadvantage; on the other hand, it lights a beacon of hope for those mired in difficult situations, believing that enduring today's adversity holds the promise of a better tomorrow. This concept is resonated by the closing lines of Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind": "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

Figure 5-2 Taiji Diagram



The statement "Water that is too clear has no fish, and a person who is too scrutinizing has no followers" from the "Notes to the Book of Rite by Senior Dai · Zi Zhang Asks Confucius How to Step into the Officialdom" reflects the inclusiveness implied in the Taiji diagram, meaning that if the water is too clear, fish cannot survive; if a person is too shrewd, he will lose companions. However, this concept can also dilute the pursuit

of refinement, truth, and justice, providing consolation and relief for those who choose to muddle through and protect themselves.

The S-curve formed by the intersection of Yin and Yang along their edges in the Taiji diagram embodies the philosophical concept of "moderation". Ill moderation creates imbalance of the two forces, ending in rough edges along the S-curve, leading to frictions and conflicts. Taoism advocates the "Middle Way" - optimal appropriateness - from the Yin or gentle side: "All things bear Yin and embrace Yang, achieving harmony through the central dynamics", "Excessive speech leads to exhaustion, better to maintain the middle". Confucianism advocates the "Doctrine of the Mean" from the Yang or firm side: "The middle is called being unbiased, the mean is called being unchanging", "The middle is the foundation of the world, and harmony is the universal path. Achieving the middle and harmony, heaven and earth are well positioned, and all things are nurtured". The Yin-Yang theory also aligns with Buddhist causality, and the Madhyamaka school founded by Nagarjuna proposed the concept of the "Middle Way": "Not falling into the extremes of existence or non-existence is the Middle Way". The S-curve of Yin and Yang, distinct in black and white yet smooth and accessible, signifies the character of a Chinese gentleman: discerning right from wrong in reason, modest and courteous in attitude, measured and accommodating in behavior, convenient for others and oneself. As Mencius said of Confucius: "Confucius did not go to extremes" ("Mencius · Li Lou Chapter II").

5.2 I Ching

If the River Map and Incription are still considered as myths that need to be verified, the I Ching is regarded as the source of Chinese culture

because it most systematically expounds the philosophical thoughts and cosmology of Chinese civilization. Its content involves multiple disciplines such as astronomy, religion, philosophy, self-cultivation, medicine, arithmetic, rites and music, and military. It depicts the state and laws of all things in the world through the alternation and constant changes of yin and yang, emphasizing the cyclical nature of all things, the mutual generation and overcoming of yin and yang, containing the theory of chaos, and highlighting the dialectics of dualism.

According to textual research, the I Ching originally included three parts: the Lianshan, the Guicang, and the Zhouyi, with the former two lost despite a number of fake versions available. It is also collectively called stalk divination in which the ancient Chinese used 50 sticks of yarrow stalks to do divination or prediction.

The Zhouyi consists of the Jing (Classic) and the Zhuan (Commentaries). The former is believed to be composed by King Wen of Zhou in the early Western Zhou dynasty, with hexagrams and line statements for divination to predict natural and social changes; the latter is a commentary on the former, comprising ten articles collectively known as the Ten Wings (Shiyi). It was finalized during the Warring States period thanks to the effort of Confucius and his disciples.

The Zhouyi aims to guide human practice with naturalistic and mystical thoughts, hence it says, “The great man is one who unites his virtue with that of heaven and earth, his brightness with that of the sun and moon, his order with that of the four seasons, and his fortune with that of the spirits. He follows heaven’s ways and does not go against them; he follows the times of heaven. If heaven does not go against him, how much less will men? How much less will spirits?” Due to its profound insights into the relationship between heaven and man as well as its obscure and

polysemous language, it creates a vast imaginative space for readers with different purposes and emotions. The Zhouyi became the only work that was revered as a classic by all schools throughout the dynasties.

It was first revered by the Confucian school as the sacred canon, the foremost of all classics, and the source of the great way; the Daoist school also listed it as the first of the Three Mysteries, along with the works of Laozi and Zhuangzi; the Zen (dhyāna) school in Buddhism is a product of the long-term integration of Indian Mahayana Buddhism with the Three Mysteries of Taoism. Outside of Confucianism, two branches of I Ching studies developed alongside Confucian line: one is practical in divination, and the other is philosophical in Taoism. The development of I Ching studies in various schools marks the slow and tortuous evolution of Chinese culture from mystical witchcraft to humanistic science.

Some people compare the I Ching with India's Vedas, the Western Bible, and the Arab world's Quran, collectively calling them the four great classics of world culture. "As the first classic of Eastern culture, the I Ching is revered not only by the Chinese nation but also by Eastern nations such as Japan and Korea. The South Korean flag features the Taiji diagram and the Actogram; the Japanese nation is called the Yamato nation. 'Yamato' is derived from the Zhouyi: 'To maintain harmony and great peace is beneficial and correct.' The name of the dominant religion in Japan, Shinto, is believed to be copied from the verse of Zhouyi: 'The way of the gods establishes teachings.' If we divide world culture into Eastern and Western cultures, then Western culture can be represented by the Bible, and Eastern culture can be represented by

the I Ching."[42] But compared to the Bible in which images, events, context, and teachings are quite concrete and legible, thus have served the development of religion since its birth, the I Ching strives for an all-encompassing philosophy and divination penetrating various fields. While it helps nurture profound wisdom, its illegibility and ambiguity easily lead to confusion and endless debate.

5.3 Chinese Metaphysics: School of Mystery

When discussing the ancient sources of thought, setting aside the legends of the River Map and Incription, from the I Ching to the Tao Te Ching, the character "玄" (xuan) is indispensable for summarizing their characteristics. The original meaning of "玄" is a deep red color approaching black, so Xu Shen's Explanation of Characters interprets it as: "玄" (xuan), profound and distant.

As a negative philosophical trend that prevailed during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties, Metaphysics developed based on the so-called "Three Schools of Mystery" from Zhouyi, Laozi, and Zhuangzi. Its meaning comes from Laozi's description of the Dao in the Tao Te Ching: "Mystery upon mystery, it is the gateway to all mysteries". It inherits the core idea of "the nihility giving birth to all things", where this "nihility" cannot be perceived but can dominate everything, hence the so-called "theory on nihil values".

With the collapse of the Han Dynasty, which had unified China for four hundred years, the literati-official class, long immersed in orthodox

[42] Zhang Qicheng. Chinese Studies is the Spiritual Homeland of the Chinese People, China Social Sciences Net, November 28, 2014. http://fund.cssn.cn/st/st_zpwht/201411/t20141128_1421301.shtml

Confucian thought, found themselves at a loss in a turbulent world. They grew tired of the tedious classical studies of the Han Dynasty and disdained the divination theology popular among the common people since the Qin and Han Dynasties. Out of helplessness, they chose a kind of escapism and indulged in philosophical debates on metaphysics in salon-style circles. The talented and eccentric "Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove" were typical representatives of this Wei-Jin style, who enjoyed metaphysical discussions, avoiding practical topics related to national affairs and people's livelihoods. They debated on inscrutable topics such as existence and non-existence, motion and stillness, life and death, and reality and illusion. The rest was about drinking and singing, creating a scene where "the traces of Confucianism and Mohism are despised, and the thought of Taoism flourish" (Book of Jin, Biography of Guo Xiang).

Politically, it advocated dormant governance and integrated Confucian "ritual teaching (emphasizing on ethical code of hierarchy)" with Daoist "naturalness", reflecting a tendency to "go beyond ritual teaching to embrace naturalness, not emulating the likes of Tang and Wu, but rather belittling Confucius and Zhou". In fact, Confucian thought had already deeply penetrated their ideology and lifestyle. For example, Ji Kang said, "The [Confucius] Six Classics primarily emphasize restraint and guidance, while human nature finds joy in following desires. Restraint and guidance go against one's wishes, while following desires leads to naturalness. Therefore, the attainment of naturalness does not come from the restraint and guidance of the Six Classics, and the essence of one's nature does not require the rites and laws that violate emotions". (On the Difficulty of Naturally Loving Learning). However, while attacking rites and laws, he also said, "There is a distinction between nobility and humility, and there is an order between superiors and inferiors, which

is called rites". He advocated Confucian morals at home, saying, "One need not be overly humble, but should be greatly courteous; one need not be overly modest, but should be thoroughly generous". Metaphysics also revered Confucius as a sage, and they interpreted Confucius in a metaphysical way. For instance, Wang Bi believed that Confucius valued nihility, while Ji Kang said that Confucius was good at nurturing life. The pioneering contribution of Metaphysics was to harmonize the Daoist and Confucian schools by "bringing Dao into Confucianism", but its negative impact was to advocate that common people "follow heaven and accept fate", thus it was welcomed by those in power. As for their personal behavior, they fully displayed a deliberate attempt to be unconventionally indulgent, for the sake of creating a distinctive label.

5.4 Hundred Schools of Thought

The climatic traditional Chinese thought can be traced back to the pre-Qin era, with various schools forming their own identities and theories during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods (770-221 BC.). It reached a peak of flourishing diversity, known as the Hundred Schools of Thought, represented by thinkers such as Laozi, Confucius, Mencius, Zhuangzi, Mozi, Guiguzi, Liezi, Shenzi, and Han Feizi. In this era, the Eastern Zhou royal power, as the common ruler of the entire China over a number of monarches, gradually declined and lost control over the feudal order. As a result, the feudal lords rose up, competing for supremacy, with their influence waxing and waning. Faced with the real pressure of survival resulting from the predatory competition, the monarchs of the feudal states had to actively recruit talented people, seeking good

governance to save the state or achieve hegemony, thus providing a rich political soil for the movement of intellectuals and the prosperity of various schools of thought. Of course, the dramatic social changes also allowed ambitious declining nobles and commoners like Bailixi, Su Qin, Guan Zhong, Confucius, and Han Feizi to stand out, achieving their political ambitions by assisting a monarch in establishing hegemony.

In the Eastern Han Dynasty, the historian Ban Gu summarized ten schools in the "History of Han - Record of the Literati", including Taoism, Confucianism, Legalism, Mohism, Rituals, Yin-Yang, Agriculture, Diplomacy, Miscellaneous, and Novelists. In terms of their intellectual origins, Ban Gu believed that the so-called Hundred Schools of Thought all originated from official backgrounds. For example, the Daoist school originated from the historiographer's office, the Confucian school from the Minister of Education's office, the Mohist school from the guardians of the ancestral temples, the Legalist school from the judicial office, the School of Rituals from the ritual office, the Yin-Yang school from the office of astronomy, the School of Agriculture from the office of agriculture and grain, the School of Diplomacy originated from the envoy's office, the School of Miscellaneous from the advisory office, and the School of Novelists from the local office responsible for collecting folk tales and history. Moreover, the rise and fall of these schools of thought were invariably dependent on the strength of the political forces they were attached to, and their fate was ultimately determined by later rulers based on pragmatic principles. For example, the School of Novelists was eventually excluded because it was not considered proper in the eyes of the rulers as it was a collection of anecdotes and rumors from the groot roots of the society. The remaining nine schools, along with Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, were collectively referred to as "Three Teachings

and Nine Schools" by later generations. Coincidentally, the Mohist school, known for its straightforwardness and perseverance, met with collective extinction because it refused to submit to the ruling Han Dynasty and their last cohort chose to drown themselves in the sea.

In fact, labeling different thinkers with specific school tags based on their core ideas, while ignoring their cross-school diversity, is a crude method of classification. For example, the book "Guanzi" is a collection of works that elevate Guan Zhong by the Jixia Daoist school, thus creating the distinctive Guanzi school of Jixia learning. However, the "History of Han - Record of the Literati" categorizes it under the Daoist category, wheras "History of - Record of Books" positions it under the Legalist category, and the Encyclopedia of the Four Treasuries (Siku Quanshu) under the Legalist category of the Zi (Philosophers) section. In terms of the content of "Guanzi", it encompasses theories from Legalism, Confucianism, Taoism, Yin-Yang, School of Rituals, School of Military, and School of Agriculture.

From Duke Huan to King Xuan, the Qi state maintained a tradition of attracting scholars from all over the world to lecture, granting them the title of senior officials without specific duties, but simply to discuss and debate. This led to the formation of the Jixia Academy, similar to Plato's Academy (Hekademia) established north of Athens in the same era, which also had the nature of a permanent forum. At its peak, it gathered "hundreds of thousands of people", becoming a hub for the contention of the Hundred Schools of Thought during the Warring States period. Shen Buhai, also a representative of the Jixia Academy, although later categorized as a Legalist, had highly compatible ideas with Taoism and Confucianism. He proposed: "Heaven has light but does not worry about people's darkness; the earth has wealth but does not worry about people's

poverty; the sage has virtue but does not worry about people's danger". Since the people have their own instincts and wisdom "to seek their own safety", heaven, earth, and the ruler can all "do nothing". This clearly belongs to the Daoist principle of non-action or non-intervention. He also integrated Confucian and Legalist thoughts by proposing: "A wise ruler acts according to intelligence and divides responsibilities according to wisdom; determines rewards and divides wealth according to law; practices virtue and maintains moderation according to rites".

5.5 The Four Books and Five Classics

The repertoire of Four Books and Five Classics is a collection of classic literature on Chinese traditional thoughts formed through the meticulous refinement through extensive editing, annotation and citation by the school of Confucianism. Especially since the Han Emperor Wu established the exclusive veneration of Confucianism, and the Song Dynasty further designated them as essential reading for the imperial examinations, they have been revered as classics of Chinese studies, exerting an immensely profound influence on Chinese culture and philosophical conception.

The Five Classics originally consisted of six texts: the Book of Poetry, the Book of Documents, the Book of Rites, the Book of Music, the I Ching, and the Spring and Autumn Annals. Due to the early loss of the Book of Music, Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty officially sanctioned the Five Classics. The Four Books refer to the Analects, the Mencius, the Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean. The combined term "Four Books and Five Classics" was established by Zhu Xi, a Neo-Confucian scholar of the Southern Song Dynasty. Zhuangzi summarized the core content of

these six classics: “The Book of Poetry expresses aspirations, the Book of Documents records events, the Book of Rites prescribes conduct, the Book of Music fosters harmony, the I Ching explains yin and yang, and the Spring and Autumn Annals establish proper identity. These texts are scattered throughout the world but are rooted in central China, and often serve as the source of cititions by various schools”.

The Book of Poetry is the earliest anthology of Chinese poetry, containing 311 poems. It is believed to have been compiled by Yin Jifu of the Western Zhou Dynasty based on his collection of folk songs and verses, and edited by Confucius. The anthology reflects various aspects of the pre-Qin period, such as politics, economy, geography, social customs, labor, daily life, and romantic love, and also expresses the long-accumulated emotions and aspirations for a better life of the people. The Book of Poetry is divided into three sections: the “ballad”, the “Eulogy”, and the “Chant”.

The Book of Documents is a collection of speeches and historical records from ancient monarchs and ministers, serving as a compilation of political documents from the pre-Qin era. Its contents span from the legendary emperors Yao and Shun to the Spring and Autumn period, covering the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties. The text is known for its obscurity and mystical nature, referred to by historians as “the book of the heavenly realm”. For example, the “Hong Fan” chapter is believed to be the “River Incription” given by heaven to Yü the Great for flood control. The Book of Documents originally contained 3240 chapters, but Confucius reduced it to 120, divided into the “Yü”, “Xia”, “Shang”, and “Zhou” books. The current version contains a mix of authentic and spurious chapters. The “Sixteen-Character Aspiration” considered the essence of Chinese cultural tradition, comes from the “Counsels of the Great Yu” in the

Book of Documents, which states: "Human minds are unpredictable, while the way of Tao is subtle and profound. One must adhere to precision and integrity, and act with appropriate balance". This Aspiration is said to have been passed down from the abdication process of Yao, Shun, and Yü.

The Book of Rites consists of the "Record of Rites by Senior Dai", the "Record of Rites by Junior Dai", and the "Record of Rites by Qingpu", recording the ritual systems and related statutes of the pre-Qin period, especially the Zhou dynasty. The "Record of Rites by Qingpu" has been lost, the "Record of Rites by Senior Dai" is severely damaged, and only the "Record of Rites by Junior Dai" compiled by Dai Sheng during the Western Han Dynasty remains intact. Confucianism has always emphasized governing the world with rites, asserting that "all five relationships - ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, brothers, friends - are governed by rites". Therefore, the Book of Rites provides procedural rules for various aspects of social life and interpersonal relationships, including dress, food, housing, transportation, speech, behavior, marriage, funerals, and weddings, as well as maxims that highlight moral cultivation and ideals of governance.

The Spring and Autumn Annals is the earliest chronological history of China, recording the history of the state of Lu during the Eastern Zhou period. Its representative works include the "Zuo Commentary", the "Gongyang Commentary", and the "Guliang Commentary" (collectively known as the "Three Commentaries on the Spring and Autumn Annals"). Confucius infused the compilation with a wealth of Confucian political principles and ethical concepts on governance, making it the "prime text" of Confucian thought. Hence, the "Mencius" states that "The Spring and Autumn Annals are the affairs of the Son of Heaven".

Confucius's disciple Zixia once said, "Those who have a state cannot but study the Spring and Autumn Annals... If one can expound the principles of the Spring and Autumn Annals and implement its ways, it is not only about averting disasters, but also about attaining the virtues of Yao and Shun".

The Six Arts refer to the six basic skills that Confucianism required students to master in ancient China: rites, music, archery, charioteering, calligraphy, and arithmetic. The appearance of the Five Classics predates that of the Four Books. The saying "King Wen, while imprisoned, developed the Actograms by studying the I Ching; Confucius, while in distress, composed the Spring and Autumn Annals" is widely circulated in historical circles, implying that no hardship can extinguish the aspiration of great men.

The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean were originally part of the Book of Rites. It was not until the Song Dynasty that Zhu Xi extracted them and compiled them into separate volumes, alongside the Analects and the Mencius, collectively known as the Four Books. They were also established as basic subjects for imperial examinations, along with the Five Classics. The Great Learning has been highly esteemed by Confucian scholars throughout the ages for its lofty ideals of self-cultivation and governance. Zheng Xuan of the Han Dynasty commented in his annotations to the Book of Rites, "The Great Learning is so named because it records the extensive learning necessary for governance". Zhu Xi regarded it as the foremost of the Four Books and stated in his "Collected Commentaries on the Four Books", "The Great Learning is the subject of study by the great people".

5.6 Fervour for National Traditional Culture

Xi Jinping has elevated the promotion of China's excellent traditional culture to the height of guarding the soul of the nation, considering it an important part of realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation on the basis of consolidating the "Four Confidences". He proposed, "Chinese excellent traditional culture is the spiritual homeland that the Chinese nation can never part with". The so-called spiritual homeland is where the entire nation's soul finds solace and faith finds a resting place. In response, the fervour for thel study of ies among the public has already become a trendsetter in recent years.

Undoubtedly, traditional Chinese culture carries a wealth of ancient literary texts, philosophical ideas and ethical tenets. In the Han Dynasty, Liu Xiang and his son's "Seven Archives" (including the table of content and general introduction) Ban Gu's "Book of Han: Arts and Literature" divided texts into six categories: the Six Arts, various philosophers, military texts, mathematics, technical skills, and poetry. The "Book of Sui: Catalogue of Texts" established a cataloging system based on the four categories of Classics, History, Philosophers, and Collections, but also included contents from Taoism and Buddhism. The "New Book of Tang: Arts and Literature" compiled by Ouyang Xiu and others in the Northern Song Dynasty also said, "Both capitals gathered books in four categories, arranged in the order of A, B, C, D, and listed the four libraries of Classics, History, Philosophy, and Collections (of poems)." This catalogue practice had been carried on until the Qing Dynasty, with Classics referring to Confucian canonical works, History to various genres of official histories, Philosophy to the works of various pre-Qin thinkers, and Collections to anthologies of poetry. Today, the classification of Classics, History,

Philosophers, and Collections has become a general concept encompassing all ancient Chinese texts, but the craze for traditional culture mostly focuses on Confucius literature and ethical teaching.

The concept of traditional culture as part of national studies was born in modern times in contrast and even opposition to Western studies. One obvious reason is that China has a profound historical accumulation in the classic works, and the other motivation is that it is considered conducive to awakening the nation's self-confidence and self-esteem. In fact, at the end of the 19th century, facing the impact of Western studies brought by the country's transition from Asia to Europe, more conservative Japanese intellectuals also called for the promotion of "national studies". At the turn of the last century, when China was striving for survival, a group of scholars who had long lived in Japan, led by Zhang Taiyan, Deng Shi, and Liang Qichao, were deeply inspired and took it upon themselves to preserve the essence of the nation and revitalize the national culture. They reflected on the shortcomings of completely denying traditional Chinese culture in the New Culture Movement and vigorously advocated for the study of national culture. They successively founded newspapers and organized research groups, from the establishment of the Society for the Preservation of National Studies in Shanghai in 1905 to the establishment of the Institute of National Studies at Tsinghua University in Beijing in 1925, pushing the research of national studies to a climax with fruitful results. In the field of cultural construction, this was a rare brilliance presented in the chaotic history of the Republic of China since the Qin and Han dynasties, achieving a large number of masters on national studies, with no scholars today being able to match them. Tsinghua Institute of National Studies only existed for a short period of 4 years, but the four great masters - Wang Guowei, Liang Qichao, Chen Yinke, and

Zhao Yuanren - have always been a delightful topic in academic circles. Looking back, it is not only their academic achievements but more importantly, their educational and academic principles that are deeply inspiring.

From the epitaph written by Mr. Chen Yinke for Wang Guowei (Figure 5-3), we can see the lofty intellectual realm and shining personal charm of these masters of Chinese studies. In particular, the phrase "the independence of spirit and the freedom of thought" should serve as an inspiration for educators and scholars of all generations in their pursuit of knowledge.

Figure 5-3 Monument of Wang Guiwei



Scholars and intellectuals study and pursue knowledge to free their minds and aspirations from the shackles of worldly mediocrity. Only then can truth be promoted and spread. If thought cannot be free, it is better to be dead. The subtle principles guarded by benevolent and wise people throughout history are not something that vulgar and narrow-minded people dare to aspire to. Mr. Wang Guowei used his death to demonstrate his independent and free will. His death was not, as some people argue, due to personal grudges or the rise and fall of a family's dynasty. Alas! This stone is erected near the lecture hall to express our grief for the professor, to show that we will never forget him, and to record the precious integrity of this philosopher, highlighting the vast and boundless Dao of the universe. We cannot predict how future generations will evaluate the professor's writings. There may be times when they are not valued, or when people find aspects of his theories debatable. However, we know that only his independent spirit and free thought can endure for thousands of years, shining eternally like the sun, moon, and stars.

After being suspended for 80 years, the Tsinghua University Institute of National Studies was grandly restored in November 2009, claiming to inherit the tradition of the old Tsinghua Institute of National Studies and promote the research and development of national studies. However, times have changed. Although it is led by Professor Chen Lai, the assistant to Feng Youlan and the eldest disciple of Zhang Dainian, the towering building of this research institute has not yet revealed a productive demeanor of rejuvenating classic national studies. Instead, it has become a place for for popular training and networking.

The Baidu Encyclopedia entry titled “Institute of Chinese Studies at Tsinghua University” comments: “The dependency of thought and

academics on political power seems to be a fundamental phenomenon in tradition. The initial 'craze for Chinese studies' appeared to rebel against such a traditional pattern, but in the end, it turned into an old tradition of subservience to power. ... Because it inherits an 'old' reputation, we have more and greater expectations, hoping it can break through the existing system and return to a pure or purely traditional form. However, the involvement of political power and economic interests behind the 'craze for Chinese studies' has deepened our concerns about the restoration of tradition."

Unlike the Soviet Union and now Russia, China experienced a drastic, transformative upheaval of its traditional values and culture from the May Fourth Movement to the end of the Cultural Revolution. In contrast, Russia managed to retain a more intact continuity of its traditions, from Eastern Orthodoxy to literature and arts. This means that if China wishes to establish substantial cultural confidence based on its traditions, reliance on the promotion of classic Chinese literature is far from being adequate. It needs to devise systematic strategies and make more arduous efforts to fill in the gaps and engage in a long-term, unremitting struggle against the residual anti-traditional forces often labeled as revolutionary.

5.7 Summary Commentary

Regarding the source of Chinese philosophy, some say that only the "I Ching" is revered, while others include the "Book of Documents" and the "Book of Songs". As for the fundamental branches, there are those who speak of the three streams of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and others who refer to the "Three Teachings and Nine Streams", depending on the historical stage addressed and the perspectives and

classification methods adopted. Considering the continuity of Chinese civilization, it seems more reasonable to trace its historical traditions in a retrospective manner based on the vivid cultural expressions of today. Although the diverse thoughts of philosophers during the Spring and Autumn period have mostly entered the dust of history, the main branches of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism remain vibrant to this day. However, what is often overlooked is the enduring vitality of Legalism. In fact, although emperors and opinion leaders superficially advocate the soft social order encompassed by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and wish to learn from the downfall of Qin due to Legalist practices, the methods of controlling people found in "Book of Lord Shang" as a culmination of Legalist thought, have proven time and again to be a valuable cultural and political legacy.

The traditional Chinese philosophical writings are difficult to categorize into modern academic disciplines, as philosophy, ethics, political science, and secular moral teachings are often mixed together, and it is hard to clearly delineate materialism from idealism or scholasticism from pragmatism. They are lofty in intent, concise in language, neat in rhetoric, and filled with thought-provoking and even introspective maxims, but they do not focus on strict conceptual definitions or logical derivations. They resemble a series of ink wash paintings in freehand style, neither completely abstract nor seriously realistic, retaining enough blank space on the canvas. Unlike Western philosophy, which is meticulous and even aggressive, Chinese thinkers aim not for absolute rationality, but to enlighten wisdom. Even within the same school or from the same author, contradictions may exist, which precisely validates the complex psychology of the readers, evoking emotional resonance. This perhaps more closely adheres to the original meaning of philosophy, which is "love of wisdom".

Perhaps due to the lack of professional philosophers in traditional China, from a purely academic standpoint, Chinese philosophical thought is difficult for Western philosophers to appreciate. Hegel compared Taoist thought with ancient Greek philosophy, noting that the "Tao Te Ching" speaks of something universal, somewhat like the beginnings of Western philosophy. However, he denied the philosophical credentials of the "Analects", describing it as common-sense morality, which can be found in other cultures. "Confucius was a practical worldly-wise man, with only kind, seasoned, and moral admonitions to offer, beyond which we cannot derive any particular significance." In his view, Confucius formally set the duties of sovereign and subject, father and son, where these duties do not arise from the free will of the individual. Hegel pointed out that Chinese ethical teachings served autocratic politics. In China, only the emperor was free, and everyone else was devoid of freedom, all decrees emanating from the emperor's will. "Subjects are considered to be still in a state of infancy." The relationship between sovereign and subject is an extension of family relations. "Within the family, they are not individuals with personalities, because they live within a unit bound by blood relations and natural duties. Within the state, they similarly lack personality; for the most prominent relationship in the state is that of the family head, the emperor, like a stern father, forms the foundation of the government, managing all departments of the state."

Under the rule of successive feudal dynasties, mainstream Chinese philosophical and ethical thought underwent transformations and degenerated into tools for maintaining imperial and hierarchical social systems. The resulting moral norms and legal standards emphasized individual duties in a collectivist atmosphere, even viewing any individual's desires for self-satisfaction and actions as evil, and preemptively elevating selfless

dedication and sacrifice as noble spiritual pursuits. This duty-based guiding ideology, while fostering an intuitionist sense of responsibility, harmed the public's moral reasoning, increasing unthinking blindness. First, its evaluative standards focused on moral motives, as exemplified by the once-popular "instant thought of fighting selfishness and revisionism", while neglecting rational speculation on substantive moral issues, unwilling to consider comprehensively and long-term the possible and already occurring moral outcomes, often adopting a lenient attitude towards those who "mean well but do harm". Secondly, it employed zero-sum thinking, accustomed to equating altruism with self-denial, even using guarding one's reputation as bait to encourage self-abnegation, thus suppressing the natural expression of individual nature. People were forced to suppress themselves amidst guilt, and in the process of cultivating obedience, personality atrophy and deformity occurred. Thirdly, looking at those officials who were still publicly preaching selflessness yesterday but have since fallen from grace, it has fostered hypocrisy, providing a grandiose language system for hypocrites who speak one thing but mean another. More commonly, hypocrisy involves binding others to the moral cross, to take advantage of the situation for self-gain. In the works of British author Oscar Wilde, the mill owner Darius consistently instilled in Little Hans that "a true friend should share everything", convincing him completely, yet in reality, he enjoyed all of the loyal little friend's belongings, including his life.

Zhu Yuanzhang, who presided over the "Great Ming Code", established the principle of "using harsh laws in troubled times, and strong medicine for chronic illness", but the issue lies in how to discern whether one is in a time of chaos or peace, and to what extent the penal code should be intensified, which is a test of the ruler's wisdom. Emperor Qin Shi

Huang relied on harsh punishments to suppress the people, resulting in the tragic scene of "red-clothed prisoners filling the roads", ultimately leading to the downfall of his once unassailable empire. In the early Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang aimed to rectify what he considered a chaotic time, proposing the thought "in times of chaos, severity is necessary", and incorporated the judicial principle of "emphasizing what is important" in the "Great Ming Code". To enforce strict punishments on officials, he specifically formulated the "Great Ming Edict", employing tortures such as flaying, pricking tendons, cutting fingers, and shaving knees to punish corrupt officials, ultimately still emitting a sigh of helplessness. Thus, relying on legal despotism alone cannot create a thriving and orderly governance landscape.

6

THE DAOIST PHILOSOPHY OF EMPTINESS AND NON-ACTION

6.1 The Profundity of Laozi

Laozi is revered as the founding father of Taoism which was inspired by the "Books of legendary Huangdi", with his 5,000-character "Tao Te Ching" as the classic text. The details of Laozi's birth and death, and even his actual existence, remain a topic of fascination for historians, primarily because "his teachings emphasize self-concealment and anonymity". However, it is widely accepted that Laozi's surname was Li, his given name was Er, his courtesy name was Dan, and he was from Qu Ren Li in Li Xiang, Chu County. He served as the "Keeper of the Archives" for the Zhou dynasty, equivalent to a librarian for the royal family. This is recognized as authoritative in Records of the Grand Historian: Biographies of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Shenzi, and Han Feizi. Laozi "resided in Zhou for a long time, and upon witnessing its decline, he chose to leave". At Hangu Pass, he was compelled by the guard Yin Xi to write down the 15 chapters of the Tao Te Ching before riding off on a green ox, with his final whereabouts unknown. Due to his expertise in cultivating the Dao and

preserving life, he is said to have lived for over 160 years, or even more than 200 years.

Taoism forms its own system, consisting of three parts: Daoist philosophy, Daoist religion, and Daoist techniques. Daoist philosophy, with Laozi's "Tao Te Ching" as the primary text, belongs to the philosophical category of metaphysics, aiming to reveal the essence and operational laws of things through speculative thinking, and is filled with a spirit of subversive criticism. Daoist religion is a deified religion that has chosen Laozi, the founder of Daoist school of philosophy, as its idolized figure. The Temple of Three Purities is a typical Daoist temple, named after the Daoist concept of "the Three Pure Ones giving birth to all beings". The highest deities in Daoist religion include the Primordial Heavenly Worthy (of the Jade Purity), the Spiritual Treasure Heavenly Worthy (of the Upper Purity), and the Dao and Deity Heavenly Worthy (of the Great Purity). Only Laozi, who is revered as the Dao and Deity Heavenly Worthy, is in charge of earthly affairs, while the other two deities are fictional. Daoist techniques focus on the cultivation of life and essence, with two main efforts: practicing breathing techniques and discovering or refining elixirs to extend life.

The "I Ching Xici" states: "That which is above form is called the Dao; that which is below form is called a tool". As a philosophical school, Daoist philosophy occupies the commanding heights of exploring the origin and laws of motion of the universe with its ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Taoism advocates for emptiness and non-action, and non-contention with the world, believing that "the way of heaven is to win without contention, to respond without speaking, to attract without summoning, and to plan without haste. The net of heaven is vast, yet it misses nothing". Thus, Daoist philosophy is seen as a philosophy of

disengagement, or natural liberalism, in contrast to Confucianism's intense engagement with the world. If Confucianism is about racing against time, Taoism is about waiting for the right moment. Its advocacy for non-action and non-contention is not about being idle or passively accepting everything, but rather opposing reckless actions, emphasizing capturing the essence, internal connections, and developmental laws of things, and seizing the most appropriate timing, space, and relationships to control action with stillness and respond to changes with constancy, thereby achieving "non-action without inaction".

It provides a crucial insight for people's daily decision-making: many things seem to be constantly changing on the surface, as the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, "No man ever steps in the same river twice", but in essence, they never deviate from their fundamental principle. If there is no substantial difference, would a person who has waded through a river change their decision to step in again just because they can no longer touch the same drop of water they touched before? If people hastily react to superficial changes, they might lose sight of the essentials, fall into a trap of fallacy, and thus get embroiled in a constant state of anxiety and exhaustion. When a critical moment arrives, they may panic and lose the courage and ability to advance boldly, and then blame the chaos they caused on external changes. In terms of state governance, the "Tao Te Ching" suggests "governing a large country is like cooking a small fish", meaning "the difficulty in governing the people lies in their leaders' excessive and capricious governance". Laozi further emphasizes with the words of the sage: "Therefore, the sage says: 'I do nothing, and the people transform themselves; I love stillness, and the people correct themselves; I am not busy, and the people enrich themselves; I have no desires, and the people simplify themselves.'" Imagine what Laozi would

think and advise about Li Hongzhang's description of "a change not seen in a thousand years" and the contemporary phrase "a change not seen in a hundred years".

Sima Tan (165 - 110 BC.), historian and philosopher in the early Han Dynasty, summarized the Daoist philosophy by saying, "Taoism advocates non-action, and also says that there is nothing not to be done. It is easy to practice but difficult to comprehend. Its technique is based on emptiness and nothingness, using compliance and adaptiveness as its application. Without a fixed position or a constant form, it can therefore understand the nature of all things. Not preceding nor following things, it can thus be the master of all things". Taoism "follows the great harmony of Yin and Yang, adopts the goodness of Confucianism and Mohism, extracts the essence of the School of Forms and Legalism, changes with the times, responds to changes in things, establishes customs and practices, and is suitable for everything. Its principles are simple and easy to implement, its tasks are few but its achievements are many". In fact, Taoism has had the most profound influence on Chinese medicine, the art of health preservation, witchcraft, and folk customs.

Laozi discovered that the way of heaven and the way of humanity are diametrically opposed: "The way of heaven is to reduce what is excessive and supplement what is deficient, while the way of humanity is to reduce who is deficient to supplement who is excessive", thus revealing the root of resource polarization as a societal reality. The parable of the virgins and the Matthew effect in Chapter 25 of the Gospel of Matthew in the Bible are completely similar to the observation of the way of humanity. The parable of the virgins is about a parable in the kingdom of heaven, where ten virgins took their lamps to meet the bridegroom. The wise virgins who had prepared oil not only refused to lend it to the foolish virgins

but also waited for the bridegroom while sending them away to buy oil, and then shut the foolish virgins out. The conclusion is: those who were prepared went in with him to the wedding banquet, and the door was shut. The Matthew effect is about another parable in the kingdom of heaven that is more well-known. Before going to a foreign country, the master gave three servants five thousand, two thousand, and one thousand silver coins, respectively. When the master returned, he settled accounts with them. The two servants who had earned five thousand and two thousand through lending were praised as "good and faithful" and were entrusted with more responsibilities and allowed to enjoy the master's happiness. The third servant, who carefully guarded the master's silver and worked hard to cultivate the land, was scolded as "wicked and lazy", and the one thousand silver coins were taken from him and given to the one who had ten thousand. The conclusion is: for everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

In the "Tao Te Ching", the "Tao" refers to the objective laws of nature (the way of heaven), while "De" refers to the social laws of human nature (the way of humanity). However, in terms of how to resolve the conflict between the way of heaven and the way of humanity, Laozi did not offer more constructive and concrete strategies for state governance and community management, except for advocating a society of small states with few people where "neighboring states are in sight of each other, and the rooster crows and dog barks are heard, yet the people have no dealings with each other all along". Moreover, his advocacy is self-contradictory. On one hand, he talked about governing by non-action – "The more prohibitions there are, the poorer the people become... I take no action and the people are naturally wealthy," on the other hand, he talked about

keeping the people ignorant and weak. He said, "In the governance of the sage, he empties people's minds, fills their bellies, weakens their wills, and strengthens their bones, always keeping them from knowledge and desire." One can imagine that if a ruler adopts a policy of laissez-faire, it would be possible to achieve the vision of a prosperous and wealthy nation described by Adam Smith in "The Wealth of Nations". However, the utopia painted by Laozi negates Smith's two basic premises: first, to unleash the people's enthusiasm for knowledge and wealth, and second, to drive a broader division of labor and product exchange through market mechanisms. A strong government is not what Laozi desires. But if the ruler wants to deprive the people of their natural pursuit of knowledge and wealth, what kind of strong control measures must be taken to achieve this? Furthermore, in a world of many states, it is impossible for a kingdom with few people to enjoy peace and prosperity. How can a ruler lead a populace devoid of knowledge and desire to cope with the competition of survival of the fittest among nations?

6.2 The Blitheness of Zhuangzi

Zhuangzi, with the surname Zhuang and given name Zhou, was active during the middle Warring States period (approximately 369-286 BCE) and was another great thinker who, following Laozi, based his philosophy on Taoism. Like Laozi, he revered the natural way of heaven from an ontological perspective, advocating that "emptiness, tranquility, detachment, and non-action" are the foundations of all things, and he is known together with Laozi as "Lao-Zhuang". Actually, Zhuangzi's concept of free and unfettered living is deeply influenced by another branch of Daoism during the Eastern Zhou period, namely the School of Gwuxu of Liezi.

His works extensively quote Liezi's words and legends, describing him as "able to ride the wind, free and at ease". Therefore, some people summarize that Daoism before the Qin Dynasty originated with Laozi, developed with Liezi, and reached its peak with Zhuangzi.

In terms of metaphysics, Liezi (around 450-375 BC) believed that while the Dao is a real existence but with no concrete form, purpose, or will. The transformation of all things occurs naturally and freely, without any supreme ruler above them. Moreover, things constantly change in circular pattern without any distinction between beginning and end. He expounded his philosophy of "unity of Dao and form" and "equality of all things" to enlighten people about life: any attachment or discrimination leads to self-inflicted troubles, so one should adopt a calm and detached attitude, disregarding distinctions of value, honor, disgrace, gain, loss, life, and death. He summed it up as a concept of "emptiness", stating "Forget all distinctions; in the dark unity is one. Therefore it is called emptiness".

He advocated that "being void and natural, not grasping or acting, is the highest spiritual state for nourishing life and governing the self", thereby freeing oneself from the fetters of the mind and achieving the ultimate freedom of the sage. Laozi's disciple Wenzi described this state in "Wenzi: Essence and Sincerity" as follows: "As for the wandering of the sage, it is moving towards utmost emptiness, wandering the mind in the ultimate nothingness, running in the square outside, walking through the gateless, listening to the soundless, looking at the formless, not bound by the world, not tied to conventions." Zhuangzi, who followed closely, out of his thorough understanding in its essence, more systematically expounded this philosophical concept.

Shun asked his minister, "Can the Dao be obtained and possessed?" The minister replied, "Your body is not truly yours, so how could you have the Dao?" Shun said, "If my body is not truly mine, then whose is it?" The minister replied, "It is the form entrusted to you by heaven and earth. Your birth is not yours; it is the harmony entrusted by heaven and earth. Your nature and life are not yours; they are the compliance entrusted by heaven and earth. Your grandchildren are not yours; they are the shedding entrusted by heaven and earth. Therefore, you walk without knowing where you are going, stay without knowing what you hold, and eat without knowing the taste. How could you possibly obtain the strong energy of heaven and earth?"

——*Liezi, Tianrui*

In the chapter "Zhuangzi: Zhi Wanders North", he said, "Heaven and earth possess great beauty but do not speak, the four seasons follow clear laws but do not debate, and all things have their principles but do not explain. The sage is one who grasps the beauty of heaven and earth and comprehends the principles of all things, therefore the ultimate person acts without action, and the great sage does nothing, observing the way of heaven and earth." He was not only eloquent and visionary but also adept at using simple allegories to reveal profound philosophical truths, even reaching the point of being sharply critical. For example, he illustrated the principle of using stillness to overcome movement by describing how a person tries to escape from his own shadow and footsteps - the more he actively pursue, the better it is to solve the problem passively. Someone who was afraid of his own shadow and detesting his own footsteps tries to escape them. The faster he runs towards the sun, the more footsteps he creates, and the darker the shadow he can see. Thinking he is still too slow,

so he runs even faster without rest until he gets exhausted to death. How foolish he is not being able to realize that staying in the shade naturally makes the shadow disappear and staying still makes the footsteps cease to exist!

Zhuangzi was a rare thinker in the history of Chinese philosophy who advocated for individual dignity and spiritual liberation. His behavior was similar to that of his contemporary Greek philosophers like Antisthenes and Diogenes, the Cynics, who preferred madness to pleasure. [43] Therefore, he despised wealth and power, opposed the suppression of human nature by conventional morality, and advocated that true moral freedom could only be achieved by following nature. In an era when everyone was competitive and unscrupulous in their pursuit of success, Zhuangzi's sharp and even acerbic criticism was like a cold current in the scorching summer, making those who were complacent shiver. However, through selective interpretations in different times and circumstances, his transcendent and carefree philosophy had a negative impact on Daoist optimism, degenerating into a kind of passive philosophy that was accommodating and smooth. On one hand, it provided spiritual consolation for those disheartened scholars who were not motivated to advance; on the other hand, it offered a moral excuse for people to abandon principles and integrity, and to prioritize self-preservation at all costs. He refused to serve in the state of Chu, preferring to live like a turtle dragging its tail in the mud rather than accepting high-ranking positions and wealth, which would burden him with worldly affairs and destroy his character, making him a sacrificial offering in the political arena.

---

[43] Bain, Volume 2, pages 4-5; Moulai, "The Fifth Stage", pages 113-114. Quoted in [English] Bertrand Russell, "A History of Western Philosophy", page 147, The Commercial Press, 2006.

Zhuangzi was fishing by the Pu River when the King of Chu sent two ministers to greet him, saying, "The King of Chu wishes to entrust you with the affairs of the state and to burden you with this responsibility."

Without turning his head from his fishing rod, Zhuangzi said, "I heard that there is a sacred turtle in Chu, which was killed after living for three thousand years. The king keeps it in a bamboo box, covered with a cloth, and treasures it in the ancestral temple. Would this turtle prefer to die to leave behind its shell for display, or would it prefer to live, dragging its tail in the mud?"

The two ministers replied, "It would prefer to live and drag its tail in the mud."

Zhuangzi said, "You may go. I too shall continue to live, dragging my tail in the mud."

——Zhuangzi·Autumn Water

However, Zhuangzi's ideas on governance still followed in the footsteps of Laozi, believing that "by non-action, there is enough to govern the world; by action, there is not enough to be used by the world." He built a dialogue between Confucius and Laozi in which the value of Confucius endeavor of enlivening the core concept of benevolence and righteousness around the world is completely revoked:

Confucius went to visit Laozi, and Laozi did not promise to fulfill Confucius's requests. Confucius then cited the "Six Classics" to explain. Laozi interrupted Confucius's explanation midway and said, "You speak too elaborately; I hope to hear a summary of these books." Confucius said, "The essence lies in benevolence and righteousness." Laozi asked, "Is benevolence and righteousness human nature?" Confucius replied,

"Yes. A gentleman cannot establish his reputation without benevolence, nor can he establish himself in society without righteousness. Benevolence and righteousness are indeed human nature; what can one do without them?" Lao Dan asked further, "What is benevolence and righteousness?" Confucius answered, "Equity and harmony, universal love without selfishness, this is the true nature of benevolence and righteousness."

Laozi said, "Alas, how perilous are these remarks! To love all under heaven, isn't that too pedantic? To speak of selflessness is precisely motivating selfishness yearning for more love from others. Sir, do you want all under heaven to surrender the conditions for nurturing themselves? Then, heaven and earth have their own laws of motion, the sun and the moon have their own brightness, the stars have their own sequences, birds and beasts have their own groups, and trees stand upright on the ground. Sir, you should act in accordance with the state of nature and proceed along with its laws; that would be excellent. Why so eagerly flaunt benevolence and righteousness? Isn't that like beating a drum to search for a fugitive, where the louder the drum, the farther they run? Alas! Sir, you have disturbed human nature!"

——*Zhuangzi, "The Way of Heaven"*

He not only adhered to "releasing virtue and following the Dao" in his "The Way of Heaven" but also first proposed the concept of "inner sagehood and outer kingship". In his "The World", he stated that "The sage has his reason for his birth, and the king has his reason for his emergence. they all originate from the Dao, which is the unity of all things in the universe."" The essence of this concept is to grasp the origin of things subjectively and to implement a policy of non-action and laissez-faire governance objectively. "Since the way of inner sagehood and outer

kingship is obscure and constrained, everyone in the world ought to do what they desire, taking themselves as the standard." "Inner sagehood" is the moral ideal of personal development: "Viewing nature as the origin, innate endowments as the foundation, and laws as the path, thereby foreseeing the various changes of things, he is called a sage. Dispensing kindness with benevolence, distinguishing right from wrong with righteousness, regulating behavior with propriety, and harmonizing dispositions with music, gentle and compassionate, he is called a gentleman." "Outer kingship" is the political ideal of social harmony and order, manifested as: "Determining duties according to laws, establishing standards following social ranks, seeking verification through inspection, and making decisions based on examination. Various officials take their respective positions as specific as counting one, two, three, four. Various professions are clearly divided to their optimal capabilities. Agricultural and sericultural affairs are prioritized, focusing on reproduction and storage. The elderly, weak, orphaned, and widowed, are all provided for and nurtured. This is the law for stabilizing the people's hearts and governing the populace."

This concept was borrowed and interpreted by Confucianism, transforming the naturalistic causal relationship between "inner sagehood" and "outer kingship" into an objective idealistic relationship between means and ends. Non-action thus became action, that is, achieving objective accomplishments through subjective effort. In the Confucian view, "inner sagehood" emphasizes self-cultivation and moral cultivation, while "outer kingship" focuses on accomplishments in the objective world, namely "regulating the family, governing the state, and pacifying the world." The harmonious unity of the two constitutes the highest realm pursued by Confucianism. For monarchs, inner sagehood requires orderly

state governance, and outer kingship requires harmonious foreign relations and the promotion of the ideology of kingship. Moral cultivation is a core element here, as Confucius said, "Governing with virtue is like the North Star, which stays in its place while all the other stars revolve around it." As time passed, the way of "inner sagehood and outer kingship" gradually condensed into the core value concept of Chinese culture, becoming the crystallization of the integration of Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist thoughts.

As a matter of fact, Zhuangzi does not negate traditional ethics. In "The Way of Heaven", he explicitly outlines the order of hierarchy and precedence among rulers and ministers, siblings, elders and juniors, men and women, husbands and wives, and assigns moral values to each subject: revering kinship in ancestral temples, honoring dignity in courts, valuing seniority in communities, and esteeming virtue in conduct. However, he places ethics after philosophy and political science, referring to it as the "least learning" that has long existed. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the order of priority, otherwise, one deviates from the source of Dao and can never enter its gateway: "Speaking of Dao without its order is not of Dao; speaking of Dao and stand in its way, how can one attain Dao!"

Therefore, those in ancient times who understood the great Dao, first comprehended nature and then understood morality; after understanding morality, they grasped benevolence and righteousness; after grasping benevolence and righteousness, they understood their duties; after understanding their duties, they comprehended the form and names of things; after comprehending form and names, they understood assigning positions based on talent; after understanding assigning positions

based on talent, they grasped pardon or abolition; after grasping pardon or abolition, they understood right and wrong; and after understanding right and wrong, they implemented rewards and punishments.

——*Zhuangzi, "The Way of Heaven"*

Fundamentally, Zhuangzi is an extreme proponent of libertarianism, emphasizing self-sustenance, self-preservation, and self-improvement in pursuit of personal ascendency, striving to reach the free-spirited state where "the ultimate man is without self, the divine man is without achievement, and the sage is without name". He simply conceals this self within the concept of naturalism, advocating transcendence, roaming with the wind in one's heart, and living independently from the world, hence giving the impression of selflessness and forgetfulness of self. American writer Ayn Rand, in her book "The Fountainhead", provides a popular interpretation of the core idea of a sound personality which resonates with Zhuangzi - freedom is "to ask nothing, to expect nothing, and to depend on nothing." However, considering her escape from Russia in the 1920s, she was persistently yearning for and pursuing freedom, thus her state cannot be compared with that of Zhuangzi. In the book, she writes: "I would give the greatest sunset in the world for one sight of New York's skyline, the skyscrapers stretching to the sky, so evident of human will. What more do we need to believe? I feel if there were a threat of war here, I would throw myself into the sky, my flesh shielding all of this."

Given that the royal family of the Zhou Dynasty was already in steep decline, Laozi, who had a clear view of the world's affairs understood that nobody was unable to reverse the situation. With a sense of resignation, he earnestly advised Confucius, who came seeking guidance, that his pursuit of the great ideal of self-restraint and the restoration of rites was akin

to trying to grasp the moon's reflection in a pond. Finally, he fulfilled his farewell advice to Confucius with practical action, saying, "A noble man, when the time comes, takes the reins; when the time does not come, he drifts like a weed." This means that a noble man can take office when the opportunity arises or drift aimlessly like a weed when the opportunity does not present itself.

6.3 The Evolution of Yin-Yang and the Five Elements

The term "Yin-Yang" first appeared in the "I Ching"", which includes phrases such as "one Yin and one Yang is called Dao" and "the unpredictability of Yin and Yang is called divine". In addition to the dialectics of the unity of opposites between Yin and Yang, the theory of the Five Elements represents a systematic view of Taoist philosophy and has been widely used in fields such as traditional Chinese medicine, geomancy, numerology, physiognomy, and divination.

The concept of the Five Elements first appeared in the "Shang Shu · Hong Fan" (Book of Documents · Great Plan), with the Five Elements being water, fire, wood, metal, and earth, which are the five basic elements constituting all things in the world, abstracting the material world. The "Shang Shu · Hong Fan" also describes the characteristics of the Five Elements and their corresponding tastes: "Water is called moistening and descending, fire is called flaming and ascending, wood is called bending and straightening, metal is called compliance and change, earth is called crops and harvest. Moistening and descending tastes salty, flaming and ascending tastes bitter, bending and straightening tastes sour, compliance and change tastes pungent, crops and harvest taste sweet."

In the late Western Zhou Dynasty, Shi Bo proposed that "mixing earth with metal, wood, water, and fire to create all things". According to Confucius, Laozi of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty was well-versed in the theory of the Five Elements. Confucius once said in a conversation with Ji Kangzi: "In the past, I heard from Laozi: 'Heaven has five elements, water, fire, metal, wood, and earth, which divide time and nurture to create all things.'" Clearly, the concept of the Five Elements endowed the five materials with dynamic meaning. In the late Warring States period, the Yin-Yang school's Zou Yan proposed the conquering theory of the Five Elements: metal conquers wood, wood conquers earth, earth conquers water, water conquers fire, and fire conquers metal. At the end of the Western Han Dynasty, Liu Xin supplemented the generating theory of the Five Elements: metal generates water, water generates wood, wood generates fire, fire generates earth, and earth generates metal. Since "virtue" has the meaning of characteristics, Zou and Liu revealed the motion laws of the Five Elements from both positive and negative aspects, forming the dynamic Five Virtues of Permanence theory. The core idea is that the five materials, under the impetus of the Yin and Yang energies, move in relation to each other according to the principles of generation and conquest - depending on each other while restraining each other, thus cycling repeatedly and starting anew.

The theory of the Five Elements originated from the cognition of the material world and seemed to transcend Democritus's atomic theory of the same era in ancient Greece in the category of early natural science. The latter believed that each thing is composed of atoms, which are indivisible but vary in form. However, as early cognitions of the material world, the different methodologies of the two have already determined the divergence of their developmental paths. The Five Elements theory

abstracted and summarized all things from the beginning, providing a ready-made formula for material classification on the one hand, and restraining the motivation for further exploration with scientific methods on the other hand. In contrast, the atomic theory was derived from experimental and dissection-like speculation, leaving room for later generations to continue exploring the elements of the material world with experimental and dissection methods, from atoms to protons and electrons. The "Needham Question" in Chapter 18 will discuss the impact of these two methodologies on the development of science.

Although the theory of the Five Elements did not play a significant enlightening role in China's natural sciences, it was quickly and widely applied in the field of social sciences. Besides divination and geomancy, it was especially prominent in the fields of political science and ethics. Confucius once said that since Fuxi marked his dynasty with wood from the Five Elements, the other dynasties followed suit, aligning with one of the virtues from the Five Elements based on the era of their establishment: "The application of the Five Elements begins with wood. Wood, from the east, is where all things first emerge; thus, the sovereign adopts it and rules the world with the virtue of wood, followed by the generating element, passing on in turn."[44]

The doctrine of "Five Virtues of Permanence" was widely used to analyze the rise and fall of dynasties and the historical view of changing times, believing that the designated virtue of each dynasty dominated its fortunes. According to this principle, setting the overthrow of the previous dynasty as conquest and the succession of the previous dynasty as generation. The transition of Chinese dynasties is varied, but it has been

[44] Confucian Analects · Five Emperors XIV.

summarized that the Fuxi era was wood, the Shennong era was fire, the Yellow Emperor's era was earth, Qin was water, Western Han was earth, Eastern Han was fire, Tang was earth, Song was water, Yuan was metal, Ming was fire, Qing was water, Beiyang government was wood, and the Republic of China was metal.

Inspired by the theory of Five Elements, Mencius proposed the "Five Relationships" for father-son, sovereign-minister, husband-wife, elder-younger siblings, and friends: "The relationship between father and son is affection, between sovereign and minister is righteousness, between husband and wife is distinction, between elder and younger is order, between friends is trust." (Mencius · Monarch Teng Wen I) In the Eastern Han Dynasty, Ban Gu traced the origin of the "Five Relationships" directly to the Huaxia progenitor Fuxi in "General Discourse on the Classics at the White Tiger Temple", associating it with the Five Elements: "In ancient times, without the three ethical bonds and six orders, people only knew their mothers, not their fathers... Thus Fuxi looked up to observe the patterns in heaven, looked down to examine the laws on earth, based on the couple, corrected the Five Elements, and first established human morality." The Western Han's Dong Zhongshu further derived the Five Materials to the moral level of the "Five Constants", namely benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith: "Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith, the path of the Five Constants, are what the sovereigns constantly cultivate."[45]

In the Tang Dynasty, Liu Zongyuan gave a clear explanation in "On Seasonal Orders Part II": "The sage's teaching establishes the right path to show to posterity, calling it benevolence, righteousness, propriety,

[45] Dong Zhongshu, "Strategies for Selecting the Wise and Capable", "Book of Han", Vol. 56.

wisdom, and faith, known as the Five Constants, meaning they can be constantly practiced."

For reasons in translation and understanding from the Chinese perspective, the theory of the Five Elements also permeates Buddhism. In correspondence to the Five Elements, five practices in the "Mahaparinirvana Sutra" was sumed up as Buddhist virtue cultivation: saintly practice, Brahman practice, heavenly practice, infant practice, and sick practice. The five practices in the "Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana" refer to practicing generosity, observing precepts, enduring insult, diligence, and meditation.

Thus, the theory of the Five Elements represents a significant development of the Yin-Yang dualism, exerting a profound influence on multiple aspects of traditional Chinese culture.

6.4 The Art of Huang-Lao and Taoist Religion

The Art of Huang-Lao is a philosophical thought that formed during the Warring States period. It absorbed elements from multiple schools, including Yin-Yang, Taoism, Confucianism, and Mohism, and is known for its reverence for the Yellow Emperor and Laozi, hence the name Huang-Lao school. Beyond its emphasis on self-cultivation and a form of passive nihilism, particularly from the Western Han dynasty onwards, it provided rich nourishment for the political philosophy of governance through non-action. The advocacy of "reducing harsh measures, lightening taxes and levies, and saving people from corvée in busy seasons", as well as the principle of "following established rules and regulations", laid the ideological foundation for the recovery of production and social order during the reigns of Emperor Wen and Emperor Jing in the early stage of

Han dynasty. It was the four decades (202 BC - 141 BC) of "recuperating with the people" from the grievous destruction inflicted by the protracted civil war. that prepared the material condition for the succeeding Emperor Wu to achieve his great ambition of territorial expansion via military prowess. When national wealth was soon exhausted, he had to revisit the policy of his predessesors. By the Eastern Han dynasty, the Art of Huang-Lao, with combination of the reinvented theory of prophecy, craft of divination, and practice of longevity, brought about significant reformation to the Taoism.

Such reformation prepared the soil for the emergence of Taoism as a religion in the Eastern Han dynasty, blending primitive shamanism, folk superstitions, and ceremonial reverence for heaven and earth in court and countryside. It regards "Dao" as its highest belief and venerates Laozi's "Tao Te Ching" as the classic for entering the realm of immortality. The prototypes of Daoist religion began with the Fangxian (Alchemistry and Fairy) Taoism created by the Eastern Zhou scholar and statesman Chang Hong and the Huang-Lao Taoism created by Taoist disciples. They blended knowledge and skills such as astronomy, medicine, immortality, divination, physiognomy and geomancy, and promoted methods of longevity and immortality through diet and sacrifices. Chang Hong was known for his interpretation of Yin-Yang and communication with spirits. The "Records of the Grand Historian - Book of Fengshan Sacrifices" states that he "practiced the Fangxian Taoism, transforming and dissolving his form, relying on the affairs of ghosts and spirits", and "served King Ling of Zhou with his methods".

The Huang-Lao Taoism is more theoretical. The "Records of the Grand Historian - Biographies of Mencius and Xun Qing" further mentions that Taoist figures such as Tian Pian, Shen Dao, Huan Yuan, and

Jiezi "all studied the teachings of Huang-Lao Taoism, thereby expounding and extrapolating their intended meanings". They claimed to follow the Yellow Emperor, revered Yi Yin and Jiang Taigong, and combined the worship of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi by emperors and common people, thus adding a religious hue to Taoist teachings, later known as Huang-Lao Taoism. However, it was not until the late Eastern Han dynasty that Taoism truly formed a systematic religious organization, notably with the establishment of the Zhengyi Taoism (also known as the Celestial Masters or Five Pecks of Rice Dao) by Zhang Daoling in Chengdu – southwest of China, and the Taiping Taoism by Zhang Jiao in central China.

Taoism experienced significant development during the Southern and Northern Dynasties, absorbing content from Buddhism, and was revered as the state religion during the Tang dynasty. One of the simple reasons is that the imperial family of Li claimed that they were the decendents of Laozi for the fact of sharing the same family name. Today, Taoism is divided into two major sects: Zhengyi and Quanzhen.

The brutal conquest followed by chaotic governance over China by the Yuan dynasty prompted the large-scale integration of Taoism, leading to the formation of the two major sects that continue to this day: the Zhengyi School and the Quanzhen School.

The Zhengyi School is a collection of various talismanic sects, absent of a unified organizational system. Apart from adhering to the "Zhengyi Scripture", it lacks a systematic theoretical framework, mainly focusing on superstitious practices such as worshiping deities and spirits, drawing talismans, reciting incantations, exorcising demons, and praying for blessings and averting disasters, thus integrating more of its kind into the popular folk culture. The Quanzhen School was founded by Wang

Chongyang during the Mongol Yuan era, advocating the return to purity of one's entire being. Wang Chongyang, well educated in the Confucian classics, achieved enlightenment through studying the Buddhist "Heart Sutra", thus proposing the idea of integrating the three teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, claiming that "the three teachings do not deviate from the true Dao". Unlike the long-established Zhengyi School, the Quanzhen School does not advocate supernatural beliefs and practices such as talismans and immortality, but promotes the practice of cultivating both one's nature and life force. It believes that unfolding one's true nature leads to transcendence of life and death, with cultivation being the process of enlightening the mind. Additionally, it emphasizes the moral development of practitioners, advocating for equal importance of placid cultivation and active conduct to benefit the world and its people. As expressed in the saying of Wang, "Without conduct, there is no achievement in the Dao; with both cultivation and conduct, one is a true person." The mission and philosophy of the Quanzhen School was favorably received by the scholar-official class, thus assumed a dominant role in Taoism as a later comer. There hundred years later, the three core concepts of Wang Yangming's Neo-Confucianism – "cultivating the mind for knowledge", "extending innate conscience", and "unity of knowledge and action" - align closely with Wang Chongyang's theoretical propositions regarding the Quanzhen School.

Due to its advocacy of governance through non-action and the unspoken teachings, Taoism does not have as vast a collection of scriptures as other popular religions, but its various grand ceremonies (scriptural, teaching, and ritual ceremonies) are quite solemn and grand. For Taoist priests, their ultimate goal is to achieve unity with the Dao through diligent personal cultivation and social contribution. They believe that

immortality can be attained once they succeed, with the highest achievers ascending to the rank of Celestial Venerables.

China currently has over 1,500 Taoist temples and 25,000 practitioners of Qian Dao and Kun Dao. Qian Dao and Kun Dao are two concepts in Taoism based on the yin-yang theory. "Qian" symbolizes masculinity, positivity, heaven, and the sun, while "Kun" symbolizes femininity, negativity, earth, and the moon. In Taoism, Qian Dao refers to male practitioners who focus on cultivating themselves, their bodies, and their spiritual realms. Kun Dao, on the other hand, refers to female practitioners who focus on cultivating their hearts, minds, and moral character. It's important to note that these concepts are not used to distinguish between genders or races but to describe different practices and characteristics.

7

CONFUCIANISM: BENEVOLENCE, RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THE DOCTRINE OF THE MEAN

7.1 The Essense of Confucian School of Thought

The founder of Confucianism is undoubtedly Confucius, with Mencius subsequently promoting and expanding his teachings. Therefore, the essence of Confucian thought is also known as the Thought of Confucius and Mencius. To cater to the political needs of different eras, Dong Zhongshu of the Han Dynasty proposed "abandoning all other schools of thought and exclusively venerating Confucianism", initiating the transformation of Confucian studies. After continuous modifications and evolutions, by the time of the Song Dynasty's idealistic Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism and the Yangming School of Heart-Mind at the end of the Yuan and beginning of the Ming Dynasty, Confucian thought gradually established an ideological system centered on benevolence, aiming to shape perfect individual character and implement a practical ethical order, thus becoming the mainstay of Chinese culture.

Contemporary philosopher Feng Youlan even categorized the diverse, chaotic, and contrived Taoism and Metaphysical Reasoning (Lixue) of the

Song, Yuan, and Ming periods as part of Neo-Confucianism. For beginners, especially the foreign readers he has long faced, this arbitrary classification can be seen as a simple and clear approach. Today, there is a resurgence of interest in what can be called "New New Confucianism", which attempts to introduce Confucian principles into various sectors of modern society, especially by advocating the concept of the Confucian merchant. As a result, Confucianism has become a popular brand, but the philosophical and ethical research and claims made in the name of Confucianism have strayed far from the Way of Confucius and Mencius. The Confucian lineage, originating from the guests and retainers of feudal lords, is inherently attached to the ruling class, which is also the source of its enduring vitality. After Kublai Khan conquered China, he revered Confucianism, and Confucian scholars Yuan Haowen and Zhang Dehui pleaded with him to accept the title of "Grand Master of Confucianism". Even Kublai Khan, a warlike leader, was pleased to accept it. Behind the seemingly open attitude, the evolution of Confucianism actually reflects a conservative tendency, and even Dong Zhongshu and Zhu Xi, who made significant contributions, could hardly establish their own schools independently. However, the radical transformation and forced extensions of the Way of Confucius and Mencius do align with their consistently advocated spirit of practicality and usefulness in governing the world.

The ideological system of Confucianism is encompassed in the well-known Four Books and Five Classics. The "Four Books" include The Great Learning, The Doctrine of the Mean, The Analects, and The Mencius. The "Five Classics" consist of The Book of Poetry, The Book of Documents, The Book of Rites, The I Ching, and The Spring and Autumn Annals.

Its core value lies in "inner sageliness and outer kingliness", specifically summarized as "three principles and eight objectives". Liang Qichao summarized it: "The ultimate goal of Confucian philosophy can be encapsulated by the phrase 'inner sageliness and outer kingliness' from Zhuangzi. All the words and various methods of Confucianism ultimately boil down to this point. "Inner sageliness" refers to reaching the spiritual realm of a sage in terms of inner cultivation, while "outer kingliness" refers to achieving accomplishments in the real world and realizing the social ideal of "great governance under heaven". In terms of individual development, Confucianism advocates the integration of essence and function, uniting the cultivation of inner virtue with the achievement of external careers for a fulfilled life. As the saying goes: "Virtue leads to wisdom, success relies on diligence, small wealth comes from hard work, moderate wealth from wisdom, great wealth from virtue; minor victories from wisdom, and major victories from virtue."[46] In terms of social and national governance, "inner sageliness" is the prerequisite for "outer kingliness". Based on this notion, Confucianism insists on governing the world with culture as the Way of the King, as opposed to conquering the world with force as the Way of the Hegemon.

As Liang Qichao said, the phrase "inner sageliness and outer kingliness" actually comes from the Taoist Zhuangzi. In "Zhuangzi: The World", it is said: "The way of inner sageliness and outer kingliness is obscure and unclear, suppressed and not expressed, each person in the world follows their own desires, taking themselves as the standard. Alas, all the schools of thought have gone forever, thus no harmony can be ushered in anymore!" Zhuangzi is lamenting the chaos of "the world

[46] [Southern Song Dynasty] Liu Yiqing, "A New Account of Tales of The World: Annotations and Explanations".

in great disorder, the wise and the sages not recognized, and morality not unified." When the principle of inner sageliness and outer kingliness cannot be manifested, people hold on to their own opinions and act according to their own interest, thus going against the right path.

The "Three Principles and Eight Objectives" proposed in "The Great Learning" highlight the goals and paths of Confucian moral cultivation. The "Three Principles" of "illuminating virtue, being close to the people, and reaching the utmost goodness" are the goals; the "Eight Objectives" of "investigating things, extending knowledge, making intentions sincere, rectifying the heart, cultivating the self, regulating the family, governing the state, and pacifying the world" are the paths to achieving the "Three Principles".

Among the "Three Principles", "illuminating virtue" lays the foundation for Confucian ontology, which holds that noble virtues are innate in humans but become dulled and tarnished by the dust of society in the socialization process. Therefore, it is necessary to uphold the way of "The Great Learning" to dust off and restore the inherent goodness of humans, aiming to reach a state of moral perfection or utmost goodness in the world. This understanding of human nature somewhat echoes Freud's theory of the three levels of the self: the id, ego, and superego.

So, what is the state of utmost goodness in Confucianism? First, the role of each person needs to be clearly identified and defined in an ideal society. Confucius answered to Duke Jing of Qi when asked about governance: "Let the ruler be a ruler, the minister a minister, the father a father, and the son a son," ensuring that everyone occupies their proper place and fulfills their duties. Second, it involves continuously improving everyone's moral cultivation, ultimately achieving an ideal society in which "the ruler is benevolent, the minister is respectful, the son is filial,

the father is kind, and interactions with fellow countrymen is trustworthy." Third, among the "Eight Objectives", "cultivating the self" is the prerequisite. "Investigating things, extending knowledge, making intentions sincere, rectifying the heart" are the means of self-cultivation, and "regulating the family, governing the state, pacifying the world" are the goals of striving. More specifically, "The Great Learning" outlines five steps of individual cultivation: "determination, imperturbability, concentration, contemplation, and attainment": "Only by understanding the realm of supreme virtue can one set on determination upon the Way. With determination upon the Way, distractions are dispelled by imperturbability. With imperturbability, one can concentrate. With concentration, one can engage in thorough comptemplation. With thorough comptemplation, one attains supreme virtue. All things have their roots and derivatives, all affairs have their beginnings and ends. Knowing what comes first and what follows, one approaches the essence of higher learning."

"Those in ancient times who wished to illuminate virtue throughout the world first governed their states. To govern their states, they first regulated their households. To regulate their households, they first cultivated themselves. To cultivate themselves, they first rectified their hearts. To rectify their hearts, they first made their intentions sincere. To make their intentions sincere, they first extended their knowledge. The extension of knowledge lies in the investigation of things. When things are investigated, knowledge is extended; when knowledge is extended, intentions become sincere; when intentions are sincere, hearts are rectified; when hearts are rectified, selves are cultivated; when selves are cultivated, households are regulated; when households are regulated, states are

governed; and when states are governed, there will be peace throughout the world."

——From "The Great Learning"

"The Great Learning" begins with the concept of "investigating things" and aims for supreme goodness in the world, constructing a ladder for moral development that ascends step by step. From the original text, we can see that the ultimate goal of the Way of the Great Learning is to "illuminate virtue throughout the world" (implicitly being kind to the people and bringing the world to a state of utmost perfection). While "pacifying the world" has milestone significance, it is only a stage goal. Moreover, it is not achieved through military conquest, but by enhancing one's own competency through self-cultivation, family regulation, and sound state governance.

Zhu Xi, quoting Cheng Yi, interprets the "three Principles" of "being close to the people" as "renewing the people", which has been a topic of ongoing debate. This distortion logically demotes the goal of being kind to the people to a means of reengineering the mindframe of the people. The consistent political stance of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism is thus underpinned aiming at forging theoretical justification for the the rulers to domesticate the people via brainwash. Wang Yangming rebutted Zhu Xi's biased interpretation and insisted on sticking to their original meaning, reasoning that "being close to the people is akin to Mencius's idea of being close to one's relatives and benevolent to the people."[47] However, he supported the idea of educating and nurturing the people from the

[47] Wang Yangming. "Instructions for Practical Living and Other Neo-Confucian Writings".

position of parenthood, thus reverted to the proposition of Neo-Confucianism.

In fact, the narrative of "The Great Learning" as the Confucian classic is inherently contradictory. It starts by quoting the "Book of Songs" – "O noble man who values harmony and joy above all! He is indeed the parent of us common folk." And then it expounds the phrase as "What the people desire, desire it; what the people detest, detest it." First, the laudatory words in the "Book of Songs" are used to praise the early kings of the Zhou dynasty, so it is difficult to derive a universally applicable assertion. Second, it depicts a patriachical governance however wise and benevolent the kings are. Third, "What the people desire, desire it; what the people detest, detest it" indicates a concept of democracy - government of stewardship in which the will of the people preceed the will of the king, i.e. a virtuous king should respect and comply with the will of the people. Yet, "The Great Learning" abruptly boomerangs to define it as "the parents of the people". Isn't this reversing the master-servant relationship? On further extrapolation, if (and often) the king's will conflicts with the likes and dislikes of the people, then for which side should the Confician Way of the Great Learning provide moral defense?

7.2 The Doctrine of the Mean

The Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong) is considered one of the core ideas of Confucianism, encapsulated in one of the Four Books, "The Doctrine of the Mean". In its original meaning, "Zhong" (中) signifies impartiality, and "yong" (庸) denotes constancy. Thus, Zhu Xi recognized the Doctrine of the Mean as "the perpetuating principle of the righteous path under heaven", aimed at achieving a state of delicate and

precise fittingness, where everything is just right and appropriately arranged.

The Doctrine of the Mean is considered by most scholars to be written by Zisi, Confucius's grandson, though its content is still a record and exposition of Confucian thought. Zisi is popularly regarded as the relay runner passing on the baton from Confucius onto Mencius, playing a role of connecting the past and the future in pre-Qin Confucianism. However, one detail to note is that Confucius lived to be 72 years old, and Zisi was born when Confucius was 68, so it can be imagined that his direct opportunity and ability to be taught by Confucius were extremely limited. His remarks about Confucius should have been indirectly obtained during his apprenticeship with Confucius's disciple Zeng Shen.

The key to mastering the Doctrine of the Mean in governance lies in holding to the two extremes and using the mean for the people; as Confucius praised the ancient leader Shun, "holding to its two extremes, he employed the mean for the benefit of the people". However, Confucius himself used the phrase "would rather" multiple times between the two extremes, indicating that he, too, admittedly failed to achieve the mean. For example, he said: "Extravagance leads to arrogance, whereas frugality leads to rigidity. Between the two, I would rather choose rigidity." This concept of perfect balance is embodied in many popular idioms such as: A mile wide and an inch deep; More haste and less speed. The Mean can be understood as a state where things have reached such a perfect and flawless condition that there is no longer any room for improvement. Any reduction or addition would bring damage to that state. Song Yu offered a vivid description for a perfect beauty in "The Profligate Son's Fondness for Beauty": "To add one more bit would make it too long, to

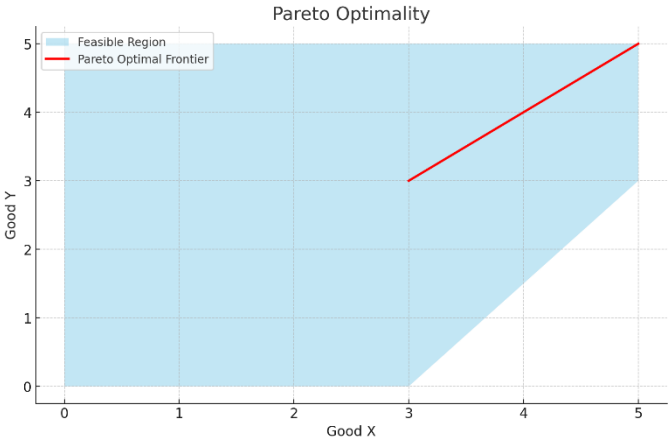
take away one bit would make it too short; to apply powder would make it too white, to apply rouge would make it too red..."

The Doctrine of the Mean is obviously a kind of common-sense wisdom that can be widely applied to judgments and decision-making in various scenarios. It reminds people that in doing anything, one should consider the costs and benefits and find the best balance within them to achieve the highest threshold of effect. The common saying "Why use a cleaver to kill a chicken?" illustrates the principle that overkill or making a big deal out of a small issue can lead to a waste of resources.

However, in the original source wherefrom this saying is derived ("The Analects of Confucius · Yang Huo"), there is no indication that Confucius advocated the Doctrine of the Mean. Confucius once came to Wucheng County of the State of Lu where his student Ziyou was a magistrate. Seeing Ziyou was playing the zither and singing, he smiled and said, "Why use a cleaver to kill a chicken?" The implication was that there was no need for music and rituals to govern such a small place as Wucheng. Ziyou countered him with his own saying: "You told us in the past: 'A gentleman who learns this way will care others, and a petty man who learns this way will be responsive to commands.' (I am doing as you said, why are you mocking me?)" Confucius quickly corrected himself, saying: "Ziyou is right, I was merely joking just now." Confucius clearly understood the Doctrine of the Mean, but facing the chaotic times in his mind, he decided to be a lone walker firmly committed to his meaningful but impossible mission. So, he lamented: "[Under such circumstance], a gentleman would give up halfway when he adheres to the mean, but, I cannot stop. A gentleman who relies on the mean would retreat from the world without regret, but only the sage can do this" (The Doctrine of the Mean).

In resource allocation, Pareto Optimality scientifically embodies the Doctrine of the Mean. In the distribution of given resources among a fixed group of people, the optimal distribution scheme is achieved when any adjustment would harm someone in the group, reaching a critical point. As shown in Figure 7-1, the feasible region is shown in light blue, and the Pareto Optimal Frontier is marked by the red line. Points along this frontier represent allocations where it is impossible to make any individual better off without making someone else worse off. In economics, under given resources and technological conditions, when facing decisions to produce various goods, the resource allocation scheme that achieves the maximum overall benefit reaches the Production Possibility Frontier, which also implicitly conforms to the Doctrine of the Mean. In the moral realm, the Doctrine of the Mean echoes the "Stop at the Ultimate Good" in "The Great Learning".

Figure 7-1 Pareto Optimality



Practically, mastering the Doctrine of the Mean, learning to hold both ends in balance, requires superior wisdom and skills. The inspirations it brings to people includes:

1. Any extreme attitude and behavior are harmful, or at least inefficient. The expression "would rather have... than..." is a typical example. During the Cultural Revolution, the entire China was bombarded by extreme slogans such as "would rahter have socialist weeds than capitalist seedlings", "would rather have low socialist yields than high capitalist yields", "would rather have late socialist trains than punctual capitalist ones". A typical gold digger Ma Nuo stated that "she would rather cry in a BMW than smile on a bicycle". During the boycott of Japanese goods, ultranationalists claimed that they "prefer to buy fake domestic products rather than genuine Japanese goods". These emotional impulses are always a narcotic that harms rationality. There are also many projects that vow "at any cost", "a decisive battle", or "mobilizing the whole country's efforts". Even if the goals are achieved, waste of resources is inevitable, no to mention long lasting negative impact.
2. To grasp the two extremes, one must first understand the whole picture of things, and then determine the "middle" position between the two extremes. The "middle" here does not necessarily refer to the center point or line in physical concepts, or the median number in mathematical concepts (such as 3 between 1 and 5), but rather the only most appropriate, moderate, and efficient point. Just like the best fulcrum to be determined using the principle of leverage, this fulcrum does not have to be in the absolute middle position, but it is the most labor-saving and efficient.

3. Simply stacking two extremes together does not equal moderation. Ceteris paribus, a wooden stick cannot be expected both long and short at the same time. Equally, a regime cannot claim both democratic and dictatorial. The is obviously unreasonable since they both run counter to Confician Doctrine of the Mean and Plato's Principle of Non-Contradiction.
4. Discussing Doctrine of the Mean, one must first clarify concepts, lock in the time, scenario, and objects, etc., otherwise, it is easy to fall into the trap of sophistry, and thus mislead practice. Just like the example Socrates gave: a person is standing still, but his head and hands are shaking; if someone believes that this is the same person being both still and moving at the same time, this statement is incorrect. it should be said that this person is still in one part and moving in another part.
5. When multiple conflicting but individually good goals forcibly mixed together, without clarification of the premises and standards of each goal, it is easy to cause ambiguity in understanding and execution, and thus deviate from the doctrine of the golden mean. In May 1958, Mao Zedong insisted the CCP Central Committee set "going all out, aiming for the top, and achieving greater, faster, better, and more economical results" as the general guideline for building socialism. Although this reflected the party and the people's well-intended eagerness for rapid development, the goals of "great quantity, high speed and superb quality at minimal cost" could hardly be achieved simultaneously. As a result, the outcome was counterproductive, leading to severe waste of resources and directly attributing to the great famine across the country in the following three years.

6. Between truth and error, justice and evil, there is no middle ground, and any compromise is a harm to the Doctrine of the Mean, because adhering to truth and justice itself is a commitment to the doctrine of the golden mean. As time passes by, however, the Doctrine of the Mean has gradually evolved into a timid and conservative approach. Popular sayings like "the tree that stands out in the forest will receive more headwinds", and "the fattest pig gets butchered first" actually pulls the philosophy of life back to one extreme. Living in an environment of high uncertainty, they understandably advise people to muddle through for self-protection instead of striving for outstanding achievement. In addition, it they also breed hypocrisy, pretense and insincerity in human relationship.

"The Doctrine of the Mean" cites the extensive praise of King Cheng of Western Zhou from the Book of Songs, Major Odes, The Elegant Melody: "Exemplary is the noble man, with his virtuous governance, he is suitable for the common people as well as the nobility. You receive blessing and fortune from Heaven. Heaven protects you, bestows grace upon you, and entrusts you with a mandate, followed by inexhaustible prosperity."

There are a number of fatal flaws in Confucian thought that cannot withstand rational scrutiny, with the Doctrine of the Mean probably the most outstanding. The proposition of the Doctrine of the Mean has a very high philosophical and ethical intention and could have been an important methodology for Confucianism to proclaim benevolence and righteousness. Nonetheless, since its preoccupation with political ethics, Confucianism spares no effort to direct a philosophical inquiry on the Doctrine of the Mean to an ethical advocacy to the rulers and the nobilities.

1. By quoting the paragraph from Book of Songs as theoretical support, a conclusion is drawn that "one with great virtue must receive a mandate", thus entrusting the Doctrine of the Mean to the unreachable mandate of Heaven. This contradicts the persistent Confucian argument that virtue is the result of acquired cultivation other than being bestowed by heaven. It could have made more sense by relating to the notion that God helps those who help themselves, but no logical bridge is found in between.
2. It begins with the statement, "What Heaven has decreed is called nature; following this nature is called the Way; cultivating the Way is called teaching." It can be understood as "A person's nature is given by Heaven, acting in accordance with this nature is called the Way, and teaching is the cultivation of the Way." When placed in formal deductive logic, a fallacy of circular reasoning appears: "Teaching is for following nature, following nature is for obeying Heaven's decree; obeying Heaven's decree requires following nature, following nature requires teaching."
3. It elevates "moderation and harmony" as the supreme way, saying, "Before joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure are expressed, it is called moderation; when all expressions fall in the appropriate measure, it is called harmony. Moderation is the foundation of the world; harmony is the universal way. When moderation and harmony are achieved, heaven and the earth will be properly placed to nurture all things." If one asks, "Should the emotions of joy, anger, sorrow, and pleasure be expressed or not?" Zisi might answer, "It is proper not to express them, and it is also proper to express them." Because the moderation based on inexpression and harmony based on expression both belong to the

good side. He might then add, “Either you hold it in and don't express it, or if you really can't help but express it, then everything must accord with the right measure.” The question is, what is the right measure? The author offers neither a clue nor any answer, with which his response can naturally be deduced: “you still need to follow my grandfather’s teachings with ultmost sincerity, ‘Learn extensively, inquire carefully, think deeply, discern clearly, practice earnestly.’”

4. It says, “The way of the gentleman is vast and hidden”, and then says, “The Way is not far from people; those who make the Way distant from people cannot be said to be following the Way.” It says, “There are four virtues of the gentleman, which I have not been able to fully practice.” With all his great wisdom and virtue, even Confucius admitted that he has not achieved the Doctrine of the Mean in the four aspects of filial piety, fraternal duty, loyalty, and trustworthiness. Isn’t it way too demanding for ordinary people to attain that height? After discussing “the four virtues of the gentleman,” the author proposes “the five universal ways”, namely, the relationships between ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife, siblings, and friends. The three qualities – “knowledge, benevolence, and courage” - for achieving the universal way are added. The methods for cultivating these three virtues are “loving learning is close to knowledge, practicing diligently is close to benevolence, knowing shame is close to courage”.

With all the high-sounding ideals and inconsistent arguments, the whole text of the Doctrine of the Mean is still a patchy compilation and extension of Confucian thought. Coupled with Zhu Xi’s arbitrary

compilation and annotation, it greatly disguises its hollowness by a heap pompous and mysterious expressions greatly reduces its academic value. It remains only as an inspirational concept, unable to play a practical guiding role in moral rationality and moral practice. Therefore, it can only achieve a persuasive effect on those who are not good at reasoning with a pile of fragmented phrases, thus to a large extent playing the role of an anesthetic manufacture for the ruling class, in their process of ideological engineering.

Once again, the above critics prove that Hegel's evaluation on Confucius and the "Analects" is almost spot-on. In comparison, on this particular philosophical topic, the Confician "Doctrine of the Mean" offers insomuch as a dessert platter, while Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics" is a full-course meal, worthy of systematic study from an academic perspective.

Aristotle, in his "Nicomachean Ethics" (Ethika Nikomacheia), devotes a significant portion to discussing the Doctrine of the Mean (Mesotes). He believes that in all continuous and divisible things, there exist three conditions: excess, deficiency, and moderation. Excess and deficiency both destroy perfection, while only moderation preserves it. In practice, acting at the right time, in the right place, towards the right people, for the right reason, and in the right way, is to be moderate and perfect. At this state, he calls it virtue. Virtue exists between the two evils of excess and deficiency. He first states that, on the one hand, some actions and emotions are inherently evil, such as gloating, shamelessness, envy, adultery, theft, murder, etc., and are therefore always condemned, unrelated to excess and deficiency. On the other hand, some goods do not have the problem of excess and deficiency, such as courage and temperance. On these issues, moderation is also an extreme. He says,

"Virtue is the mean, it is hitting the middle (the only moderate point), it is the highest good and the extreme correctness." Deviation toward either end is a destruction of moral quality. As a core ethical principle, Aristotle also lists a table of virtues (Table 7-1) to illustrate the moderate virtues and the two biased extremes.

*Table 7-1 Aristotelian Golden Mean**

Deficiency	Virtue	Excess
Numbness	Mildness	Anger
Cowardice	Courage	Rashness
Shyness, Panic, Fear	Shame	Shamelessness
Indifference	Temperance	Indulgence
Schadenfreude	Righteous Indignation	Envy
Losing (Forbearance, Appeasement)	Justice	Gaining (Violence)
Stinginess	Generosity	Extravagance
Self-deprecation	Honesty	Self-praise
Not loving honor	Namelessness (Unperturbed by honor or disgrace)	Love of fame (Fishing for compliments)
Hatred (Contempt)	Friendship, Pride	Flattery, Obsequiousness

Weakness	Strength	Hard work (Firmness)
Humility	Magnanimity	Vanity
Stinginess	Liberality	Extravagance
Stiffness	Wit	Cunning

*The paraphrases in parentheses are what the author believes to be more appropriate. **Source:** Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics, The Commercial Press, 2003, page 336.

In fact, the dialogues in "The Republic" that revolve around the "four cardinal virtues" - wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice - each embody the idea of the mean. 1) Wisdom is a mean, it is neither knowing everything including trivial matters like chicken feathers and garlic skins, nor knowing nothing, but knowing what is beneficial and what is harmful to the state. 2) Courage is a mean, it is neither simply being fearless nor simply retreating, but knowing when to advance and when to retreat. 3) Temperance is a mean, it is neither being insatiable nor having no desires, but knowing what should be pursued and what should not be pursued. 4) Justice is a mean, it is neither taking on everything nor being idle, but knowing what should be done and what should not be done.[48] For this reason, Plato proposed the famous saying "virtue is knowledge", and Aristotle went further, believing that knowledge is only one of the three conditions of virtue, the others being "conscious and

[48] Xian Gang. "Plato and Aristotle on the Doctrine of the Mean", Philosophy Trends, February 23, 2017, http://cssn.cn/zhx/zx_wgzx/201702/t20170223_3426759_4.shtml

voluntary" and "steadfast action", which resonates with Wang Yangming's unity of knowledge and action.

To be fair, Confucian doctrines, including the subsequent development of Neo-Confucianism and Mind studies, although varied in branches and slated with contradictions, all revolve around the focal point of cultivatiing the gentleman's character. They aim to inspire people's goodwill through moral teachings and ritual practices, awakening them to the rhythm of the mind and the call of duty, with the hope of nurturing a resilient and broad spirit of benevolence among the elite.

"To live in the broadest sphere, to stand in the most proper place, to walk along the most universal path. When successful, to share the way with the people; when unsuccessful, to walk the way alone. Wealth and honor cannot corrupt, poverty and lowliness cannot sway, power and force cannot bend. This is called a true gentleman."

——Mencius, Duke Teng Wen II

The above remark by Mencius vividly depicts the character traits of a righteous gentleman and describes the lofty goal of self-cultivation and moral nurturing in Confucianism. The governance model designed by Confucianism centers on benevolence, and the ideal value of a society envisioned is a harmony. In such a society, everyone has their place and fulfills their duties, striving to be a gentleman, bravely upholding the morality of the world, and treating each other with tolerance, respect, equality, and mutual assistance. The choices of "sharing the way with the people" and "walking the way alone" reflect the Confucian concept of freedom. The moral norms of the ruler, ministers, father, and son, and the order of everyone in their place, being hierarchical but reciprocal, also

embody Confucian ideas of justice. Throughout the long course of history, in exchanges and collisions with foreign cultures including Buddhism and Marxism, these traditional Confucian concepts have undergone countless twists and transformations. However, the broad-mindedness of benevolence, the philosophy of humility and courtesy, and the noble character of the gentleman have been passed down as unique cultural genes of the Chinese people. With the continuous enhancement of comprehensive national strength, they have blossomed with distinctive charm in contemporary times as a normative evaluation system for reshaping the international order and the way of life for humanity.

7.3 Benevolence and Righteousness of Confucius and Mencius

Although Confucius was a descendant of the aristocracy of the state of Song, he himself came from a humble background, and as a result, he was often rejected by the noble families. From a young age, he was fond of rituals. Even as a child, he took pleasure in sacrificial ceremonies and ritual propriety, which formed his core values. As an adult, he once worked as a minor official under the Ji family. From managing warehouses, handling financial affairs, and supervising pastures, he was later promoted to be in charge of construction. He also served as a retainer for Gao Zhaozi of the Qi state. Throughout his life, he traveled between six feudal states, seeking knowledge and spreading his ideas. He highly revered the social harmony of the Western Zhou Dynasty, saying, "How splendid was the Zhou Dynasty's ritual system which drew inspiration from the Xia and Shang dynasties! I follow the system of the Zhou Dynasty." He spent his life trying to promote benevolent governance and

the implementation of ritual propriety based on the rites of the Zhou Dynasty. However, he was frequently met with indifference from the rulers and jealousy from their advisors, resulting in little practical effect. The early Qing Dynasty scholar Tang Zhen commented in the "Book of Latence" that "Despite the concept of benevolent governance, the common people heard of it but never experienced it." Confucius also experienced detention in the states of Chen and Cai and was separated from his disciples in the state of Zheng. In despair, he sadly lamented himself as forlorn as a homeless dog.

His advocacy for great aspirations, impartiality, employing the virtuous, establishing ethical order, and austerity governance, were once appreciated by Duke Jing of Qi, and he was pleased to serve as the Grand Minister of Justice under Duke Ding of Lu. Although he strongly advocated for benevolent governance centered on "loyalty and reciprocity", he was uncompromising in matters of ritual propriety and political order, reaching a point of rigidity. When hosting a signing ceremony for a friendly alliance between Duke Ding of Lu and Duke Jing of Qi on a high altar, he insisted on cutting the waist of those performers who did not conform to court rituals. He also executed the Lu official Shao Zhengmao who was highly influential with contentious opinions, on the charge of disorderly governance, committing a tragedy comparable to the prosecution of Socrates. Although his governance in the state of Lu ensured that lost items were not picked up on the roads, he insisted on "men and women walking separately on the road". Both in his time and in later generations, his rigid behavior and dogmatic views, such as "not sitting on an improperly placed mat" and "not eating improperly cut meat", as well as the extravagant and complicated rituals for sacrifices and funerals, were fiercely criticized, tarnishing his reputation as a revered sage and

proponent of benevolence. His lofty moral ideals were not only difficult to adapt to the situation of his time but fundamentally challenged human weaknesses, yet he insisted on "doing what is impossible". When Duke Ling of Wei showed excessive favoritism to his wife and paraded her through the streets in his chariot, Confucius felt slighted (being placed in a secondary carriage) and lamented, "I have not seen one who loves virtue as much as beauty". Therefore, the claim of Zhao Pu, the Prime Minister of the Northern Song Dynasty, that "The world can be properly governed with half of the Analects" is undoubtedly an exaggerated falsehood.

Confucius was naturally a hard learner and kept well-informed about the world. He once traveled from his hometown Qufu of today's Shandong province to Luoyang of Henan province to learn philosophy from Laozi, ventured to Ziyang of Sichuan province to learn music theory from Chang Hong, and especially devoted himself to learning the "Elegent Music" in the state of Qi. He was so absorbed in learning that he did not notice the taste of meat for three months. However, because he was constantly on the move and focused on promoting benevolent governance throughout his life, he only truly began to devote himself to writing and teaching in his later years, after becoming disheartened with repeated setbacks. (Figure 7-2) Standing on the riverbank, gazing at the endless and irreversible flow of the river water, Confucius exclaimed his heartfelt lament: "Oh, time flies as such, never ceasing day and night." With a big sigh, he murmured pitifully: "The way of utmost righteousness probably cannot be realized in the world!" With that, he started to edit poetry, establish rituals and music, compose "Spring and Autumn Annals", and picked regular teaching.

Similar to the relationship between Socrates and Plato, Confucius "lectured but did not write". The spread of his thoughts was largely due

to the many disciples he raised through his educational efforts, the so-called "three thousand disciples and seventy-two sages". Works such as the "Poetry Collection" and "The Analects" were compiled by his disciples based on their daily interactions and observations of his speech. As Sima Qian said in "The Biography of Boyi" in "Records of the Grand Historian": "For those who are confined in the alleys and wish to polish their conduct and establish reputation, if they are not attached to a person of high aspirations, how can their names be remembered by future generations?" In this sense, Confucius and his many disciples were mutually inspired for collective achievements, just as Sima Qian commented, "Although Yan Yuan (the most favorite disciple of Confucius) was devoted to learning, his prominence was enhanced by attaching himself to the tail of a swift horse."

Figure 7-2 Confucius Lecturing



The core value of Confucianism can be summed up in the words "benevolence" and "righteousness", which have become the highest moral standards for Chinese scholars and nobilities. On one hand,

Confucius advocated cherishing life and not risking it rashly, let alone engaging in fierce battles or duels out of temporary anger or even for defending individual dignity. However, the purpose of self-preservation is not simply to live a life of ease, but to use it as a vehicle to fulfill one's moral obligations defined as benevolence and righteousness - from ordinary duty of supporting parents to the grand mission of serving the state and the world. Confucius said, "The body, hair and skin, were received from our parents, and we must not dare to injure them. This is the beginning of filial piety." He also cautioned his disciple Zilu, who intended to serve as the Grand Marshal in the state of Wei, not to take unnecessary risks, as the ruler of Wei was weak and the crown prince short of virtue: "An ounce of prevention for the body is worth a pound of cure for injury of feeling. Knowing and acting cautiously, a gentleman does not stand under a crumbling wall, so how can one take it lightly?"

On the other hand, between life and benevolence and/or righteousness, he advocated that the former can be sacrificed: "The determined scholar and the benevolent person do not seek to live at the expense of benevolence, and they are willing to die a martyer for benevolence." (Analects · Duke Ling of Wei) Mencius echoed this view, believing that dying for the sake of righteousness is a proper end, while those who die because of crime are recreant: "There is nothing that is not predestined by fate. To comply with fate is to accept a normal destiny; therefore, those who understand fate will not stand under a crumbling wall. To die while striving to follow the principle of righteousness, one will end in a proper destiny; to die as a criminal in shackles, one will end in an improper destiny." (Mencius · Jinxin I)

As for the meaning of life and death, Sima Qian's thoughts are in line with the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. When he was 47 years old,

he was imprisoned by the obstinate Emperor Wu of Han for eight years due to the Li Ling case, and suffered the infamous punishment of castration. He had intended to end his life a number of times, but he finally decided to endure the humiliation in order to complete his masterpiece "Records of the Grand Historian" at hand. After 18 years of laboring over his manuscript, he finally completed the immortal work, consisting of 130 volumes and over 520,000 words, which paved the way for the historiography of China and was praised by Lu Xun as "the masterpiece of history and literacture". In facing the adversities of fate, Sima Qian, with unwavering willpower, fulfilled the distinction he made in his "Letter to Ren'an" regarding the different values of life and death: "Man is destined to die; death may be heavier than Mount Tai, or lighter than a feather. It is the way in which one meets it that makes the difference."

What is the relationship between benevolence and righteousness? In a conversation with Mencius, Gaozi proposed a semantic proposition: "Benevolence is internal, not external; righteousness is external, not internal." He argued that "benevolence" is a good intention from within the individual, while "righteousness" is the external manifestation of benevolence, influenced and expected by others. Confucius reduced benevolence to a concrete ethical norm: "To forbear oneself and restore propriety is benevolence. If everyone can forbear themselves and restore propriety for one day, the whole world will restore benevolence. Practicing benevolence is one's own affair; must one also rely on others?" To achieve this, one ought to refrain from "looking at what is contrary to propriety, listening to what is contrary to propriety, speaking what is contrary to propriety, and making a move that is contrary to propriety." If we compare it to what Greek philosophers said about "obeying the law is the highest good", then these rites listed by Confucius must also be the highest good. Zhu Xi

brought this ethical concept to the purification of original heart, proposing "To forbear oneself and restore propriety until there is no room left for a hair's breadth of selfishness, that is benevolence." Mencius firmly believed that deviating from benevolence and righteousness is self-abandonment.

One who indulges in self-deprecation cannot be reasoned with; one who abandons oneself cannot be worked with. Words that are not in line with propriety and righteousness are considered self-deprecation; when one cannot dwell in benevolence and act according to righteousness, it is considered self-abandonment. Benevolence is the peaceful dwelling place of people; righteousness is the right path of people. To leave the peaceful dwelling place unoccupied, to leave the right path unwalked, is truly lamentable!

——*Mencius*

Regarding benevolent governance, Mencius proposed an ethical bottom line: not to indulge in killing. When King Hui of Liang asked how to unify the world, Mencius replied, "To refrain from killing is the first step". As for the upper limit, it is to follow the direction of the people's hearts: "The reason Jie and Zhou lost the world was that they disheartened the people. Disheartened people with turn their back and walk away from the ruler. To gain the world with the Way means to gain the people; to gain the people with the Way means to gain their hearts; to gain their hearts with the Way means to gather what they desire and not impose on them what they dislike. The people's inclination toward benevolence is like water naturally flowing downwards, or animals running to the wilderness. Therefore, those who drive fish into the deep are otters; those who drive

pheasants into the thicket are hawks; those who drive the people away with force are tyrants like Jie and Zhou."

The following is an iconic statement of Mencius which earns high credit for the school of Confucianism to justify its proposition of benevolent governance.

The people are most important, followed by the gods of the land and grain, and the ruler is of least importance. Therefore, if one gains the appreciation of the people, they become the Son of Heaven; if one gains the appreciation of the Son of Heaven, they become a vassal lord; if one gains the appreciation of the vassal lords, they become a great officer. If a vassal lord endangers the state, then they should be replaced. Even if the sacrificial animals are fat and the offerings are clean, and the sacrifices are performed on time, but the nation still suffers from droughts and floods, then the god of the land and grain should be replaced.

——*Mencius*

The Confucian tradition, a system of thought enduring to this day, fundamentally believes in the inherent goodness of human nature. It advocates that the state need not resort to coercion or violence to compel people to conform to a certain system, for humans are born with an innate inclination towards goodness. Therefore, the task of the state is to establish and ensure the implementation of a comprehensive set of ritual norms, to cultivate and magnify the inherent "goodness" of the people through education and guidance, emphasizing especially the exemplary role of the ruler towards the people. "Governance means integrity. If the leader is integral, who would dare to be impertinent?" (Analects of Confucius, Yan Yuan) "If leader himself loses integrity, he will not be able to make others

follow the right path despite his command." (Analects of Confucius, Zi Lu)

Once, Duke Ai of the Lu state asked Confucius who was seated beside him, "May I inquire, what is the most important thing in humanity?" Confucius replied solemnly, "It is a great blessing that you raise this question, showing your benevolence towards the people. Therefore, I must answer without reservation. The most important thing in humanity is governance. Governance aims for integrity. As long as the ruler maintains integrity, then the common people can follow and stay integral. The conduct of the ruler is what the people learn from. If the ruler abandons integrity, what can the people learn from following the ruler?"

Duke Ai asked, "How should political affairs be governed?"

Confucius answered, "Between husband and wife, there should be distinction of rank; between father and son, there should be a sense of filial piety; between ruler and subject, there should be a sense of loyalty and righteousness. If these three aspects can be correct, then other matters will naturally fall into place."

Duke Ai said, "Although I have little talent, I still hope to know how to do well in these three aspects. Can you tell me?"

Confucius replied, "In the governance of political affairs by the ancients, 'loving others' was the most important; to achieve 'loving others', observing ritual propriety was the most important; to fulfill the purpose of observing ritual propriety, a reverent attitude was the most important; and the highest reverence is shown in the marriage of the Son of Heaven and the feudal lords. When the Son of Heaven or a feudal lord takes a bride, he should personally greet her in ceremonial attire. The reason for personally greeting her is to show reverence to the bride. Therefore, a noble person shows affection with reverence; to abandon reverence is to

abandon affection. Without affection, without reverence, there is no respect. Love and reverence should be the foundation of governing political affairs, shouldn't they?" (Confucius Teaching, Interpretation of Grand Wedding, Chapter 4)

In a sense, Confucius is a psychiatrist in applied ethics; He believes, moral cultivation is achievable with rituous settings instead of controlling behavior by coercive rules. On the contrary, coercion is not only unnecessary but also undermines the individual's moral consciousness, encouraging people to seek ways to circumvent the coercive rules. Heavy cost of governance is incurred when people use their wits to run counter to moral integrity.

At the inception of Confucianism, the three foundational figures, Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi, had differing views on human nature. In fact, this distinction appears in the Book of Songs, where it praises the virtuous deeds of the founding kings of the Zhou Dynasty, who created an enlightened and prosperous era, where "the noble are esteemed by the noble and loved by their kin, while the common people rejoice in the benefits of security and abundance." It is worth noting that this passage has not yet establishes a hierarchy of morality between the the noble and the base. Confucius, however, in his extensive teachings, consistently emphasized the distinction between the two classes. He not only held a deep-rooted hierarchical view but also firmly believed that "the social and moral pattern where the wise stay at the top and the fools stay at the bottom never changes." In his view, a noble person specifically refers to someone of high moral character, while a base person is categorically of low quality. Besides his hierarchical view, perhaps due to his lifelong immersion in political affairs and experiencing the vicissitudes of life, he displayed a cynical attitude towards the world. While he strongly

advocated for noble character, he also vehemently expressed his disgust towards the base and despicable individuals. He strongly detested labor work, and gets agitated when his past career of labor work was mentioned. In this regard, Mencius joins him in the conviction of class distinction by stating: "Some people labor with their brain, while others labor with their body. Those who labor with their brain will govern, while those who labor with their body are governed. Those who are governed provide for governors, while those who govern rely on the provisions of the governed. This is a universal principle under heaven." (Commentary on Duke Teng Wen, Part I)

Strictly speaking, Confucius did not intend to deny the proposition of the inherent goodness of human nature. Instead, he differentiated between the noble and the base based on the different moral qualities, or moral expressions of individuals in reality. A comprehensive review of the Analects reveals the main differences between the noble and the base as perceived by Confucianism. (Table 7-2)

Table 7-2 Moral Distinctions between The Noble and The Base

	Criteria	Distinction in Moral Performance
1	Philosophy	The noble seek harmony through diversity, while the base seek uniformity. The noble seek improvement in themselves, while the base seek it in others. The noble's path is dim yet advances daily; the base's path is clear yet fades away daily.
2	Mindset	The noble are open and broad-minded, while the base are suspicious and narrow-minded.

3	Pursuit	The noble cherish virtue, while the base cherish material possessions. The noble care about punishment, while the base care about favors.
4	Moral Realm	The noble are adept at righteousness, while the base are adept at profit.
5	Aspiration	The noble Confucian aspires to the path of great learning, while the base Confucian remains stuck in trivialities.
6	Moral Quality	The noble embody human virtues, while the base embody human vices.
7	Character	The character of the noble is like the wind, while the character of the base is like grass which will surely bend at the wind.
8	Attitude	The noble are calm and not arrogant, while the base are restless and arrogant.
9	Group Feature	There are unvirtuous individuals among the noble, but there are absolutely no virtuous individuals among the base.
10	Orientation	The noble aim high, while the base aim low.
11	Mentality	The noble follow the heavenly mandate in ease, while the base press their luck in anxiety.
12	Adversity	The noble may be poor, but they remain dignified; the base, when in poverty, behave shamelessly.
13	Capability	The wise noble cannot be employed in trivial matters but can be trusted with great mission; the witty base cannot be trusted with great mission but can be employed in trivial matters.
14	Reverence	The noble show reverence for heavenly mandate, the eminent, and the words of the sage. The base

		show no reverence for heavenly mandate due to their ignorance; they are impudent towards the eminent and scornful of the words of the sage.
15	Utilization of the Way	Upon learning the Way, the noble love others, while the base are more compliant to command.
16	Courage and Righteousness	With courage but no righteousness, the noble cause uphevals, while the base become bandits.
17	Mistake	The noble's mistakes are like the eclipses of the sun and moon, visible to all; once corrected, all will look up to them. The base always conceal their mistakes.
18	Relation	The noble foster the good deeds of others without facilitating their bad deeds. The base do the opposite.

7.4 The Loyalty and Filial Piety in Confucianism

Confucianism has always emphasized ruling the world with filial piety, because, in a clan culture, filial piety towards parents can naturally extend to loyalty towards the monarch. In the Analects, it is stated: "To be filial to parents and respectful to elder siblings, yet enjoy challenging superiors, such individuals are rare. Those who do not enjoy challenging superiors but enjoy fomenting rebellion are even rarer. The nobleman strives to grasp this fundamental principle; once the foundation is established, the path of benevolence is also established. Filial piety to parents and respect for elder siblings, this is the foundation of benevolence, isn't it?"

Confucianism originally advocated for mutual obligations between rulers and subjects, with the core principle being "following the Way, not the ruler". Confucius said, "When the ruler deems it appropriate to use a minister according to ritual, the minister will serve the ruler with loyalty." He also said, "Those who are called great ministers are those who serve the ruler according to the Way, but if the Way cannot be followed, they will stop." This means that if the ruler does not follow the Way to show benevolence and righteousness, the minister can free himself from the obligation to serve the ruler. Mencius was even more straightforward, stating, "If the ruler regards his ministers as hands and feet, the ministers will regard the ruler as their heart and soul. If the ruler regards his ministers as dogs and horses, the ministers will regard the ruler as a stranger. If the ruler regards his ministers as mere dirt and chaff, the ministers will regard the ruler as a mortal enemy." Mencius also said, "If the ruler makes a mistake, advise him. If he does not listen after repeated advices, then leave." He even believed that a tyrant had lost the legitimacy of rule, and the people had the right to rebel against him, as in the case of punishing a lethal criminal. Yù Ràng, a virtuous man from the State of Jin during the Spring and Autumn period, also interpreted this idea: "[When the king] treat me as a commoner, and I will repay him in the capacity of a commoner; treat me as a pillar of the state, and I will repay him in the capacity of a state pillar." He also left behind the famous saying, "A man will die for his bosom friend, a woman will dress up for her beloved." Mencius' idea that the people have the right to overthrow a tyrant was confirmed by John Locke's theory of the right to revolution.

When legislators attempt to take away and destroy the property of the people, or diminish their status to place them in a state of slavery

under arbitrary power, they put themselves in a state of war with the people, who therefore no longer owe obedience but seek refuge in the common protection provided by God against the violence of the oppressors. Therefore, when the legislative is inviolably preserved and their rights and properties when they endeavor to seize or give arbitrary power to anyone over the lives, liberties, or estates of the people, they forfeit their power, and the power is reverted back to the people, who have the right to restore their original freedom.

——John Locke, "Second Treatise of Government"

In fact, in terms of the dialectical application of the concept of heavenly mandate, once the ruler of the previous dynasty is overthrown, the new dynasty will vigorously proclaim this as a change in heavenly mandate to self-validate the legitimacy of its revolution.

Facing the dilemma of being unable to balance loyalty and filial piety, loyalty is the only option. The "Classic of Filial Piety" states: "The flial piety with which a noble serves his parents can be transferred as loyalty to the ruler." It is interesting to note that Confucianism was pushed aside almost by all the state rulers during the lifetime of Confucius and Mencius, but after the Han Dynasty it has been revered close to the Christian Bible. Confucian scholars who were far inferior to its founders in moral character and knowledge were highly seated in the emperial court. The turning point for the fate of Confucianism was the "solemnization of Confucianism" by Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty. Behind it, it was the reformation by Dong Zhongshu as how the dilemma of filial piety versus loyalty should be addressed. Although Confucius and Mencius emphasized the harmony and unity of filial piety and loyalty, even advocating for "transforming filial piety into loyalty", in cases conflict between the two,

they still assign prevailing value on filial piety. Their reasoning is consistent with the order of moral cultivation and benevolent exercise - individual, family, state and then the world - with family being the basic unit of the state and the world. Therefore, they hold that serving parents bears paramount importance, suggesting that in situations conflict, people should choose filial piety over loyalty. It is this attitude of encouraging people to serve their parents at the compromise and even sacrifice of the ruler's interests that hindered from gaining favors from those rulers, even though they also emphasized loyalty to the ruler.

Xunzi was the first Confician scholar to realize that this was why Confucianism was disfavored and even rejected by those in power. While affirming the fundamental status of family lineage, he proposed a duet of parenthood and statehood in the process of human development: while people are born and raised by parents, they are nurtured and educated by the state rulers. He went further to advocate that "there is no greater ritual than that of the sage king", explicitly requiring people to deal with the dilemma of loyalty and filial piety according to the principles of "the ruler is higher than parents" and "loyalty is higher than filial piety", thereby laying the theoretical foundation for Confucianism to attend upon the political power.

Dong Zhongshu of the Han Dynasty inherited and promoted Xunzi's position, explicitly placing the relationship between ruler and subjects before kinship. His famous framework of the "Three Cardinal Guides", i.e. "the ruler is the guide of the subjects, the father is the guide of the son, the husband is the guide of the wife", is clearly distinct from Mencius' people-based "great order of humanity" but fundamentally consistent with Xunzi's "order of righteousness" in the principal-subordinate relationship By emphasizing supremacy of the ruler and subordination of the

people, Dong rounded up the principle of "loyalty over filial piety", which ultimately transformed idealistic Confucian thought to the humble servitude to the imperial court.

The feeble Southern Song Dynasty allowed for considerable political space for some Neo-Confucian scholars to adhere to the orthodox Confucian principles of ruler-subject relationships. As a follower of Zhu Xi's ideology, the Southern Song Neo-Confucian scholar Chen Pu interpreted the "Three Guides and Five Constants" as follows: "The 'guides' are like the great rope of a net, to which all the nodes are attached. When the guides are lifted, the nodes open wide; when the guides are upright, the nodes will follow in orderly fashion. In a state or the world, it is necessary for the ruler, father, and husband to be upright first, and then the subjects, children, and wives will follow and be upright. There are five levels of human relations, but the relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife are the most important. When these three are upright, everything else will be upright. From the perspective of human ethics, each person should fulfill their own duties without waiting for others. However, when it comes to the responsibilities of family, state, and the world, the ruler must be upright before the subjects are upright, the father must be upright before the son is upright, and the husband must be upright before the wife is upright. From ancient times to the present, this has always been the case. The importance lies in the origin of education; those who hold positions must first fulfill their own duties."

Zhen Dexiu's explanation on the ruler-subject relationship is more straightforward: "Speaking of the Three guides, if the ruler is the guide, when the ruler is upright, the subjects will also be upright... Therefore, those who become rulers must stand upright themselves in order to govern

their subjects." It is evident that he demands that kings must set an example first and foremost, rather than unconditionally possessing absolute authority. Other Confucian scholars from the Song Dynasty proposed, "As for the ruler, although he may have the power to command his subjects, he must not act against reason. As for the subjects, although they must obey the ruler, they must not abandon the Way and blindly follow him."

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, mainstream Confucianism abandoned the requirement for those in power to set an example, freeing them from the responsibility and obligation to those beneath them. From then on, they willingly prostrated themselves at the feet of rulers, becoming theoretical tools for justifying the oppression of the lower classes. In Chinese culture, which is adept at deifying figures, Zeng Guofan, praised by later generations as the third semi-sage after Confucius and Wang Yangming, declared: "The way of the Three Guides, with the ruler as the guide of the subject, the father as the guide of the son, and the husband as the guide of the wife, is what the earth relies on to stand and the heaven relies on to be revered. Therefore, the 'Record of Rites' says: the ruler is heaven, the father is heaven, and the husband is heaven. The 'Book of Rites' also records: the ruler is supreme, the father is supreme, and the husband is supreme. Even if the ruler is not benevolent, the subjects cannot be disloyal; even if the father is not kind, the son cannot be unfilial; even if the husband is not wise, the wife cannot be disobedient."

Liang Qichao was the first to introduce the concept of the "two and a half sages", referring to Confucius, Wang Yangming, and Zeng Guofan. He measured their status based on the "Three Imperishables" from the "Zuo's Annals (Zuo Zhuan)" - the establishment of personal virtue,

achievements in their careers, and theoretical contributions, which collectively endure the test of time. Liang recognized Zeng Guofan's controversial record of brutality during the suppression of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom and therefore categorized him as a semi-sage due to his compromised virtue. However, it is ironic that Liang, a prominent figure in the Chinese enlightenment movement, who opposed the Qing Dynasty's imperial system and advocated for political reform, included Zeng Guofan, a local warlord who helped sustain the declining Qing Dynasty, among the ranks of sages. This suggests Liang's endorsement of Zeng's imperishable accomplishments in defending the failing imperial autocracy and his acceptance of neo-Confucian ideology, despite its oppressive ethical principles. The contradiction in Liang's ideas and actions illustrates the deep-seated influence of neo-Confucian thought on Chinese intellectuals and society. Over centuries, Confucian ethics have merged with authoritarianism, becoming ready and handy tool in the hands of the rulers to tame their subjects for intuitive submission.

A notable example of this influence is seen in the collusion between Kang Youwei and the last emperor, Yuan Shikai. Kang. Kang used to be a reformist leader advocating for a British-style constitutional monarchy, but underwent a drastic shift in his political ideology to defend and legitimize autocratic rule through his manipulation of Confucianism. In 1912, Kang took a step further than Dong Zhongshu and other neo-Confucian scholars by establishing the Confucian Church to promote reverence for Confucius. In 1913, Yuan, the first president of the Republic of China, issued the "Respect Confucius Edict" to cultivate an official ideology favoring the restoration of a monarchical system. In December 1915, Yuan proclaimed himself emperor, renaming the country the Empire of China, known as the "Hongxian Imperial System". In 1916, Kang published the

"Letter to the President and Premier", advocating for "Confucianism as the dominant religion, to be enshrined in the constitution".

During the subsequent New Culture Movement, which championed democracy and science, Hu Shi recognized that the traditional Confucian ethics and rites, which had long stifled societal progress, were products of collusion between compliant scholars and autocratic rulers. They used Confucius as a facade while distorting his teachings to maintain monarchical rule. In response to the "Opposing Confucius, Revoking Confucianism" trend, Hu Shi argued rationally, stating, "It is not an attack on Confucius himself, but on the authority that monarchs throughout history have vested in him as an idol; it is not an attack on Confucianism, but on the essence of autocratic politics." During this period, philosopher Zhang Shenfu advocated more explicitly for "Overthrowing the Confucian family store and rescuing Confucius", aiming to rid of the abusive ideas and practices in the name of Confucius, but vindicate Confucius and his philosophy. However, extremists in the movement disregarded the latter part of the slogan, lacking comprehension or interest in understanding its true meaning.

7.5 Mencius Humanitarian Value

Mencius, also known as Mengzi, was a prominent Confucian philosopher who followed in the footsteps of Confucius and elevated his ideas of benevolence and righteousness to new heights. He is often regarded as the "Second Sage" after Confucius. Mencius was from the state of Zou during the Warring States period and had deep connections with Confucius' lineage. Zou was located in present-day Shandong Province, along with the capital of the state of Lu, Qufu. According to the Records of the

Grand Historian, Mencius' ancestors had moved from Lu to Zou, and Mencius himself studied under the grandson of Confucius, Zi Si. Like Confucius, Mencius traveled to various states such as Qi, Song, Teng, Wei, and Lu to promote his ideas of benevolent governance. Similar to the Analects, one of the Four Books, the Book of Mencius was also compiled by Mencius' disciples, including Gongsun Chou and Wan Zhang.

Mencius was the pioneer of the doctrine of the goodness of human nature, which laid the foundation for the Confucian emphasis on virtue. He also identified the moral source for benevolence and righteousness in human behavior. Over the moral essence of human nature, a debate was inspired between Mencius and Gaozi by the statement that "the highest goodness is like water" in Tao Te Ching, the masterpiece in Daoism. Gaozi insisted that human nature is neutral - indifferent to good and evil, just like water which flows naturally to any directions. Mencius defended his belief that human nature is inherently good because water always flows naturally downward. He attributed evil behaviors in reality to external influences rather than human nature itself, stating, "When they lose their true nature, they are no longer good." He firmly believed that the "four beginnings" or "four hearts" - the heart of compassion, the heart of shame, the heart of courtesy, and the heart of right and wrong - are innate in humans and are the fundamental signs that distinguish humans from animals.

Drawing on Mencius' assertion, the widely known Three-Character Classic, a primer for moral education since the Song Dynasty, opens with a leading statement that "At the beginning, man's nature is inherently good". According to Mencius, various bad acts people observe or experience in society cannot negate the inherent reality of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom in human nature, nor can they prove that

the original nature of humanity is evil. He argued that the lack of self-reflection leads to the abandonment of these innate qualities of goodness. The Qing Dynasty neo-Confucian scholar Cheng Yaotian further extended the concept of innate goodness to emotional and intellectual goodness, stating, "Emotions that naturally arise are good, and talents used to seek the inherent goodness without fail are also good. Therefore, innate goodness leads to emotional goodness, and talents are also good." (General Records of Skills - Annocdotes on Learning)

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant advocated that the good will belongs to humans as an innate and unconditional reality. He believed that all internal qualities such as wisdom, courage, and patience have positive moral value only when placed under the command of good will; otherwise, they will lead to evil deeds. Although both Kant and Mencius start from a metaphysical ontology when it comes to the proposition of human goodness, Kant adopted an analytical approach as compared with Mencius' non-modal judgment derived from observation and analogy. Kant believed that good intentions arise from the highest mission of reason. As moral agents, humans must obey moral duties based on conscious and voluntary submission to morality, demonstrating the necessity of respecting the laws of behavior. Based on this, he a priori proposed three moral laws that are universally applicable to human society from the perspective of pure reason: 1) the "universal law of legislation", which means that the standard of individual behavior must be able to become a universal law recognized by all rational beings; 2) "humanity as an end in itself", which means that human actions must treat humanity as an end and not as a means, ultimately serving the good of humanity; and 3) "autonomy and self-discipline of the will", meaning that the will of each rational person is the will that establishes universal laws, excluding external factors and

self-preferences, and instead rationally setting moral obligations for oneself. However, Kant was deeply influenced by Rousseau's work "Émile", emphasizing the role of education in shaping the moral will, which is consistent with Confucian thought.

Comparing the philosophies of Confucianism with Kantianism, although both start and end with the concept of goodness, their goals and means are vastly different. One aims to establish a harmonious society under the rule of a wise ruler, while the other seeks individual freedom; one hopes to enlighten individuals and enhance moral cultivation through self-restraint, while the other advocates for institutional safeguards guided by reason. This contrast highlights the divergence between Eastern and Western moral philosophies. Western ontology, established through metaphysics, relies on the definition of propositions, the abstraction of reason, and the deduction of logic, while Eastern philosophy's ontology relies more on the authority of indisputable sources and the charm of metaphors.

Based on the belief in the inherent goodness of human nature – "ability without learning", and supported by the simple logic that "everyone possesses it, and therefore I possess it", Mencius downplayed, if not outright denied, Confucius' distinction between the noble person (junzi) and the petty person (xiaoren). He advocated that "everyone can be a sage like Yao and Shun", thereby expanding the inclusiveness and universality of his moral philosophy.

Driven by deep sympathy for the people, Mencius' philosophy of putting the people first has echoed through the ages. While later Confucian schools of thought paid lip service to benevolence, righteousness, and morality, they at most viewed the well-being of the people and the authority of the ruler as a means-end relationship. When these two conflicted, they unhesitatingly upheld the latter.

Confucius consistently lumped together morally inferior petty individuals and socially lower-class commoners, often displaying disdain for the toiling masses. Mencius's assertion that "those who govern by exerting their minds rule over people, while those who govern by exerting their physical strength are ruled by others" is similar to Confucius' statement that "the people can be made to follow but cannot be made to understand". This is also close to Socrates' proposition that philosophers should govern the state. However, compared with Confucius, Mencius displayed strong sympathy for the working people.

Mencius acknowledged the decisive role of private property in the moral behavior of the people, stating, "For those who possess fixed property, their mindsets are stable; for those who do not possess fixed property, their mindsets are instable." He also warned, "If there are no stable mindsets, they will be reckless. Then there is nothing they will not do in terms of violating rites and breaking the law." (Mencius, Chapter of Duke Wen of Teng) Therefore, he proposed a system of property ownership from the emperor to the commoners, modeled after the well-field system of the Zhou dynasty[49]. Although the land distribution system was outdated by his time, its intention was to oppose the rampant land consolidation by the aristocracy and the powerful, hoping to provide a stable means of life for the people at the bottom of the society.

In contrast to many other Confucian scholars, his idea that "the people are the most important, the ruler is the least important" is sincere and trustworthy.

[49] A piece of land was divided into nine squares, with the central square owned by the state or monarch but cultivated by farmers who tend to the surrounding squares in the form of corvée.

Firstly, in the selection of talents and the imposition of penalties, despite his sense of social hierarchy, Mencius was the first to propose democratic governance: "When the sovereign selects the virtuous, if it becomes necessary to appoint those of humble status above the noble, and promote those who are distant above those who are close, how can such matters be handled without utmost care? Thus, if those in close proximity all speak highly of someone, it is not sufficient; if all the officials deem someone worthy, it is not sufficient; only when the entire nation speaks highly of someone should he be scrutinized; and if found truly virtuous, then he should be appointed. If those in close proximity all speak ill of someone, do not heed them; if all the officials deem someone unworthy, do not heed them; only when the entire nation speaks ill of someone should he be scrutinized; and if found truly lacking virtue, then he should be dismissed. If those in close proximity all advocate for someone's execution, do not heed them; if all the officials deem someone deserving of death, do not heed them; only when the entire nation calls for someone's execution should he be scrutinized; and if found truly deserving, then he should be executed. Thus, it is said that he is killed by the entire nation. Only in this manner can one truly be a parent to the people." (Mencius, Chapter of King Hui of Liang). This somewhat resembles contemporary systems of democracy and trial by jury.

Next, he urged the monarch to implement benevolent governance to achieve harmony with the people, including "reducing punishments, lightening taxes", and "not disturbing the farming seasons". Most outstandingly, he supported the people's resistance against tyrannical kings: if a ruler oppresses his people greatly, he will be killed and his country destroyed; if not to that extent, he will be in danger and his country weakened. He proposed the idea that nowadays, the rights of the people are

superior to the sovereignty of the ruler. When asked by King Xuan of Qi if it was permissible to kill a ruler, he referred to a ruler who harms innocent people as a tyrant and enemy of the people, believing that killing such a ruler is an act of justice, not regicide.

King Xuan asked, "Did Tang (the Shang dynasty) overthrow Jie (the last ruler of the Xia dynasty)? Did King Wu (of Zhou) overthrow Zhou (the last ruler of the Shang dynasty)?" Mencius replied, "According to history, they did." King Xuan asked, "Is it permissible for a minister to kill his ruler?" Mencius replied, "Those who commit treason against benevolence are called traitors, those who commit treason against righteousness are called villains, and a person who combines both traits is called a tyrant. I have heard of the execution of a tyrant like Zhou, but I have not heard of regicide."

——Mencius, "Book of Mencius, King Hui of Liang, Part II"

He cited the story from the "Book of Documents" about King Tang of Shang's armed expedition to overthrow the cruel and guilty ruler of the Xia state to approve a just invasion. He agreed with the idea of one country attacking another ruled by a tyrant, because the oppressed people there yearn for liberation by external assistance, much like "crops in great drought looking forward to the appearance of clouds and rain". When King Xuan of Qi attacked the state of Yan, the people welcomed his army with food and drink, believing that the king would rescue them from misery. However, Mencius reminded that a truly just army should be extremely cautious. After overthrowing the tyrannical king of Yan, they should consult with the people of Yan to establish a new ruler before withdrawing their troops.

Throughout the Confucian tradition, there is a consistent advocacy for benevolent governance, but it is generally from the perspective of sustaining the position of the existing rulers. Mencius, however, stands out as one of the few true Confucian masters who prioritized the ultimate goal of the people's well-being and prosperity.

"If a king implements benevolent governance, reduces punishments, lightens taxes, promotes agriculture, and allows the strong adults a break to cultivate filial piety, brotherhood, loyalty, and trustworthiness, and to serve his father and elder brothers in the family, and to superiors and elders in the community, then he can make implements to defend against the strong armor and sharp weapons of Qin and Chu aggressions with the same devotion."

——Mencius, "Book of Mencius, King Hui of Liang, Part One"

The idea that "the people prevails the ruler" in Mencius was undoubtedly influenced by Zuo Qiuming, a figure from the late Spring and Autumn period. Zuo was praised by Confucius for his noble character and extensive knowledge, and later Sima Qian also called him a "gentleman of Lu" (due to his origin in the state of Lu). In the story "Yanzi does not die for the ruler" by Zuo: Cui Zhu killed Duke Zhuang of Qi when he was having an affair with Cui's wife. Someone asked Yan Ying, a Qi state minister standing outside the gate of Cui's house, how he should act - whether he should follow the ruler to death, flee, or resign and return home. Yan Ying replied: "Duke Zhuang of Qi is not the only ruler I serve, why should I die for him? I am innocent, why should I flee? I serve the people and the state, why should I resign and return home at this moment?" From this, it can be concluded how a minister should uphold

righteousness: “If the ruler dies or flees for the sake of the state, the minister should follow without hesitation; on the other hand, if the ruler dies or flees for personal reasons, except for close friends, who would be loyal to him?” Next, Cui Zhu opened the door and invited Yan Ying into his home. Some strongly suggested that Cui should also kill Yan Ying, but Cui replied: “Yan Ying is a gentleman who is deeply loved by the people, letting him go is something that wins the hearts of the people.”

Mencius also realized that a good governance model cannot rely solely on benevolence or administrative techniques, stating, “Goodness alone is not enough to govern, and laws alone cannot make themselves effective”, emphasizing the need to combine both. Regretably, he was unable to offer a feasible strategy as how to achieve this ideal.

7.6 Xunzi’s Cold Severity

Xunzi (313-238 BC) was a great thinker of the late Warring States period. Although he belonged to the Confucian school, he decisively rejected Mencius’ theory of innate goodness, believing that sages and commoners were originally the same in nature. He argued that everyone has tendencies for “loving beauty, loving sounds, loving flavors, loving profits, and enjoying comfort in body and clothing”. Therefore, he clearly asserted, “Human nature is clearly evil; its goodness is a result of conscious activity.” Here, “conscious activity” means “adjusted or corrected behavior”. This implies that everyone’s innate nature is evidently evil, and goodness comes from external teachings and self-cultivation, which he called “transforming one’s nature to attain artificiality”.

He constructs his argument by establishing clear definitions to differentiate between human nature and acquired cultivation: “That which

cannot be learned or practiced but is innate in people is called nature; that which can be learned and accomplished, which can be practiced and achieved, is called artificiality." Building on this, he sharply criticizes Mencius' advocacy of the theory of innate goodness for failing to "examine the distinction between human nature and artificiality", thus lapsing into arbitrariness. In his view, since everyone is born with a tendency to "desire profit and pursue gain", if left unchecked and unguided, society would inevitably descend into "rebellion and disorder" – "comity giving way to contention... loyalty and trustworthiness giving way to theft and robbery... propriety and righteousness giving way to licentiousness". It is precisely because human nature is evil that it is imperative to uphold the laws of the ancient kings and implement ritual and righteousness to suppress evil and promote goodness.

His understanding of a noble person and a petty person also differs from Confucius. He believed that the distinction between them is entirely formed through nurture, stating that "Those who are influenced and taught, accumulate learning, and follow ritual and righteousness are noble, while those who indulge their natures, behave recklessly, and violate ritual and righteousness are petty."

Although Xunzi advocated the theory of evil human nature, he acknowledged people's normal desires for "satiety when hungry, warmth when cold, rest when tired". Since these desires are unquenchable, people cannot be quelled from seeking satisfaction. Otherwise, they will resort to deceit or take risks, as the saying goes, "When birds are deprived, they peck; when beasts are deprived, they attack; when people are deprived, they deceive." Therefore, he was not an ascetic; his definition of evil human nature only included unbridled desires, which would lead to a vicious cycle of strife and disorder, saying that "Without reasonable

standards to limit their desires, they will scramble; scramble leads to chaos, and chaos leads to ruin."

Based on the understanding of individual greed as a natural trait, his arguments directly point to the root cause of social chaos, namely the blurred rules regarding individual rights and proper behavior within the state. As a result, the distinction between good and evil becomes indiscernible, and moral education becomes ineffective. To this day, this chaos has not only failed to be properly addressed but has also intensified. In response, he systematically proposed the solution of "the virtue of heaven or the policy of the king" which includes but not limited to the following:

1) Moral transformation occurs through the teaching and implementation of rites, which establish clear social hierarchies and define rights and duties. "The ancient sage kings abhorred chaos, thus they instituted rites and righteousness to fulfill people's needs based on their respective societal roles. They delineated ranks for the noble and the humble, differentiated between the old and the young, and set appropriate regulations for the poor and the wealthy, as well as for the weak and the powerful. By regulating desires and satisfying demands, they ensured that desires were never unfulfilled due to material shortages, nor materials depleted due to people's desires. This mutual restraint between materials and desires led to their balanced growth. This is the origin of rites."

2) The combination of rites and law is crucial. Although he encouraged individuals to be committed to continuous accumulation of goodness, yet based on the theory of evil human nature, he challenged Mencius: if human nature is truly upright, orderly, and obedient, then what use is there for a sage emperor, or for ritual and righteousness? He went on to argue that even if there were sage kings and ritual and righteousness, what more could they add to the inherent nature of being upright, orderly, and

obedient? Just because the sages of ancient times believed that human nature is evil - inclined towards rebellious and disorderly activities, they established the authority of the kings to rule over them, promoted ritual and righteousness to educate them, established the rule of law to manage them, and imposed severe penalties to restrain them, so that all people in the world would start from observing order and conform to the standards of goodness. Therefore, it is necessary to have the guidance of teachers and laws, as well as the guidance of rituals and righteousness. Only then will people start from modesty and deference, adhere to ritual and law, and ultimately move towards peace and stability. This is the governance of sage kings and the education of ritual and righteousness.

If authority of the kings is discarded, if education in ritual and righteousness is forfeited, if the rule of law is abolished, and if coercive punishment is eliminated, allowing everyone to act as they please, then in no time the strong will oppress the weak, the many will bully the few, and the world will descend into chaos with rebellions and states mutually destroying each other.

3) Effective legal enforcement is essential for maintaining a good social order. Xunzi emphasized that while good legislation is important, it must be supported by effective enforcement. Therefore, it is crucial to organize subordinates to thoroughly discuss established laws. Officials at all levels should communicate within their respective areas of authority to ensure transparency and to close any loopholes. In enforcing the law, cases with clear legal basis should be handled according to the law, while those without specific provisions should be handled by analogy. This comprehensive approach is necessary for effective administrative management.

However, showing favoritism and deviating from established procedures is counterproductive in governance. For serious offenders, immediate execution is necessary, without the need for further education. On the other hand, ordinary citizens should be educated and transformed without relying solely on administrative measures. Those who spread evil ideologies or commit heinous acts should be assigned compulsory work for re-education, with a focus on transformation. Rewarding those who comply and punishing those who do not is crucial in maintaining order.

For those who oppose the system, especially with their talents and actions, decisive action should be taken, including execution if necessary. For minor offenders who are not beyond redemption, forced labor should be used as a means of education and as a deterrent to others. This approach, characterized by assigning individuals to work, awaiting their transformation, and using rewards and punishments accordingly, reflects the virtuous conduct akin to that of heaven. It is the political strategy adopted by saintly kings to achieve their noble ambitions.

4) The selection of officials for righteous and effective governance must be based on meritocracy. Those who possess both virtue and talent should be promoted based on their merit, regardless of their current rank. Conversely, those who lack virtue and ability should be promptly removed from their positions.

Prior to assigning roles and responsibilities, the ranking of officials and subjects should follow a hierarchy similar to the clear distinctions found in ancestral temples. Even individuals descended from kings, nobles, or officials should be classified as commoners if they fail to adhere to ritual and righteousness. Conversely, individuals descended from commoners should be classified as high-ranking officials so long as they have

demonstrated proper knowledge, correct behavior, and adherance to ritual and righteousness.

5) Political security relies on the benefits delivered to the people. Quoting the famous saying that "water can carry a boat, but it can also overturn it", Xunzi pointed out, "When the common people are terrified by the government, the ruler can never stay secure in his position." Therefore, he proposed the "three principles of a noble ruler": "To seek security, nothing is better than fair governance and devotion to the people; to seek glory, nothing is better than promoting rites and respecting scholars; to seek achievement and fame, nothing is better than honoring the worthy and employing the capable." He warned that an extractive policy of enriching the state and depriving of the people would lead the state to collapse and destruction. In addition, special care for vulnerable groups is not only conducive to social stability, it can also put the virtue of the ruler on visible display. He suggested: "For the five disabilities (deafness, blindness, lameness, mutilation, and dwarfism), the ruler should take them in, support them, and employ them according to their abilities." He called on a program of alms and relief to provide them with clothing and food, and respective government agencies should ensure that they are all cared for and none are left behind.

6) The key to managing interstate relations lies in strengthening one's own national power and garnering international goodwill. Among the three approaches to dealing with interstate competition, the Benevolent Way aims to attract people from around the world and gain the voluntary submission of other states' rulers through strength and virtue. The Hegemonic Way focuses on forming extensive alliances to foster a peaceful external environment, while the Militant Way involves seizing

land from other states, leading to increased vigilance and hostility from neighboring states.

Using military might to seize territory from other states incurs a perilous cost in lives and resources. It not only breeds wariness and antagonism among the populace of the aggressor, but also prompts brave resistance from the people in the invaded state. Even if initial victory is achieved, the population (particularly the talented and rich) of the conquered state may flee or engage in persistent resistance. Consequently, while territory may be acquired, the labor and defense force necessary for its sustenance are lost. This loss outweighs any gains, leading to a decline in national power. Other states with longstanding grievances may exploit this weakness to invade, resulting in the state's destruction and the ruler's downfall.

7) The ruler must establish official positions according to the characteristics of various industries and clearly define the responsibilities and authorities of officials at all levels. They should seek opinions from multiple sources, conduct regular assessments of officials, reward or penalize them based on the quality of their administrative performance, and reform the administration according to changing circumstances. This is to ensure that officials at all levels are dedicated, prevent abuse of power, and eliminate dereliction of duty.

Xunzi's ideas influenced two seemingly opposing but fundamentally similar schools of thought. One is the Legalist school, which advocated for the state to directly control the desires of the people through violence, and the other is the Confucian school, which successively formulated rigid moral and ritual constraints on desires. Symbolized by Zhu Xi's "upholding the principle of heaven and extinguishing human desires", the latter reached its peak in the Song and Ming dynasties. Superficially,

Legalism is rigid insisting on severe laws, while Confucianism is flexible advocating for clear and strict virtues. However, both aimed to maintain royal authority, and when moral principles and rituals became family rules and judicial standards, the differences between them became blurred.

7.7 The Philosophical Knot of Neo-Confucianism

Neo-Confucianism denotes to the "School of Li" or "school of principle" developed during the Song and Ming dynasties. "Li", originally referring to the texture of jade, was extended to mean the universal laws followed by everything in the world, akin to the "Dao" in the Chinese context and "Giri" in Japanese. Scholars of this period aimed to seek the Dao through understanding these universal laws, and thus, their dominant academic system was called the Study of Principle or the Study of the Dao. As early as the Wei and Jin dynasties, Wang Bi, a representative figure who elucidated the principles of the I Ching and Daoism, said, "Things do not happen without reason; they must follow their principles." (Wang Bi, "Brief Notes to I Ching") The "Lost Writings of the Two Chengs" (Vol. XVIII), stated, "If there is something, there must be a norm; one thing must have one principle." These must have been inspired by previous Confucian and Daoist teachings, but its notion of "differentiation within unity" advanced it further. "Unity of principle" explains the unity of laws, while "differentiation" provides the basis for the diversity and hierarchical order of things.

Since the Qin and Han dynasties, almost all scholars can be said to have come from the Confucian school, as only Confucianism had relatively systematic teaching materials, not to mention its exclusive status in the imperial examination system. Even with innovation based on the

absorption of many other schools, their teachings are still classified as a branch of Confucianism, i.e. Neo-Confucianism. The "Scholarly Archive of Song-Yuan Dynasties" evaluates the thought of Zhang Zai, a representative figure of Neo-Confucianism in the Song dynasty, as follows: "His study takes the Book of Changes as its foundation, the Doctrine of the Mean as its goal, the rites as its form, and teachings of Confucius and Mencius as its ultimate source", aiming at "adherence to ancient rites".

Since the Wei and Jin dynasties, Confucianism based on the teachings of Confucius and Mencius gradually declined. With the introduction of Buddhism to China, mainstream scholars began to integrate it with Daoism in the philosophical framework of Confucianism, forming what was known as the "Neo-Confucianism". Specifically, they raised the banner of exploring the essence of things and their operating principles, blending the elusive concepts of Laozi's "inexpressive Way", Liezi's "the Way of void" and Buddhist "metaphysical emptiness", and then applying Confucian "self-cultivation and the observance of rites" to give Confucianism a new shape. In their metaphysics, the Daoist concept of the natural "Way" was reduced to "Utimacy (Taiji)" or "Principle", the Buddhist concept of "causality" was likened to the Yin and Yang "vitality or energy (qi)" that impels all things to take shape and evolve, the Confucian idea of "benevolence" was linked to "human conscience", and various "proctocals and rituals" belonged to the instrumental "norm". The following statement by the master of Neo-Confucianism, Zhu Xi, basically represents the philosophical thought of this school:

Between heaven and earth, there is principle and vitality. Principle is the way above form, the foundation of life; vitality is the instrument below form, the instrument of life. Therefore, the birth of human beings and

everything must receive this principle to have property, and also receive this vitality to have form.

——Zhu Xi, "Reply Letter to Huang Daofu"

The School of Neo-Confucianism proposed the lofty goal of "exhausting the ultimate universal law and property of all things", dedicating itself to grand philosophical research, but showing no interest in physical sciences. Instead, it devoted all its enthusiasm on the study of human conscience and social values. On one hand, it elaborated on the Confucian classics in more detail, and on the other hand, it borrowed ideas from Daoism, Mohism, Yin-Yang School, and Buddhism, attempting to elevate Confucian ethics to a philosophical height. For example, Confucius described two different character traits of a noble person: "The wise find pleasure in water; the benevolent find pleasure in mountains. The wise are active; the benevolent are tranquil. The wise are joyful; the benevolent are long-lived." (Analects, Yong Ye) Zhu Xi explained, "The wise understand the principles of things and flow freely without obstruction, resembling water, hence they delight in water; the benevolent are firm in righteousness and principle, committed to their stance, resembling mountains, hence they delight in mountains." (Collected Comments on the Analects) Zhou Dunyi elevated these Confucius' ethical statements to a higher level of universality and proposed, "Utimacy moves and produces yang; when it reaches its limit, it becomes still. Stillness produces yin; when it reaches its limit, it moves again. With one movement and one stillness, they mutually root each other." (Explanation to the Ultimacy Diagram)

With the assertions that "The Infinity breeds the Ultimacy", "Motion and stillness shift positions, and yin and yang have no beginning to each other" (as expressed by Song Lianxi), the School of neo-Confucianism

brought up an ontological statement that everything is in constant motion and change. Instead of exploring such motion and change as a matter of natural science, it embarked on a path of unrestrained departure from the tangible towards the abstract, leading to the development of subjectivism. Although it advocated for establishing an equivalent connection between the Heavenly Principle and Human Principle, it made no progress in the field of natural sciences, which it referred to as "Principle" and "Vitality". Lacking a cognitive and methodological foundation in natural sciences, it could not break out of the vortex of repetition and circular reasoning in the humanities. It sought to construct a new discourse in the realm of knowledge and a method to resolve confusion, but its fundamental purpose was to establish a strict set of secular ethical standards to restrain individual behavior, as succinctly revealed by Zhu Xi:

The Ultimacy is just the principle of all things in heaven and earth... With this principle, there is heaven and earth. Without this principle, there would be no heaven and earth, no people, no objects, and nothing would exist. With the principle, there is Vitality, which flows and develops all things.

For under heaven, there are the eternal principles that never change, as well as the changes that occur in a single moment. The relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, are examples of these eternal principles; when circumstances force a change, that is considered a variation. However, ultimately, the eternal principles remain as they are.

Before there is a thing, there is preexisting principle of that thing. Before there are rulers and subjects, there is already the principle of rulers and subjects. Before there are fathers and sons, there is already the principle of fathers and sons. Without the original, there would be no

such principle, but once there are rulers and subjects, fathers and sons, the principles are then applied.

——From "Classified Conversations of Master Zhu"

The Neo-Confucian School believes that there is no object in the world without inherent property, from withered twigs and rubble, to dogs, horses, cows, sheep, and all kinds of people. The unique properties of all things are the result of the stimulation of Vitality, with the differences calibrated by different types of Vitalities. Regarding Vitality, "only when people attain the correct one, does the principle flow thoroughly without obstruction. When things receive the biased ones, the principle is blocked and thus knowledge is obstructed... Among things that have some knowledge, it is only obtained from a single path, such as birds knowing filial piety, or otters knowing sacrifice. Dogs can only guard, and cows can only plow." Zhu Xi further used the juxtaposition of conscience and feeling to understand the relationship between the Confician Dao and virtue. He perceived the princples of "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom" as the intangible and elusive conscience, and regarded the senses of "compassion, shame, courtesy, and justice" as the visible feelings. Then, he extended what he believed the universal law of nature in the objective world to the subjective world of mind, stating that the "Conscience within my heart encompasses all things". He acknowledged that the Confucian principle of "investigation for knowledge" lies in exploring the universal law of the world, but then he immediately narrowed the path to "exploring the principle within my conscience", summarizing it as "there are no objects outside of my mind in the world". The Lu-Wang School of Mind, represented by Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming, emphasizes that the mind is the master of all things in the

universe, advocating that "the mind is the principle". Lu Jiuyuan greatly exaggerated the saying of Mencius, "Exhausting the mind for conscience and knowledge", equating the means with the goal:

Mencius said, "To exhaust one's mind is to understand one's conscience; to understand one's conscience is to understand Heaven." The mind is just a mind, whether it belongs to someone else or to a friend, whether it is the mind of a sage from a thousand years ago or of a sage to come a thousand years later, the mind remains the same. The space of the mind is so vast that anyone who can exhaust it will be juxtaposed with Heaven.

——*Yang Jian, "Complete Works of Xiangshan"*

The emergence of the School of Mind as a subset of Neo-Confucianism marked a radical shift towards subjective idealism, reflecting the scholars' struggle with the chaotic reality they faced and their reluctance to retreat from the world. The Cheng-Zhu School of Neo-Confucianism, represented by the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi) and Zhu Xi, emphasized the superiority of principle above all else. Since the emphasis on the unfathomable Heavenly Principle, the School began its descent into the abyss of moral theology.

Over 300 years later, Wang Yangming proposed the concept of "cultivating the innate good conscience" which is completely consistent with the assertions of the Lu-Wang School of Mind. But he distinguished himself with the concept of "unity of knowledge and action" aimed to bring the secluded and self-satisfied Neo-Confucianism back into the real world, stating that "to know without action is merely ignorance; to know

is the intention to act, and to act is the accomplishment of knowledge. Knowledge initiates action, and action completes knowledge."

The Vitality-based Neo-Confucianism, represented by Zhang Zai, also attempted to discuss the origins of heaven and earth and the illusory nature of ghosts and spirits through ontology. It believed that the nature of heaven and earth originates from the Great Vacancy (Tai Xu), and ghosts and spirits are actually the derivative from the intercourse of the Yin and Yang Vitalities, unable to exist independently of the physical body. However, it quickly deviated from the path of exploring natural science, so its theories could only remain at the level of secular ethics and spiritual construction. This was largely attributed to the widespread influence of Buddhism, such as the ontology of "emptiness and unity", the epistemology of "sudden and gradual unity", and the practices of "enlightening the mind to see property" and "returning to the original and beginning". Some have classified this as "Confucianism with a Buddhist core" or "Confucianism with a Taoist exterior".

Zhu Xi believed that the Way (Dao) always belonged to objective existence and operated constantly, and that all sorts of confusion and chaos were caused by people going against it. He said, "The Way has never ceased, but people cease it themselves. What is called the disappearance of the Way is not due to its concealment; it is because people do not follow it. This is what it means." He concluded that the "self-restraint and the return to ritual" by Confucius, ""achieving harmony, honoring the virtue of one's nature, and pursuing the study of the Way" in the Doctrine of the Mean, "cultivating one's moral character" in the Great Learning, and "being true to the central principle" in the Book of Documents - all these teachings of the sages, with their myriad words, are meant to teach people to preserve the heavenly order and extinguish their desires.

In the seven centuries after the Northern Song Dynasty, the orthodox Neo-Confucianism became a tool for the Chinese patriarchal system to maintain its authority both at civil and state levels. In the fifth year of the Qianlong reign (1740), an imperial edict stated that the Cheng-Zhu school's teachings "inherit the essence of Confucius and Mencius... Those who follow it become gentlemen, those who deviate from it become petty individuals; those who use it for the country bring order, those who lose it bring chaos; it truly contributes to the transformation of the people and the establishment of customs, and is essential for self-cultivation and governance."

Therefore, it can be seen that the path of Neo-Confucianism not only goes against the fundamental proposition of Daoism of governing by doing nothing and the individual pursuit of spiritual freedom but also deviates from the Confucian concept of benevolence and righteousness. Although it may have its own unique features, its contribution to the progress of philosophy and science is not apparent. Gu Yanwu, a late Ming scholar, had a more critical view: "The name of Neo-Confucianism originated from the Song dynasty. Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism is Zen Buddhism, breaking away from the Five Classics, abandoning the words of sages, and engaging in its own teachings dubbed in Confucianism. This is what I call ignorance of the origin."

Matteo Ricci sharply criticized the drawbacks of Confucian theory in his work "The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven", stating: "I have examined the Confucian texts, which often discuss human nature and temperament, yet I have not seen a definitive resolution to the debate, hence within this school, diverse opinions always emerge. They know of things but do not understand their own nature; such knowledge is not true knowledge. To know whether human nature is inherently good, one must

first discuss what 'nature' is and what constitutes ‘good and evil’. ‘Nature’ is nothing other than the inherent essence of each type of thing. If we say ‘each type of thing’, then those of the same type share the same nature, while those of different types have different natures. If we say ‘inherent’, then whatever does not pertain to the nature of a particular type is not its inherent nature. If we say ‘essence’, then anything outside the physical boundaries of a thing is also not its nature. Some things exist independently, thus their nature is independent; some depend on others, thus their nature is also dependent. That which is desirable and pleasing is called good, that which is detestable and to be avoided is called evil. Understanding this principle allows us to debate whether human nature is good or not.” Subsequently, he evaluated the behavior of the scholar-officials based on his observations: “I covertly observe the Confucian scholars of your noble country: the problem lies herein, they only speak of cultivating virtue but do not understand that human intention easily tires and cannot self-motivate to cultivate, nor do they know to look up to the Heavenly Emperor to pray for the mercy of a loving father, which is why rarely do we see individuals who have achieved virtue.”

8

MOHISM: PRINCIPLE OF UNIVERSAL LOVE AND NON-AGGRESSION

The founder of the Mohist School, Mozi (circa 480-390 BC), by the given name Di, was a thinker, educator, military strategist, scientist, and social activist from the State of Lu during the early Warring States period. He was originally a craftsman, but well-versed in both literature and science. He was the first thinker in Chinese recorded history to come from the laboring people and advocate for their interest. He was also a pragmatic man who adhered to his principles and worked hard for them. His ideas, character, knowledge, and skills were widely praised. Mencius said, “The words of Yang Zhu and Mozi fill the world”, and “Mozi advocates universal love and sacrifices personal interests for the benefit of the world”. Zhuangzi regarded him as “truly good in the world”, a “talented person” who was “sought after but could not be found”. Han Feizi referred to the schools of Confucius and Mozi together as the “prominent schools” of the Warring States period, and Sima Qian summarized its characteristics as “good at defense and frugality”.

8.1 A School of High Integrity

Mozi championed a lofty mission of advancing global welfare and minimizing harm. His advocacy encompassed ten key principles, such as universal love, non-aggression, reverence for the virtuous, adherence to rule-based governance, frugality, and a Stoic-like lifestyle. While believing in the Heavenly mandate and the existence of spirits, he staunchly rejected fatalism, which he believed could lead to either entitlement or resignation. He viewed spirits as messengers of Heaven, responsible for punishing evil and safeguarding the good on Earth.

Following Mozi's era, the Mohist School splintered into three factions: the Xiang Li clan, the Xiang Fu clan, and the Deng Ling clan, each vying to be the legitimate successors of Mohism. Besides its philosophical and political doctrines, the Mohist School displayed pronounced sectarian traits. Its leaders, titled Jü Zi, wielded dogmatic authority, and Mohists were prepared to sacrifice their lives without hesitation, as exemplified by their readiness to "jump into fire and tread on knives".

During the reunification of China by Liu Bang, who became the first emperor of the Han Dynasty after a long period of civil strife, Tian Heng, the prime minister of the State of Qi and a Mohist Jü Zi, fled to an island. When faced with surrendering to the new dynasty, Tian Heng chose to end his life, an act followed by five hundred Mohist warriors on the island who collectively committed suicide by drowning. This event marked perhaps the final large-scale tragic demonstration of the Mohist spirit.

Mozi's scholarship was comprehensive and practical, earning him the title of a "saint of the common people". His contributions to mechanics, mathematics, optics, and other fields were so profound that some of his ideas align closely with modern scientific principles, leading later

generations to honor him as the "Saint of Science". Renowned contemporary scholar Yang Xiangkui remarked, "Mozi's achievements in natural science surpass ancient Greece and are at least equal to the entirety of Greece."

8.2 Universal Love

Mozi's central ideas revolved around universal love and practical application. Living in an era dominated by Confucianism's rising influence, Mozi sharply criticized what he termed the "Four Corruptions" of Confucianism which risk ruining the world:

1. Argument that Heaven is not wise and spirits are not effective leads to displeasure from Heaven and spirits;
2. Advocacy for lavish funerals and prolonged mourning leads to waste in people's labor and resources;
3. Indulgence in the elegant and extravagant scenes of music and dance leads to wastefulness and detachment from the realities of common people's lives;
4. Encouraging resignation to fate hinders social progress and advancement.

The Confucians believe that Heaven is unclear in its affairs and that spirits lack efficacy. When Heaven and spirits are displeased, this is enough to lead to the ruin of the world. Furthermore, they engage in lavish funerals and prolonged mourning, using multiple layers of coffins, producing many clothes and bedding, treating funerals like a household relocation. During the three-year mourning period, they cry incessantly, needing assistance to rise and relying on crutches to walk, their ears deaf

to sound and their eyes blind to sights; this is enough to lead to the ruin of the world. Additionally, they indulge in music, drumming, and dancing, making these practices habitual; this is enough to lead to the ruin of the world. Simultaneously, they believe in fate, asserting that there is a predetermined fate for poverty, wealth, longevity, premature death, peace, and turmoil, which cannot be altered. Those who rule the world according to their doctrine will surely cease to engage in governance, and those who are ruled by their doctrine will surely cease to engage in production. This is enough to lead to the ruin of the world.

——*Mozi · Gong Meng*

Mao Zedong once highly praised Mozi, comparing him to "China's Heraclitus" (the ancient Greek philosopher of materialism). He regarded Mozi as a great ancient dialectical materialist, stating in a speech at the initial summary conference of the "Resistance and Reconstruction Movement" on April 24, 1939, that Mozi "is a laborer, a sage more brilliant than Confucius."[50]

Universal love stands as the consistent core belief of Mohism, embodying its steadfast and lofty ideal. According to Mozi, conflicts between individuals, wars among nations, differing ambitions among rulers and ministers, and discord between fathers and sons all stem from a lack of mutual love, rooted in social disparities. He advocated for "universalizing distinctions", advocating the replacement of exclusive, selective, or biased love with universal, complete, or all-encompassing love. Mozi stated,

[50] A letter to Chen Boda concerning the essay "Mozi's Philosophical Thought", featuring Mao Zedong's address at the Counter-Japanese Military and Political University on April 24, 1939. This correspondence is included in "Mao Zedong's Selected Letters", published by People's Publishing House in 1983, pages 140-142.

"When princes love each other, there will be no more warfare. When heads of households love each other, there will be no more usurpation. When individuals love each other, there is no harm between them."

This belief directly challenges the Confucian notion that "love diminishes with distance, affectionate ties have differentials." While Confucians also promote benevolence and love, they acknowledge that the diminishing of love with distance is a natural human tendency. With growth and education, love expands and transcends, from inner feelings to outward expressions, from close to distant relationships. Mencius continued Confucius' assertion that "love starts with close relations", recognizing that love is an expanding process: "In childhood, we all know how to love our parents; as we grow older, we all know how to respect our elders. Kinship love is benevolence; respect for the elders is righteousness. There is nothing else to it; it is understood throughout the world." He also said, "Love your family and then be benevolent to the people; be benevolent to the people and then love all creatures."

After all, humans are not gods. Not only is it natural for people to differentiate between close and distant relationships, but there should also be a prioritization when it comes to universal love. Mencius said, "The wise are all aware of it: the most urgent tasks should be prioritized. The benevolent all love: it is urgent to prioritize the love for the worthy." (Mencius, "Wholeheartedness"). "Loving one's family and respecting one's elders" is the core ethical principle of Confucianism. Loving one's family reflects natural principles, while respecting one's elders reflects social principles.

In contrast, Mohist "universal love" is an externally imposed requirement, similar to Kant's moral imperative - you must love others not because you like them, but because the moral law commands you to.

Can this be achieved in reality? Russell also sarcastically remarked, "I doubt whether he could obey this command in his private life." (Russell, p. 163). Because of its departure from reality, Mencius criticized it as "Mohist universal love leaves their parents ignored." It should be said that in the issue of love, Confucianism and Mohism are unified in theory but differ in practice, with different paths leading to the same goal. Confucius' concept of "Great Harmony under Heaven", Mencius' "treating the elderly as my elderly and the young as my young", and Zhang Zai's "the people are my siblings, and all things are my companions", all reflect the ultimate ideal of universal or expansive love. The difference lies in one emphasizing the gradual revelation and sublimation of inner emotions, being gradual and adaptable, while the other sets it as an external moral principle, being radical and mechanistic.

8.3 Argument for Non-aggression

During the Warring States period, China had already formed a pattern of seven major states standing side by side. Each of these feudal kingdoms was engaged in endless struggles, both overt and covert, to expand their territories and dominate the land. The wars and plundering brought about what Mozi summarized as the "three calamities" for the people: "those who are hungry cannot eat, those who are cold cannot clothe themselves, and those who toil cannot rest" ("Mozi, Against Music"). Out of deep sympathy for the toiling masses, Mozi vigorously advocated for non-aggression and cessation of warfare.

Setting out from the State of Lu, Mozi traveled for ten days and nights, clad in tattered clothes and wrapped in straw sandals, to reach the capital of the State of Chu, Ying, where he successfully dissuaded Chu from

attacking the State of Song through a demonstration using a sand table. Mozi insisted that neither individuals nor states should violate the life and property of others. He excelled in using a progressive logic to support his view of justice: 1) Murder and robbery are selfish acts that harm others, which the public considers immoral and punishable by the authorities. 2) The more severe the harm caused by selfish acts, the more immoral they are, and the greater the guilt and punishment. Therefore, 3) Is launching an aggressive war against another country not the greatest act of murder and robbery? Why do people not consider this immoral and criminal, but rather follow and even praise it as a righteous act? This is because people can still distinguish right from wrong in small matters, but they become callous and indifferent to major issues of right and wrong. Here is an excerpt of his forceful argument against offensive warfare following an inductive logic:

"When people hear about a person who enters someone"s garden and steals their peaches and plums, they condemn him. If the ruler finds out, he punishes him. Why is this? It is because he harms others for his own benefit.

Then there are those who go further and steal chickens, pigs, and dogs, which is even more unjust than stealing peaches and plums. Why is this? It is because they bring more harm to people. If they bring more harm to people, their lack of benevolence is greater, and their punishment is more severe.

Then there are those who enter someone's pen and steal their horses and cattle, which is even more unjust than stealing chickens, pigs, and dogs. Why is this? It is because they bring more harm to people. If they

bring more harm to people, their lack of benevolence is greater, and their punishment is more severe.

Then there are those who kill innocent people, strip them of their clothes and weapons, which is even more unjust than stealing horses and cattle. Why is this? It is because they harm even more people. If they harm more people, their lack of benevolence is even greater, and their punishment is more severe.

At this point, all the gentlemen in the world know and condemn this as unjust. They call it unrighteousness. But when it comes to committing great unrighteousness and attacking a state, they do not know to condemn it; instead, they praise it and call it righteousness. Can this be considered knowing the difference between righteousness and unrighteousness?

To kill one person is considered unrighteousness and deserves the death penalty. If we follow this reasoning, killing ten people is tenfold unrighteousness and deserves ten death penalties; killing a hundred people is a hundredfold unrighteousness and deserves a hundred death penalties. At this point, all the gentlemen in the world know and condemn this as unrighteousness. But when it comes to committing great unrighteousness and attacking a state, they do not know to condemn it; instead, they praise it and call it righteousness. If they truly do not know that it is unrighteousness, why would they record and pass down their words for future generations?

If someone sees a little black and calls it black, but when they see a lot of black they call it white, then they must be considered ignorant of the distinction between black and white. If someone tastes a little bitterness and calls it bitter, but when they taste a lot of bitterness they call it sweet, then they must be considered ignorant of the distinction between bitterness and sweetness. When they commit a small wrong, they know it

is wrong; but when they commit a great wrong by attacking a state, they do not know it is wrong; instead, they praise it and call it righteousness. Can this be considered knowing the distinction between righteousness and unrighteousness? Therefore, it is known that the gentlemen of the world are confused about the distinction between righteousness and unrighteousness."

——Mozi, "Non-aggression"

8.4 Synchronized Governance for Moderated Sufficiency

Mozi wrote a total of seventy-two chapters, compiled into the "Mozi, Dialogue with Mr. Lu". Some parts of this work are accounts of Mozi's own teachings, while the rest are additions from later Mohist disciples. Mozi opposed any form of doctrinalism. His philosophy was neither the benevolence and righteousness of Confucianism nor the non-interference of Daoism. Instead, he advocated for practical governance strategies tailored to specific situations. When asked what he would say to persuade the ruler for better governance when entering a state, he replied: "When you arrive in a state, you must choose the most urgent matters for persuasion: if the state is in disorder, tell them the importance of promoting the virtuous and synchronizing state-wide efforts; if the state is poor, tell them about thriftiness and simple funerals; if the state is addicted to music and alcohol, tell them the benefits of avoiding excessive revelry and fatalism; if the state is licentious, eccentric, and disregards propriety, tell them about the reverence for Heaven and acknowledgment of spirits; if the state engages in deceit, plunder, aggression, and humiliation of other states, tell them about the benefits of universal love and non-aggression."

Mozi proposed an ideal governance model in the "Promoting Synchronization" section, which bears a strong resemblance to a system of democratic centralism: everyone, from the ruling elite to the common people, is united in mind and purpose, acting in unison with clear rules of rewards and punishments. Once the administrative system is established, the ruler issues decrees to the realm. If a superior makes a mistake, subordinates can offer advice; if there are good or bad actions among the people, they should be reported upwards. Once the superior determines right from wrong, subordinates must acknowledge and obey without colluding or engaging in disguised disobedience; otherwise, they should be punished. Superiors must be prudent and reliable in their rewards and punishments according to these standards, convincing the people of their fairness.

Rather than the Confucian emphasis on the ruler loving and valuing the people in a vague manner, Mozi, in the "Regulating the Use of Resources" section, proposed standards for moderation and sufficiency in matters such as production, diet, clothing, funerals, and tombs. He opposed industrial policies that lead to resource waste due to excessive production capacity, as well as fiscal policies that increase expenditure without benefiting the people's livelihoods: "The ancient sage kings instituted laws of frugality and sufficiency... No more projects should take place so long as the people's needs were sufficiently met. Whatever additional expenses do not benefit the people, the sage kings did not undertake."

8.5 Summary Commentary

The universe of Chinese culture is enveloped in one origin and three streams - Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. The Law of Change (Yi Jing) which took shape two millennia ago sets the keystone of Chinese traditional culture which embodies a holistic view of natural law and embraces a philosophy of dialectics. In essence, it substantiates that everything in the universe is in constant change, but behind the change there is constancy which is sanctioned by the law of change. Thus, the complicated world filled with uncertainty is made predictable at the mastery of this law. That is why it is still biblically cited in astrology and fortune telling.

It is intriguing that the world ushered in greatest thinkers, such as Socrates, Prato, Shakyamuni, Laozi and Confucius almost in the same era of human history - the golden age of philosophy. One explanation is that human civilization had advanced to such a critical stage that the society called for deep thought as how it could be better structured so that humanity could step up to time with renewed viability and vibrancy. Within China, it is the Spring and Autumn period (770 – 476 BC) when large number of schools thought surged in heated debate. Notwithstanding some of their intersectant or furcate views with regard to peace, order and humanity, each had its distinctive propositions and resorted to varying practices, and therefore resulted in different outcomes. While literally hundreds of schools blossomed, Taoism, Confucianism, Legalism and Mohism are the most well known. They have thrived and withered at different times notably at the discretion of the incumbent ruling class. Endured the test of time, extant Taoism has pervaded civilian life in folktales, medicine and iatrology, and religious abbey in retreat.

Confucianism has engulfed the intelligentsia and has been adopted as mainstream ethics backed by the ruling class. Now that most of the indigenous ideologies are preoccupied with secular life, Buddhism is an extraneous religion introduced from ancient India via the Silk Road under the Han Dynasty (206 BC - 220 AD) to fill the gap of ultimate salvation. Mahayana Buddhism in particular as a religion in proper was gradually localized on the Chinese soil through vernacular interpretations and practices.

Taoism is the closest descendent of the Law of Change which has identified two rudimental opposing but coexistent forces - yin and yang - based on its philosophical dialectics. It has ramified in philosophy, religion and technology, all of which, together with many derivative sects, would claim their original revelations to Tao Te Ching, the mystical works of Laozi that is still open for controversial interpretations. Riding on this principle, Taoism upholds the notion of laissez faire (Wuwei), leaving the world in its natural course. The world and people would be alienated through artificial manipulation either in the form of moral education or political intervention. A perfect state of mind lies in the stage of infantry before a person gets greedy and brutal as he grows up. Simplicity, austerity and humility should be the healthiest way of life, which is in harmony with the Dao - the way. The role of government is to help people resist temptation and competition so that everyone can stay put in peace and complacency. By analogy, people can find the supreme quality of being in the property of water which always flows to the lower places but permeates everywhere, and penetrates everything.

Confucianism is neither interested in cosmological inquiry or scientific exploration, nor circle of life. “Before understanding life, how do you know death”, Confucius proclaimed. He also despised laborers as lowly

and inventors as petty. It persists as a school of ethics which has mainstreamed Chinese culture since the beginning of the Han Dynasty primarily because it has been able to render the closest ideological service to the imperial thrones during peacetime.

The earliest proposition of Chinese national values can trace back to the great thinker Guan Zi who raised four fundamental moral principles: propriety, righteousness, integrity and shame. Propriety requires that one's manner ought to conform to socially appropriate norms. Righteousness refers to being in right relation to others. Integrity is about accountability, consistency and transparency. Shame is a sense of guilt deeply embedded in one's conscience with regard to vicious ideas and wrongdoings.

Confucianism advocates introvert conscientiousness and extravert benevolence. One of Confucius favorite disciples Zeng Zi extrapolated it into triple self-reflection on daily basis: 1）Have I done my utmost when giving advice to others? 2）Have I been faithful dealing with friends? 3）Have I practiced what I preach? This school of thought is firmly convicted that people are born virtuous and thus everyone is endowed with the gift to ascend to a sage through transformative education. The fact that some people descend to an evil is due to their exposure to bad influence. The locus of innate moral quality is instinctive empathy, as touted be Mencius. When someone notices that a child is about to fall into a well, he naturally extends a hand, not because he wants to curry favor with his parents or earn a fame among the community, but rather out of his instinctive empathy.

Confucianism begins with personal moral cultivation which extends to multiple layers of delineated relationship from family to state and

ultimately the world. Socially, relationship is defined between ancestors and descendants, parents and children, husbands and wives, elders and youngsters, rulers and ministers, as well as that between friends. A harmonious society rests on the recognition and fulfillment of one's respective role within each of these structured relationships. In other words, a society would become chaotic when rights and obligations attached to each one's defined role are either arrogated or reneged. He championed strong family loyalty, ancestor veneration, and respect to old. Within members under one roof, the male parent by their children and of husbands by their wives, recommending family as a basis for ideal government. He espoused the well-known principle "Don't do unto others what you don't want to be done by", as a universally accepted Golden Rule.

Taoism adheres to the value of individual freedom and conservation of life - a philosophy further stretched by Zhuang Zi. In fact, the technological part of Taoism is devoted to the quest of health and ultimately immortality, resulting in the advancement of alchemy, martial arts and herbal/mineral medicine. Confucianism propagates a gentrified society through self-discipline under institutionalized moral settings. A real gentry should stand ready to sacrifice his life for what is right, or the benevolence (ren). In a ruling position, benevolence can be exercised in two ways: 1) lessening tax burden on people; and 2) lessening punishment on people and relying on moral education for socially desirable behaviors. Mencius noticed the phenomenon of voting with feet. He hence pointed out that a benevolent government will be able to attract talents and wealth from all around the world: public officers to serve in the court, farmers to plow in the land, merchants to trade in the market, tourists to travel in the

country, complaints against sovereigns in their home state will be filed here. With that, a state will become invincible.

Mohism flourished during the Warring States era (479-221 BCE) on the heels of the Spring and Autumn period when invasion and conquest between states became the name of the game. It defies preference and prejudice based on blood connection and class distinction by advocating universal fraternity among all people and peace between all states. It denounces lavish lifestyle and promotes frugality. All believers in Mohism had to lead an ascetic life. Like Confucius, Mohist also trained followers to serve various governments. However, his introduced rigorous disciplines on integrity and cohesion in his constituency. His followers ought to pay a portion of their income back to their organization for common welfare and had to be ready to resign from any posts if justice risked distortion. Unlike Confucianism which is preoccupied with ethical canons or Taoism with abstract discourse and metaphors, Mohist nosedived into moral argumentation with analogical reasoning. Its epistemology is closely associated with consequentialism relying objective test. Ethical normativity is placed on three standards: historical experiences of those sacred leaders; the perception of ordinary people; the actual benefits to the country and its people. In contrast with Daoists who were dedicated to the discovery of panacea, Mohists devoted their wisdom to the invention of practical utilities with profound knowledge in mechanical engineering. Pragmatism is another salient feature of Mohism. It is the antithesis of Taoism that discouraged promotion of talents for fear of triggering envy and rivalry. It is also antagonistic to Confucianism that places great emphasis on elaborate funerals. Unfortunately, Mohism perished at the beginning of the Han Dynasty simply because as a tightly knitted organization, it was unwilling to submit to the imperial court.

The school of Legalism is mesmerized in the notion that people are born evil and therefore need to be punished to keep order and peace in the society. Although this school of thought developed in Spring and Autumn Period or the East Zhou Dynasty, it is fully embraced and strictly implemented in the Qin Dynasty (221 - 206 BC) which unified the entire country by conquering a host of waring states through years of military maneuvers. Ying Zheng, the complacent conqueror, triumphed as the first emperor and envisioned himself a perpetual sovereign rule. It replaced the manor-like feudal system of governance with the town and county-based centralized administration via bureaucracy, which forged a template for most of the subsequent dynasties, and is still valid today. Unification took place in every facet of the society - languages, measurements, roads, vehicles - based on harsh laws and brutal punishment. In order to unify ideology across the country, they went so far as to burn all books except those practical ones on farming, forestation, medicine, and of course the embellished history of Qin Dynasty. Unsurprisingly, the landscape of independent belief and free thought halted into exility.

Now that legalists believed people are inherent sinners, they remained silent on whether this hypothesis should equally apply to the ruler. Isn't it an irony? Among virtually all the classical political literatures, few propositions are available on the check and balance of power. That is "rule by law", not "rule of law".

Along its history, China's governance largely depicts a swinging pendulum between two ruling traditions, the Confucian and the Legalist. However, the tension was resolved without consistent effort toward establishing a social contract between the rulers and the ruled, which in turn diminished the ability of the state to make credible commitments.

As the famous saying by Guan-zi, a renowned minister who empowered the Qi state in the Spring and Autumn period two thousand years ago, only when the granaries are full, will people follow appropriate rules of conduct. These moral values are sustained by the continued increase in the nation's disposable income.

9

THE DRACONIAN SCHOOL OF LEGALISM

9.1 Governance by Virtue or Law?

It is widely believed that traditional Chinese society emphasized governance by virtue over law, and the rapid collapse of the Qin Dynasty is often attributed to the adoption of Legalist doctrine. Imagine, without compulsory behavioral norms, relying solely on moral teachings to govern a vast country would lead to a chaotic society dominated by hypocrisy and greed. Throughout its history, China has primarily operated on a blend of Confucianism and Legalism, known as “Confucianism on the surface, Legalism at the core”, with the complementary approach of “protecting people with morality, governing people with punishment”. Cao Cao succinctly expressed this idea: “To establish order, ritual comes first; to rectify chaos, punishment takes precedence.”

In practice, Different eras have oscillated between morality and punishment, shaping the spiritual character of Chinese nation as both gentle and circular on the outside, yet unyielding and square on the inside. In the meanwhile, this unpredictable duality combined with social hierarchy has led to a society where common people fear the law, while the powerful manipulate it.

Strictly speaking, ancient Chinese law primarily focused on criminal punishment, including physical mutilation, bodily destruction, and harm to extended family members. This legal system traces back to the Xia and Shang dynasties, with the Yin Dynasty implementing harsh punishments for slaves and commoners, such as mutilation, amputation, castration, branding, and death by exposure, as well as other forms of brutal punishment such as beating to death, dismemberment, boiling, roasting, and disembowelment. The "Book of Documents - Pan Geng" records the harsh approach of the Yin dynasty, where those deemed inauspicious or disrespectful faced severe consequences, reflecting a society where law enforcement was strict and unforgiving. "When Pan Geng, emperor of the Yin dynasty, was about to move the capital, some people opposed it. Pan Geng admonished them, saying: 'Anytime when I encounter those who are inauspicious and disrespectful, who are rebellious and disrespectful, I will mutilate and destroy them, leaving no descendants, so as not to let them take root in this new city.'" "Han Feizi - On the Way to Internal Treasures" says: "The law of the Yin Dynasty was to cut off the hands of those who dump ash in the public road."

In the history of legal systems, there is the concept of "criminal charges follow Shang", which means that later Chinese dynasties generally followed the system of the Shang Dynasty in setting criminal charges and penalties. It has gradually evolved from the goal of "protecting the people" to "governing the people" as social control gets tightened. Among the various schools of thought during the Pre-Qin era, the Legalist school, represented by Shen Buhai in the Warring States period, advocated following the itemized charges to carry out the actual penalties and emphasized prudent rewards and clear punishments.

The "Lv Xing" established during the reign of King Mu of the Western Zhou Dynasty is the first criminal code in Chinese history. Although it followed the criminal items of the Yin and Shang dynasties, it adopted the governance ideology of combining virtue with punishment, emphasizing the importance of virtue in the judicial process. Prudence was required in levying clear punishment, which was also accompanied with education.

Shang Yang (390-338 BC), a Legalist reformer, put the theory of harsh criminalilty into practice, proposing "if it can strengthen the country, do not adhere to the old ways; if it can benefit the people, do not follow the rituals," emphasizing the importance of strict laws and their stringent enforcement. He assisted King Xiao of Qin in successful reforms, laying the economic, organizational and military foundation for King Ying Zheng of Qin to unify the whole country.

However, Legalism, as a systematic school of thought, did not reach its peak until the end of the Warring States period when Han Feizi summarized its essence. It was not until the Western Han Dynasty that Legalism was perfected and became the governing ideology passed down in China. In the early Western Han Dynasty, the policy of Huang-Lao Daoism was incorporated to promote light taxation and minimal corvée labor, allowing the people to rest and recover from the traumas of protracted wars. Therefore, the policy of "simplifying laws and regulations" was implemented, abolishing corporal punishment and some harsh laws. However, Emperor Wu of Han built on the achievements of his predecessors in the growth of population and wealth during the Wen-Jing reign, but averted their implementing high pressure internally and expansion externally.

It was during the Western Han Dynasty that Legalism was perfected and became the governing ideology of China, incorporating aspects of Huang-Lao Daoism to promote light taxation and minimal labor, allowing the people to recover from war. However, Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty inherited the accumulated population and wealth from the Wen and Jing reigns. However, he departed from his predessesors' policies of "resting with the people" and "governing with virtue", instead adopting a radical strategy of internal suppression and external expansion.

The Confucianists of the Han Dynasty, represented by Dong Zhongshu, proposed the concept of "judging cases based on the classics", attempting to reform the law with the moral principles and doctrines of the "Spring and Autumn Annals". The essence of this proposal was to moderate the severity of the previous dynasty's laws. Other than replacing laws with classics, they intended to "apply ritual to law, use the classics to embellish administrative affairs", in order to achieve the combination of principles and laws. Therefore, Wang Chong and Ban Gu affirmed this idea, saying: "Dong's exposition of the 'Spring and Autumn Annals' aligns with the law without contradiction." Therefore, the notion that China has always adhered to governance by virtue and denied governance by law over the past thousands of years is detached from reality.

9.2 Rule by Law for Rule by Man

Regarding the leniency or severity of legal systems, the "Zhou Li · Autumn Officials · Minister of Justice" sets a reasonable and fundamental principle for the Minister of Justice in charge of laws: "In a new country, light penalties are used; in a stable country, moderate penalties are used; in a chaotic country, severe penalties are used." Of course, the

ancient concept of legal systems is vastly different from the modern notion of governance by law. Although both aim to maintain social order, the former emphasizes governing people by law to uphold the absolute monarchy of the ruler, essentially still being rule by man. The latter emphasizes restraining the arbitrary power of the ruler, opposing any privileges, and protecting the democracy and freedom of the people, representing true rule of law. However, compared to the Confucian hierarchical concept of "penalties not applied to nobles, rites not enforced on commoners, and laws not implemented on the elite", the Legalist school advocates "no hierarchy in penalties" under the premise of upholding the ruler's power, reflecting the progressiveness of the times.

The concept of uniform penalties means that there is no hierarchy in punishments. From ministers and generals to nobles and commoners, anyone who disobeys the king's orders, violates the laws of the country, or disrupts the established order is guilty of an unforgivable crime punishable by death. Those who have achievements in the past or failures in the future should not be affected by the severity of the punishment. Those who have done good in the past or wrong in the future should not be affected by the leniency of the law. When loyal ministers or filial sons make mistakes, their punishment should be determined by the severity of their actions. Officials who fail to uphold the king's laws should be punished by death without mercy, extending to their three generations. As for subordinates who report misconduct to their superiors, regardless of their status, they will be exempt from punishment and inherit the position, rank, land, and rewards of their superiors. ... The sage bestows offices and titles according to merit, so the virtuous do not worry;

the sage does not forgive wrongs or pardon punishments, so evil deeds do not arise.

——*Book of Lord Shang · Rewards and Punishments*

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods when the Zhou dynasty was declining, vassal states faced internal turmoil and external threats, leading them to seek wise counsel that would allow them to defend themselves and expand their power. It became evident that those who could break free from the constraints of old rituals, and initiate progressive institutional reforms, had the potential to become the overlords of the realm. Consequently, the Legalist school, advocating practical reforms and strict discipline, became favored during this era.

The concept of "governing by law" was first proposed by Guan Zhong (Guanzi) during the Spring and Autumn period, assisting Duke Huan of Qi in becoming one of the Five Hegemons. He emphasized the authority of laws and the coherence of government decrees, stating that all governance should be conducted through legal means: "With the authority unswerving and the government unerring, governing by law is simply to handle everything according to the law." He opposed divergent options, believing that "when laws are followed, the country is governed; when personal options prevail, the country is in chaos."

He also opposed arbitrariness outside the law, advocating against leniency beyond the law: "In the governance of the ancients, there was no spontaneity beyond the law, no mercy within it. Those acting outside the law were banned to prevent exceptions and private gains." The role of law is to preempt disputes and deception: "With laws in place, one cannot deceive; with standards in place, one cannot cheat; with measures in place, one cannot deviate." In talent selection and decision on reward and

punishment, clear criteria must be followed. If everything is done according to regulations, the king needs not personally oversee everything, and society can function autonomously under the rule by law: “In ancient times, sage kings governed the country by selecting talents based on laws and regulations, but they did not personally recommend them; they measured achievements by laws and regulations, but they did not personally decide. Therefore, virtuous and capable individuals could not be concealed, nor could the unworthy disguise themselves; flatterers could not be employed, nor could slanderers dismiss others. In this way, the boundaries between ruler and subjects are clear. With clarity comes governance at ease; state affairs can be managed through laws and regulations without personal attention by the ruler.”

For Guan Zhong, The whole idea of rule by law is not to protect the interests of people, but rather to present an instrument for the ruler to strengthen his power, stating that “The superiority of the ruler and the inferiority of the subjects do not stem from the subjects’ affection for the ruler, but from the ruler's coercion through power; the officials' diligent service does not result from the ruler's kindness to the subjects, but from the resolute enforcement of rewards and punishments.”(Guanzi, On Clarity of Law)

9.3 Competition in Legalist Reforms and the Fate of Reformers

During the Warring States period, the widespread adoption of iron tools spurred innovation in agriculture and warfare, intensifying competition among feudal lords. Reform movements emphasizing institutional change became crucial, representing a struggle for survival for each state.

Li Kui of the State of Wei pioneered large-scale reform, followed by Shen Buhai in the State of Han, Wu Qi in the State of Chu, and Shang Yang in the State of Qin, all achieving notable success.

Li Kui initially focused on social governance, addressing issues such as theft, banditry, imprisonment, arrests, miscellaneous crimes, adultery, slander, access control, gambling, assembly, and bribery, culminating in the "Six Chapters of Law". Secondly, he implemented measures to incentivize diligence and penalize laziness in agriculture, stipulating that "if farmland is diligently and carefully managed, the yield per acre will increase by three dou (10 liters); if not diligent, the loss will be the same." Thirdly, in personnel management, he stressed merit-based appointments, with transparent rewards and punishments. He suggested establishing a fund with confiscated wealth from criminals to attract talent from other regions.

Li Kui's reform took a relatively moderate political approach, neither significantly depriving the nobility of their privileges nor obstructing the economic interests of scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants. The reform yielded steady results without provoking significant resistance from interest groups, allowing him to live peaceful life.

Throughout history, individuals who armed their minds with Legalist thought have been advocates of bold reforms, as well as proponents of centralized authoritarian rule. Their aim has been to achieve national prosperity and military strength through the principles of "unity of the people under the ruler" and the ruler's "unity through law". The people have always been relegated to the bottom rung of society, and the distribution of political and economic power within the ruling class has been the primary, daunting contradiction. This cannot be resolved through the promotion of benevolence and righteousness.

In reality, when it comes to significant redistribution of vested interests, any Confucian ideals of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom become ineffectual and pale. Targeting the vested interest groups composed of feudal lords, royal relatives, officials, scholars, and wealthy families through internal measures would undoubtedly yield significant results, as these reforms would directly address prevailing issues. However, once the ruler compromises with conservative forces, the reformers are bound to face a grim outcome.

From a personality perspective, most radical reformers tend to be ambitious individuals eager to make a name for themselves, often exuding a fierce demeanor in their interactions. A common trait among such ambitious individuals is their willingness to use any means necessary to achieve their goals, viewing others either as stepping stones to be trodden upon or obstacles to be overcome. While these individuals are likely to achieve extraordinary success, this ambition also serves as a double-edged sword, making it difficult for them to meet a peaceful end. Wu Qi, who spearheaded sweeping reforms in the State of Chu during the early Warring States period, serves as a typical example.

Born into a wealthy family in the State of Wei, Wu Qi (440-381 BC) harbored ambitions from a young age, tirelessly seeking official positions but ultimately squandering his family fortune with no success. After killing over thirty of his mocking neighbors in a fit of rage, he initially sought refuge in a school of Confucianism, but was expelled for violating the Confucian rites by refusing to return home to mourn his deceased mother. So, he abandoned Confucianism and joined a school of Military Strategy. During a war between the States of Lu and Qi, in order to gain opportunities to showcase his abilities, Wu Qi personally killed his wife, who was originally from the State of Qi, in order to dispel

suspicions from Duke Mu of Lu that he might be loyal to the State of Qi. After defeating the Qi army, he joined the State of Wei based on his successful record.

He endured hardships alongside his soldiers, leading the Wei army to the west to confront Qin's enemies and to the east to conquer Qi territory, earning remarkable achievements. Subsequently, he joined the more powerful State of Chu, where he earned the favor of King Dao of Chu. Within just one year, he rose from the position of governor of Wancheng to the powerful position of chancellor, reaching the pinnacle of his career. (Sima Qian, Records of the Grand Historian)

Applying the reformist ideas, he learned while serving in Wei, Wu Qi implemented strict laws, abolished hereditary privileges of the nobility, relocated some nobles to remote areas to expand the borders, rectified the corrupt and extravagant bureaucratic system, and standardized customs and habits throughout the state. Chu's strength and territory expanded rapidly, instilling fear in neighboring states. However, disaffected nobles launched a coup upon the death of King Dao of Chu, shooting Wu Qi with arrows at his funeral. His body was then subjected to the punishment of death by dismemberment, marking the failure of Wu Qi's ambitious reforms.

9.4 The Climax of Legalist Reform by Shang Yang

Shang Yang (390 - 338 BC) was born in the State of Wei but failed to gain prominence serving under King Hui of Wei. He then responded to the recruitment call of Duke Xiao of Qin, moving from Wei to Qin. Without a brilliant resume and lacking the favor of kings, Shang Yang had to rely on his eloquence to stand out, using rational analysis to win

the trust of the monarch with his "the ruler ought to be resolute" principle. This forced him to organize his ideological views, culminating in "Book of Shang", a systematic Legalist masterpiece.

The Legalist thought represented by Shang Yang emphasizes decisiveness and credibility. He believed that "doubt leads to no achievements, and doubtful matters lead to no accomplishments." This includes two aspects: reformers must have unwavering convictions and cannot hesitate; laws must be strictly enforced to gain the trust of the people. One of his most famous methods was the "move a trunk to confirm trust" policy:

Upon joining Duke Xiao's court, Shang Yang sought to implement reforms but feared widespread criticism. To gauge public trust, he placed a long trunk at the southern gate of the capital, offering ten gold pieces to anyone who could move it to the northern gate. After announcing a reward of fifty gold pieces, one daring individual moved it, and Shang Yang promptly rewarded him to prove his trustworthiness.

—— *"Records of the Grand Historian: Biography of Shang Yang"*

Shang Yang believed that reform required breaking with tradition and establishing new norms. He stated, "Different dynasties had different rituals to govern, and different hegemons had different laws to dominate... Rituals and laws should be adjusted according to the times, and regulations should be adapted to suit the circumstances... Governance does not adhere to a single path, and governing a country does not require adhering to ancient practices." Reform, therefore, necessitated foresight and courage to go against prevailing opinions. He said, "Those with unique insights will inevitably face criticism from the people... Those who achieve great deeds do not seek the approval of the masses."

Shang Yang's reforms under Duke Xiao of Qin transformed the remote Qin state into a formidable power, laying the foundation for its eventual unification of China. His reforms included: 1) harsh punishments for minor offenses, punishment preceeds reward; 2) rewarding those who reported crimes, implementing collective punishment; 3) prioritizing agriculture over commerce, emphasizing the dual roles of farming and warfare; 4) abolishing hereditary and class systems, awarding titles and rewards based on merit; 5) promoting unity in governance, ensuring people focused on their professions; 6) restricting thoughts and censoring speech, eliminating the ten "evils" of Confucianism and banning wandering scholars who indulged in debauchery; 7) "legislating customs", leaving no room for idleness, forcing people to engage in agriculture; 8) abolishing the well-field system, opening up land for private ownership and allowing free transactions; 9) Replacing the feudal system with the establishment of 31 counties with subdivisions, appointing magistrates for administration and county officers for military affairs; 10) standardizing weights and measures, issuing standard measuring instruments; 11) compiling household registers, organizing households into groups for tax collection based on households and population; 12) abolishing extended families, rewarding households where men farm and women weave, prohibiting fathers and adult sons or brothers from living together, to promote agriculture and population growth.

Following Shang Yang's reforms, Qin's governance underwent a dramatic transformation, leading to a significant increase in national strength that set it apart among the warring states. However, Zhuge Liang pointed out the pros and cons of Shang Yang's approach, criticizing his haste for results and abandonment of education in favor of strict laws: "Shang Yang excelled in legalism but neglected education."

Shang Yang relied on harsh laws and military might, disregarding benevolence and righteousness. His methods, while effective in governance, earned him numerous enemies due to his harshness and lack of benevolence, creating a stifling atmosphere in the country. After Duke Xiao's death, Shang Yang lost his powerful political backing. His successor, King Huiwen of Qin, under pressure from the nobles, accused him of treason and ordered his capture.

During his escape, Shang Yang sought refuge but was rejected due to his own law that required anyone without proper identification to be punished collectively. This ironic twist led to his death, embodying the principle of "reaping what one sows". The state of Wei also rejected his request for asylum due to his betrayal in previous battles. He returned to his fiefdom of Shangyi, attempting to organize his troops to attack the neighboring state of Zheng. However, Qin forces caught up with him and shot him at the Mianchi River in Zheng. His body was brought back to Xianyang, capital of Qin state, where King Huiwen ordered him to be executed by dismemberment, along with his entire family.

Jia Yi, a renowned thinker in the Han Dynasty, commented, "The Qin people's hatred for Shang Yang's laws surpassed personal enmity. Therefore, on the day of Duke Xiao's death, the entire country rose up against him, with no place to flee, ... eventually leading to the dismemberment of his clan." (from "Salt and Iron Debate: Refuting Yang") Although Shang Yang died, his reforms were not abolished and continued to deeply influence the governance of future dynasties.

9.5 Moderation and Commentary on Legalistic Governance

The core idea of Legalism can be summed up in a word "unity" emphasized by Shang Yang. This entails the king's authority as absolute, his word being final, decisions made according to law, equal treatment for all, and the nationwide implementation of unified thoughts, standards, and actions, all consistently applied. Thus, Shang Yang concluded that with strict laws, "the sage's governance is only about thorough unity".

Deeply influenced by the school criminology, Han Fei (280-233 BC), with a more scholarly demeanor, was able to draw from various schools of thought. He incorporated elements from Daoism and Confucianism, while also summarizing the experiences and lessons from reformers like Shang Yang and Shen Buhai. He developed a comprehensive theory of governing by law from a philosophical and epistemological standpoint, earning him the title of the epitome of Legalism. In his view, governance should be calm and measured, integrating law, strategy, and circumstances. He believed that "Shen Buhai was rigid in strategy, and Shang Yang was rigid in law", because none of them learned to integrate multi-faceted factors into proper governance.

He further emphasized the concept of equality before the law, advocating that "the law does not favor the noble, and the measuring line does not bend. The wise cannot evade the law, and the brave dare not challenge it. Punishments for wrongdoing do not exempt high officials, and rewards for good deeds do not bypass commoners." In addition to legislation, judiciary, and enforcement, he also proposed the concept of using law as education, promoting a society where people "know the law, understand the law, and abide by the law", which would prevent potential wrongdoing and help reduce the overall cost of governance.

Unfortunately, Han Fei was falsely accused and killed in prison due to the jealousy and political machinations of Li Si, the Prime Minister of Qin at the time.

During Lü Buwei's tenure as Chancellor of Qin, he recruited scholars and intellectuals from all over the country, modeling after the Jixia Academy, and promoted the Yellow Emperor and Laozi's Daoist ideology. He combined Confucianism and Legalism, selecting the writings of various pre-Qin philosophers to compile the first eclectic book in China, The Annals of Lü Buwei. However, after Ying Zheng actually took power, he used harsh methods to eradicate the Lü Buwei group, abolished their eclectic governance policy, and reinstated Legalist thought. This was later implemented nationwide during the process of unifying the six states. Shortly after, he enforced a cultural totalitarianism known as "burning books and burying Confucian scholars", severely suppressing the Hundred Schools of Thought, including Huang-Lao Daoism.

Sima Qian's evaluation of Legalism was: "Legalism does not distinguish between kinship or rank. If a decision is made according to law, then even the affection and respect of kin and superiors are severed. While it can be effective for a time, it cannot be used for long. Therefore, it is said to be 'strict and lacking in grace'. If superiors honor their positions and subordinates understand their roles, and there is a clear division of duties without overstepping, even the Hundred Schools cannot change this." (from "Records of the Grand Historian: Self-Introduction by Sima Qian")

In the end, the strategies employed by the Military and Legalist schools, while miraculous in the short term, often deviate from the right path. The more refined they are, the more dangerous they become. Furthermore, using strategy to govern the military can maintain discipline

and strength, but applying it in the form of harsh laws to govern a country, ultimately leads to external strength but internal weakness, which is not a path to long-term stability.

Ban Gu also remarked on the adverse consequences of deceptive strategies and ruthless governance, "During that era, the state of Wu had Sun Wu, the state of Qi had Sun Bin, the state of Wei had Wu Qi, and the state of Qin had Shang Yang. These individuals were renowned for their ability to capture enemies and achieve military victories, leaving behind influential writings. Sun and Wu were adept at expediency and valued deception. They thrived in tumultuous and corrupt states marked by discord between rulers and subjects, where political and strategic ineptitude created opportunities for deception. Urgent circumstances led to widespread killings in cities, and disputes over territory resulted in numerous casualties. The followers of Sun, Wu, Shang, and Bai (Bai Qi, a military commander of the Qin state known for his brutal tactics) were all executed in their respective eras, leading to the eventual downfall of their states. The principle of retribution operates in a similar manner, as history has shown."

10

HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS IN THE PRE-QIN ERA

History is evocative. “Taking history as a mirror, one can know the rise and fall of the state,” proclaimed by the second emperor of the Chinese Tang Dynasty Li Shimin who brought the nation to the climax of national unity and prosperity. To understand the present and predict the future, nothing is more reliable than a regressional exploration of the nation’s historic path. This is particularly true of China whose civilization has evolved and persisted without major fractures.

History is a relentless master. It has no present, only the past rushing into the future. To try to hold fast is to be swept aside.

——*John F. Kennedy*

As Benedetto Croce put it, all history is contemporary history (D’Amico 1999). For the most populous nation that has maintained high level of social, moral and political cohesion for 5,000 years with little rupture, it is necessary to delve into its historical context and visit its pathway before any compelling argument can be made with regard to China’s

present attitude, purpose and behavior. In other words, mere narrative exposition on the face value may be construed as misleading.

It is no intention of this book to elaborate on history, but it is necessary to provide the poli-socio and cultural context behind the dominant ideologies within truncated historical episodes. Therefore, the book cherry picked the epoch-making events, interesting anecdotes, preeminent figures and outstanding thoughts in chronic order that have left visible legacy on the present Chinese values.

10.1 The Chinese Primogenitors and the Abdication System

The Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors are regarded as Chinese primogenitors. Their divine status, however, varies in historical records. According to a popular version, Fuxi, Shennong, and Huangdi respectively represent the Three Sovereigns of Heaven, Earth, and Man, who were monarchs during the initial establishment of the world. There is much speculation about their identities, chronologies, and achievements. In contrast, the Five Emperors listed in the Records of the Grand History - Huangdi, Zhuanxü, Diku, Yao, and Shun - are more credibly believed to be leaders of tribal alliances, revered by later generations as the Five Emperors.

In the primitive society of ancient times, the state of human existence was no different from that of birds and beasts, “people only knew their mothers, not their fathers”, and there were no ethical codes or social norms. Everything in nature was shared with no concept of ownership, possession or storage. “They sought food when hungry and discarded leftovers when full.” But this is different from the “communal ownership”

some people misunderstand. As the lifestyle transitioned from local fishing and hunting to nomadic wandering, the concept of tribes strengthened during migrations. During this period, Suiren taught people to drill wood for fire, changing their dietary habits from raw meat and blood. Fuxi observed the celestial phenomena and the geography, created the Actogram, and led the tribes out of the valleys to settle in the plains. The Records of the Three Sovereigns state: "After Nüwa's death, Shennong began to reign." Shennong invented agriculture – "cutting wood for plows, twisting wood for harrows, using the harrow and plow to teach the world," and tasted various herbs to treat diseases and save people, thus being revered as the leader of the tribal (regional) alliance. The stable agricultural production mode prompted the transition from matrilineal clan society to patrilineal clan society, and ethical consciousness based on kinship began to emerge.

The surplus of labor results and the domestication of animals gave rise to concepts of savings and private ownership. With the growth of the population, contact between tribes became more frequent. Thus, conflicts and wars over territory and possessions unfolded on various scales. Wars strengthened the tribal chiefs' leadership and the cohesion of tribe members, and put the improvement of weapons and military preparedness on the agenda, laying the foundation for the social governance and technological innovation of the victors.

Around the 22nd century BC, the Xuanxuan Huangdi tribe, which emerged on the Loess Plateau, ruled over six large tribal alliances and became the most powerful force in the area where Shaanxi, Shanxi, and Henan meet. Huangdi, who cultivated virtue and strengthened his army, defeated Yandi and captured Chiyou, was supported by the lords as the Son of Heaven, replacing Shennong and occupying the chief position

among the Five Emperors. Large-scale wars promoted the integration of tribes, and the Huaxia ethnic group began to take shape, spreading and growing in the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, becoming the center of Chinese civilization, and generally referring to the surrounding ethnic tribes as "the Four Barbarians", which were later subdivided into "Dongyi, Nanman, Xirong, and Beidi". Yandi and Huangdi are recognized as the ancestors of the Huaxia ethnic group, and the origins of the three core concepts of "Yanhuang descendants", "China", and "Son of Heaven". The Records of the Grand History states: "Huangdi was in the center, and the Four Barbarians paid tribute; the Son of Heaven 'governs China and pacifies the Four Barbarians'."

The imperial position of Zhuanxü was passed down from his grandfather, Xuanxuan Huangdi, and Zhuanxü passed it to his nephew, Diku, but these two generations had no significant deeds to record. Yao and Shun, who opened the governance of Tang and Yü, as the leaders of the tribal alliances in the Central Plains during the ancient period, have a lot of documentary records. After Diku's death, his eldest son Zhi succeeded the throne, and nine years later, he abdicated in favor of his brother Yao. Yao, who was enfeoffed in the land of Tang, was thus named Tang Yao. Throughout his reign for seventy years, Yao lived a simple life, and governed orderly. He was able to "enlighten virtues, stay close to nine tribes, and empower good officials." To develop agriculture, he also tackled flood disasters. Based on the four seasons of spring, summer, autumn, and winter he determined, he bestowed farming seasons to the people, winning their deep affection. The Records of the Grand Historian depicted him as:

"His benevolence is like heaven, his wisdom like a deity. Approaching him is as heartwarming as the sun; looking up to him is as nourishing as clouds covering the earth. He is wealthy but not arrogant, noble but not indulgent. He wears a yellow hat and black clothes, with a vermilion chariot drawn by white horses. He can respect those with good virtues, making nine generations of his kin love and cherish each other. With his kin in harmony, he then inspects the officials. The achievements of the officials are clear, and all the lords and states can live in peace."

Yao voluntarily broke the tradition of hereditary succession of the imperial position, not passing political power to his own children, but to the virtuous and talented Shun, pioneering the system of abdication. This alone is enough to be remembered through the ages. During his reign, Yao focused on selecting the virtuous and appointing the capable. Knowing that his son Danzhu was incompetent, so he offered recommendation to heaven for Shun to act as regent, and abdicated 28 years before his death. What a magnanimous deed! No wonder the people mourned his death as if they had lost their parents, and stopped playing music for three years to express their grief. Shun also showed the virtue of humility, but the people voted with their feet to choose their monarch, and Shun eventually ascended to the position of Son of Heaven in accordance with the will of heaven.

If it is true that Shennong passed on his leadership position to Huangdi because of his cowardice in facing battle, Yao, in a peaceful and prosperous era, refused to pass the throne to his incompetent son, it on one hand shows that he realized the principle that "if virtue does not match the position, disaster will surely follow," and on the other hand, it shows that he understood the greater good in his decisive choice for the heir to

the throne between his kinship and the larger world. Therefore, as the saying goes: "selecting the virtuous for empowerment is utmost fairness." This precedent was followed by later generations, with Shun passing the throne to Yü, who had merits in water management. Yü pacified southern tribes such as the Jiu Li and San Miao and divided China into nine provinces. This is the origin of the later literary works equating the Nine Provinces with China.

Yü passed the throne to Yi, and the incompetent Yi abdicated in favor of Yü's son Qi. Qi was indeed a capable leader; he established the first dynasty in China, the Xia Dynasty, which emerged from tribal alliances, ending the system of abdication and starting the hereditary monarchy system that continued in China for thousands of years. Yao's abdication and Shun's succession both involved the will of heaven, thus opening the political concept of "the right to rule is granted by heaven", while Shun's final decision also directly expressed the democratic idea that "the will of the people is the will of heaven". Inspired by the system of abdication, Mencius summarized a famous saying: "The mandate of heaven is constant, and only the virtuous can occupy it." From the following statement in the Book of Changes, ancient thought also favored the turnover of power, but the premise is that the previous governance has fallen into a desperate state, and the purpose and result of change are for "good governance" and "sustainability".

After the death of Shennong, Huangdi, Yao, and Shun rose to prominence. As the times changed, they adapted to the changes, ensuring that the people's lives were not rigid and monotonous, allowing them to live in peace and stability.

The principle of the I Ching (Book of Changes) is that when things reach an extreme, they change; when they change, they become smooth; when they are smooth, they can last forever. If one can follow this principle of flexibility, what can't be achieved? Therefore, it is like having divine assistance, naturally bringing auspiciousness without any harm. Huangdi, Yao, and Shun established cultural systems and divided official duties, each contributing their strength, ultimately bringing peace to the world, achieving governance by doing nothing that goes against nature, a phenomenon that is reflected in the Qian and Kun hexagrams.

——*From the Book of Changes, Xici II*

Of course, the practice of the abdication system and Mencius's famous saying also provided a strong basis for ambitious individuals in later generations to seek power, usurp thrones, and change dynasties. Since Shun established the model of graceful yielding, and Emperor Gaozu of Han, Liu Bang, set the precedent of the Three Declines before being honored as emperor. Usurpers in successive dynasties, whether through rebellion or coup, at least formally continued this tradition of yielding during the transfer of power. The Liu royal power of the Han Dynasty successively yielded to Wang Mang and Cao Pi, and the frequent transfers of power during the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, all the way to Yuan Shikai's ascension to the throne in the Republic of China era, all cited the precedent of the abdication system, always putting on a show of three persuasions and three declines before ascending to the grand throne.

China as a nation of initial unity was earmarked by the Xia Dynasty which symbolized the end of the tribal society. An epoch-making legacy ingrained in Chinese political history is that the prototype of throne succession shifted from a merit-based abdication to a hereditary mode within

the royal family. In a sense, the country became privatized to a family ever since. Naturally, the fate of the country with its entire people became utterly dependent on the inherent wisdom and morality of one single ruler beyond their selection. With few exceptions, it is the moral decay of last emperors that makes their dynasties ramshackle. Their indulgence in dissolute lifestyle got themselves blindfolded against reality and deaf to admonition. When corruption and oppression turned so viral that coup d'état, uprising of his people or foreign invasion would follow. This is the typical case why the Xia was replaced by the Shang Dynasty. Alas, such a feedback loop forged a boilerplate for the dramatic rise and fall of all ensuing dynasties along Chinese history.

10.2 The Three Dynasties Period

The earliest three dynasties in China - the Xia, Shang, and Western Zhou dynasties - are referred to by historians as the "Three Dynasties Period" or "Three Kings Period". It marked the time when the Chinese nation moved away from the primitive form of clan tribes and entered the track of class society. There were fundamental advancements in productivity, production methods, and political models compared to the tribal or legendary times ruled by sages in Chinese literature.

As previously mentioned, Chinese administrative history commenced with the governance of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors within a tribal framework. Their leadership was succeeded by Yao of the Tang tribe and Shun of the Yü tribe. Shun, impressed by a young man named Yü's accomplishments in water management, entrusted him with the leadership of the tribes, heralding the establishment of the Xia Dynasty (circa 2070-1600 BC), China's first dynasty. Yü's throne was later passed

to his son Qi, initiating the hereditary system of the Chinese throne, known as the "Great Yü passed down to his son". This transition marked the end of the abdication system of leadership, with the political ideal evolving from "the world for everyone" to "the world for one family".

The Xia Dynasty gradually formed the unique form of the Han nationality by absorbing the surrounding tribes. The ancestors of the Huaxia (elegent Xia) people founded their country in the middle reaches of the Yellow River and, within their then-visible world, considered themselves to be at the center of heaven and earth, hence the term "China", literally "central kingdom". Some people seek the origin of this concept of China from the perspective of civilization advancement. The "Interpretation and Commentary on Tang Code" states: "Zhonghua refers to China. They are close to the king's teachings, belong to China themselves, wear clothes and hats with dignity, follow customs of filial piety and brotherly respect, and observe propriety and righteousness in their behavior, thus they are called Zhonghua – the elegant nation (country) in the center."

The surrounding tribes were called the "Four Barbarians". The "Book of Rites: Royal Regulations" subdivides them into Eastern Barbarians, Western Di, Southern Man, and Northern Yi. However, the term "Four Barbarians" first appeared in the late Western Zhou period, when the Zhou dynasty used blood relations as the standard to distinguish between the Huaxia and the Yi and Di. The Son of Heaven of the Zhou dynasty used "king's mother's younger brother, nephew, and uncle" to extend and honor the countries that followed Zhou's rituals, calling them Huaxia, while the other countries were called the Four Barbarians, or "Man, Jing, Rong, and Di". The "Guoyu: Zheng Language" says: "If they are not the king's branch, mother, brother, nephew, or uncle, then they are all people of Man, Jing, Rong, and Di. If they are not relatives, they are stubborn

and cannot be admitted... The sons and grandsons who have made great achievements in the world have never been without preeminence, such as Yü, Xia, Shang, and Zhou." This is certainly a dynamic concept. Han Yü believed: "If Confucius used Yi rites for the feudal lords, they were Yi; if they advanced to become part of China, they were Chinese." As Huaxia expanded in the process of ethnic integration, the term "Four Barbarians" came to refer to other peoples beyond the Nine Provinces.

Beyond mere geography and blood relations, the distinction between the Huaxia and barbarian tribes also signifies cultural disparities. In the "Record of Zuo: Duke Xiang, Year XIV", Jü Zhi, a descendant of the Jiang Rong tribe from the far west, remarked, "Our Rong people differ in food, clothing, and sacrificial rites from the Huaxia. We do not engage in mutual trade, and our languages do not align."

The "Record of Zuo: Duke Ding, Year X", quotes Confucius as saying, "Foreign tribes should neither scheme against nor disturb the Huaxia." Here, "Huaxia" specifically denotes the Zhou dynasty in the Central Plains and its vassals, highlighting the cultural superiority of Huaxia civilization over the surrounding tribes' barbarism. The "Strategies of the Warring States: Vol. XIX" elaborates on the sense of Huaxia's cultural superiority: "China (Huaxia) is where intelligence and wisdom reside, where wealth accumulates, where the wise and virtuous are educated, where benevolence and righteousness are practiced, where poetry, books, rituals, and music flourish, where various skills are honed, where distant lands are observed and visited, and where barbarians seek to emulate."

The "Book of Han" candidly expresses disdain for external tribes: "In the Spring and Autumn Annals, there are the states of Xia within, and the Yi and Di without. The people of Yi and Di are described as greedy and profit-seeking, with their hair hanging down on the left side,

exhibiting a beastly nature beneath a human façade. They differ from the Chinese in dress, customs, food, and language. Therefore, the sagacious kings treated them like animals, refraining from making treaties or launching attacks. If treaties were made, they demanded bribes and acted deceitfully. Attacking them would deplete our armies and breed banditry. Their land, if conquered, could not be cultivated for sustenance; their people, if captured, could not be civilized or integrated. Thus, the wise kings kept them at arm's length, avoiding close association."

10.3 The Beginning of Hereditary Dynasties

10.3.1 The Xia Dynasty

The Xia Dynasty (approximately 2070-1600 BC) is widely recognized as the first hereditary dynasty in Chinese history, marking the genesis of the dynastic history of Chinese civilization. Archaeologists have preliminarily identified the Yanshi Erlitou site in Henan as the capital of the Xia Dynasty (according to the "Chronology Project of Xia, Shang, and Zhou" and the "Exploration Project of Chinese Civilization", there were a total of six large-scale, high-ranking central cities around the Erlitou site during the Xia Dynasty).

Yü, a descendant of the Yellow Emperor, was the leader of the Xiahou tribe. Due to his achievements in water management and the subjugation of the Three Miao tribes, he was elected by various tribes to succeed Shun and became the leader of the tribal alliance. Yü founded the country but maintained the political form of tribal alliance governance and abdication. Although Yü designated Boyi, leader of the Eastern Yi tribe, as his successor, his son Qi, with the support of some tribal leaders, fought against Boyi and eventually won the throne. Despite not being Yü's original

intention, the fact that Qi, his son, inherited the throne and formalized this hereditary system of the Chinese throne that lasted for nearly four thousand years. The Xia Dynasty lasted for 470 years with 14 generations and 17 emperors succeeding to the throne.

During the Warring States period, Wu Qi pointed out that the territory ruled by Jie of Xia extended northeast to the lower reaches of the Yellow River and the Ji River basin, now southeastern Hebei and central Shandong; westward to Mount Hua, now southeastern Shaanxi; southward to the "Yi Que", now the Yi River in western Henan and its surrounding mountains; and northward to the "Yangchang", now the hilly area in southern Shanxi. Despite its vast territory and strategic position, it was still lost under the tyrannical ruler Jie.

As for the origin of the name "Xia Dynasty", some say it is because the Xiahou tribe was the most powerful among the twelve tribes at that time. Another theory is that Yü was enfeoffed in the land of Grand Xia in Yangdi, and was given the title "Lord Xia". This leads to the concept that China is called Huaxia, and the Chinese people call themselves the sons and daughters of Huaxia. The term "Huaxia" first appeared in the "Book of Documents: Book of Zhou, Wu Cheng", which means that whether it is the ethnic groups in the Central Plains or the distant ethnic groups, all submit to King Wu of Zhou. The term "Xia" is almost certainly derived from the Xia Dynasty, while "Hua" has different explanations. One theory is that it originated from the Huaxu clan, an earlier matriarchal clan leader, believed to be the mother of Fuxi and Nüwa. Another theory is related to the birthplace of the Xia tribe, as the Yan Emperor tribe and the Yellow Emperor tribe were concentrated in the area of Mount Hua and the Xia River. Yet another theory, as in the "Interpretation and Commentary of Tang Code", takes it to mean "splendid and magnificent" - Xia meaning

great. Since China has the great rites and the beauty of attire, it is called Xia; and with the beauty of attire, it is called Hua (like the splendor and colorfulness of "flowers"). Indeed, the Huaxia civilization at that time, consisting of rites, music, divination, ancient Chinese language, etc., was highly developed, giving it enough capital to look down upon the surrounding tribes. Before the Han Dynasty, the people of the Central Plains were called Xia-ren. The concept of Han-ren or Han ethnicity emerged after the Han Dynasty, and after the Tang Dynasty, they were also called Tang-ren, while overseas they are still all called Hua-ren, and the China-towns in which they live together are called Tang-ren Street.

The hereditary system, while offering predictability in future rulers, also introduces a risk of favoritism over merit, establishing a fixed pattern for succession. This pattern limits the reigning monarch's freedom to select and change successors, leaving the fate of the country and its people uncertain under future rulers. For example, Tai Kang, the first emperor of the Xia Dynasty, inherited the throne from his father Qi but was later deposed by tribal leader Houyi due to his extravagant lifestyle and weak governance, leading to the event known as "Tai Kang losing the country". Shaokang, with the help of remnants of the Xia Dynasty, later defeated Houyi's large army, reclaiming power and becoming the sixth generation emperor. Shaokang focused on diligent governance, particularly in agriculture and water conservancy, achieving a period of prosperity known as the "Shaokang revival".

Over the 470-year span of the Xia Dynasty, there were ongoing power struggles and tribal wars, resulting in the capital city shifting multiple times. After pacifying the tribes in the Central Plains, the Xia rule expanded to the coast of the East China Sea. The last Xia sovereign, Xia Jie, ruled without virtue, engaging in continuous warfare that burdened the

people. Tang of Shang rallied tribes from the east and defeated Jie in a decisive battle at Mingtiao, leading to Jie's fleeing and subsequent death. Tang of Shang then ascended to the throne, establishing control over the country as vassals submitted, and changing the dynasty's name to Shang.

10.3.2 The Shang Dynasty

The ancestors of the Shang Dynasty were led by Xie, whose mother was reportedly a concubine of Emperor Ku named Jiandi. It is said that Xie was born after his mother swallowed a five-colored egg of the mysterious bird while bathing in the wilderness, hence the saying "the mysterious bird gave birth to Shang". When Xie grew up, he assisted Great Yü in his water control efforts, which earned him recognition from Emperor Shun. As a result, he was granted the land of Shang (present-day Shangqiu County, Henan Province) and the surname Zi. The Shang clan originally resided in the ancient eastern tribes downstream of the Yellow River. By expanding outward, they gradually became powerful, with their influence extending eastward to the Bohai Sea, southward to the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, northward to the central part of Inner Mongolia and the western part of Liaoning, and westward to the middle reaches of the Yellow River, bordering the Xia Dynasty. They eventually grew from a tributary to a powerful rival of the Xia Dynasty.

Shang Tang gradually defeated the peripheral vassal states of Xia, eventually mobilizing 70 war chariots and 6,000 soldiers to make the "Oath of Tang" (see "The Book of Documents") and chased Xia Jie a thousand miles before annihilating him. After an alliance convention of three thousand feudal lords, Tang was elected as the top commander, becoming the founding emperor of the Shang Dynasty.

The Shang Dynasty (approximately 1600-1046 BC) initially established its capital at Bo. Due to the frequent relocation of its capital, it lingered longer in the Yin region, hence it is also known as the Yin Dynasty or Yin Shang. Shang Tang learned from the downfall of the Xia Dynasty and implemented benevolent governance, winning the hearts of the people and initially consolidating the regime.

The Shang Dynasty attached great importance to the development of agriculture and animal husbandry, producing grains such as millet, wheat, rice, and barley, as well as economic crops such as mulberry, hemp, and fruits. Among the cultural relics unearthed in the Yin ruins, in addition to the remains of six animals, there are also elephant bones, indicating the presence of elephants in the north at that time. They also mastered the technique of pig castration, beginning the artificial breeding of freshwater fish. Handicrafts were highly developed, especially the casting technology of bronze vessels, which reached its peak. With a well-established system of private ownership, the refinement of division of labor, and the expansion of production scale, commerce was promoted, which in turn led to the growth of cities. The Shang Dynasty established a comprehensive bureaucratic system and a social hierarchy.

Most tribes were incorporated into the central management system as vassals, with their leaders being granted different levels of titles based on the size of their territories and contributions. A professional army was in a state of constant readiness, and a large number of statutes such as the "Ganshi", "Pangeng," "Yixun", and "Siming" entered the social governance system. "The Commentary of Zuo: Duke Zhao, Year VI" records: "Against the disorder in the Shang Dynasty, Tang instituted the Tang Codes." Land nominally belonged to the Shang king and was granted to nobles and vassals at all levels in a form of enfeoffment, while a basic tax

system was implemented through the well-field system at the grassroots level. Archaeological discoveries such as the Erlitou and Yin ruins demonstrate that the Shang Dynasty had emerged from the primitive jungle era, creating a brilliant civilization in the Central Plains. Meanwhile, contemporaneous civilizations existed in parallel in the Yangtze River Basin, as evidenced by the Sanxingdui site in Sichuan and the Tanheli site in Ningxiang, Hunan Province.

In the early years of the Shang Dynasty, there appeared a minister named Yi Yin, revered by Confucians as a sage model for all ages. Yi Yin, originally of humble birth, was a skilled chef and slave. His talents in both literary and military affairs were later recognized by King Tang, and he assisted Tang in overthrowing the Xia Dynasty and organizing the country's governance. After Tang's death, three successive legitimate heirs all had short reigns. Yi Yin then placed Tang's eldest grandson, Tai Jia, on the throne. However, Tai Jia proved to be incompetent and tyrannical, disregarding Tang's laws. Yi Yin, therefore, had no choice but to exile him and take over the government. Importantly, Yi Yin did not usurp the throne. After Tai Jia repented and reformed himself for three years, Yi Yin welcomed him back, relinquishing power and returning the reins of government to him.

Yi Yin upheld the hereditary system, serving as a foundational example for future loyal ministers and generals: loyalty to the monarch should be paramount. For an established ruler, regardless of age or ability, replacing them would be a serious act of rebellion against the established order. In the case of a young ruler, a loyal minister could act as regent, guiding and advising to protect the throne. Even in the extreme case of an incompetent ruler, advocating for the establishment of a new monarch among the legitimate heirs was permissible, but the dynastic succession

must not be violated. During the Three Kingdoms era, despite ambitious figures like Cao Cao, no one dared to usurp the Han throne and establish their own. Similarly, the exceptionally wise Zhuge Liang, the dedicated minister to the Shu Han dynasty, willingly served the largely inept Liu Shan, a distant descendant of the Han Dynasty, even though he was told to replace him when found incompetent by Shan's father before death. These examples illustrate how deeply ingrained the concept of hereditary rule had become in the orthodox ideology of the time.

Although Yi Yin's exile of Tai Jia was effective in protecting the Tang dynasty, subsequent orthodox views were still critical. During the Western Han Dynasty, the powerful Huo Guang manipulated the abdication and enthronement of emperors, a situation later dubbed the "Yi-Huo Incident". This demonstrates that, in the eyes of the orthodox, hereditary royal power was supreme. Those in power, regardless of their virtue, should never be slighted, unless someone has the ability and ambition to completely overthrow and rewrite history. Of course, this person must also create a new situation based on real achievements, thereby slowly opening up the value judgment of "only the virtuous should rule". However, as new dynasties solidified, the idea of hereditary rule quickly reasserted itself.

10.3.3 The Zhou Dynasty

Originated from the Huaxia ethnic group, the tribe of Zhou were descendants of the Yellow Emperor. To avoid invasions from nomadic tribes like the Rong and Di, their leader, Duke Dan Fu, led his people to migrate to the area around Mount Qi (now northeast of Qishan, Shaanxi) for settlement. When Ji Chang succeeded to the throne, he continued to

serve the Shang Dynasty and was granted the title of Duke of the West. The last ruler of the Shang Dynasty, King Zhou by the name Di Xin, was was arrogant, indulgent, and debauched. He imposed harsh taxes and labor burdens to build parks, pavilions, and hunting grounds, and extensively collected rare treasures, exotic birds, and animals. He indulged in extravagant feasts and revelries, especially favoring the beautiful concubine Daji. Amidst widespread discontent and widespread rebellion by vassal states, he dismissed the wise minister, Shang Rong, and appointed corrupt officials like Fei Zhong and You Hun, forcing vassal states to attack each other. He imprisoned Duke of the West Ji Chang in Youli and force him to drink the soup made from the flesh of his eldest son killed by him. The Zhou people bribed King Zhou and his corrupt officials with fine horses and beautiful women to secure the release of Ji Chang. Ji Chang died before he was able to mobilize forces to destruct the Shang Dynasty. Ji Fa, his second son who survived, succeeded as the Duke of the West. Following his father's aspirations, Ji Fa united with other vassal states and advanced eastward upon the weakly defended Chaoge, the Shang capital. After the fierce Battle of Muye, King Zhou, with his fate sealed, set himself on fire, ending the rule of the Shang Dynasty. This event is known in Chinese history as the “Overthrow of the Shang by King Wu” or “King Wu Conquers Shang”.

After conquering Shang, the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 BC) established its capital at Haojing (present-day Xi’an, Shaanxi). Ji Fa took the title King Wu and posthumously honored his father as King Wen. During this period, the relocation of the capital to Luoyi by King Ping of Zhou in 770 BC marked the division between Western and Eastern Zhou. The Zhou Dynasty came to an end when King Nan of Zhou was

conquered by the Qin state in 256 BC, and the royal house of Zhou completely withdrew from the historical stage after nearly 800 years.

King Wu lavishly granted land and people to their sons, relatives, meritorious officials, and nobles, leading to the establishment of major fiefdoms such as Qi, Lu, Song, Wei, Yan, and Jin, which collectively defended the central Zhou royal house. The "Xunzi · On Rulers" records: "King of Zhou governed the world, establishing seventy-one states, with fifty-three of them being of the Ji surname." Many Chinese surnames are derived from these fiefdoms and their subsequent splintering.

The institutional setting was clearly structured where the king of Zhou dynasty was officially accredited as the son of the heaven, inheriting the will of heaven to rule over the world (the entire country). The leaders of the states were the monarchs, and they were granted along five ranks of titles: duke, marquis, earl, viscount, and baron, with those below the fifth rank being vassals. The sizes and strategic positions of the fiefdoms varied. The states were required to obey the Zhou royal house, pay tribute on time, and participate in wars to defend the royal house. This marked the end of the semi-tribal, semi-feudal Shang Dynasty, and China entered a fully established feudal dynasty.

According to Bo Yang's statistics in "An Outline of Chinese History", there have been 83 dynasties in Chinese history, from the Yellow Emperor to Puyi, comprising a total of 559 emperors and kings, including 397 emperors (some sources say 422) and 162 kings. The pattern of dynastic succession has repeatedly followed the same model: the founding ruler would fortify the military, go through bloody battles to seize power, and then govern diligently to create a prosperous realm, hoping to pass this vast inheritance to his descendants for endless generations to come. However, as the throne is passed down within the family, it eventually

ends up, after centuries or mere decades, in the hands of a final ruler who squanders the ancestral legacy to outsiders, thus bearing eternal infamy.

Gauging though all Chinese dynasties, from Jie of Xia, Zhou of Shang, to Huhai of Qin, Nan of Zhou, Xia of Han, Yang of Sui, Ai of Tang, up to Puyi of Qing, each last emperor was like a fleeting fish across the river, either debauched and brutal or naive and incompetent, inevitably meeting a predestined downfall.

Especially during periods of dramatic change, every Chinese dynasty faced the crucial political challenge of how to win the hearts of the people. Different responses meant different destinies. Mencius said, "The reason why Jie and Zhou lost their kingdoms was that they lost their people, and losing their people meant losing their hearts. The way to conquer the world is to win the people, and to win the people, you must win their hearts. The way to win their hearts is to align with their desires and avoid imposing what they despise." (Mencius, Li Lou I) This principle, summarized as "He who wins the people's hearts wins the world", has always been praised by Confucianism and touted by rulers as the highest political ethics. However, this idea of "the people as the foundation of the state" remains a form of populism where the king, under the premise of owning the world, is advised to govern benevolently, akin to a master being urged to treat his livestock well. On the fundamental question of who owns the world, an idea proposed by Lv Wang, a mentor to King Wen of Zhou who lived seven centuries ahead of Mencius, is closer to the concept of democracy. Determined to overthrow King Zhou of Shang, King Wen of Zhou sought advice from grand Duke Lv Wang on how to win over the world, to which Lv Wang responded, "The world does not belong to one person; it belongs to everyone." According to this view, even the kindest kings are merely leaders supported by the people, not owners of the world.

Regarding how to win the hearts of the people, he emphasized that a ruler should share weal and woe with the people, and adhere to the four fundamental principles of benevolence, virtue, righteousness, and the Way:

"He who shares the world's benefits with the people will win the world; he who monopolizes the world's benefits will lose the world. Heaven has its seasons, and Earth has its wealth; he who shares these with the people is benevolent. Where benevolence resides, the world will gravitate towards it. He who spares people from death, relieves their difficulties, rescues them from disaster, and helps them in emergencies possesses virtue. Where virtue resides, the world will gravitate towards it. He who shares worries, joys, likes, and dislikes with the people is righteous; where righteousness resides, the world will flock to it. Generally, people fear death and enjoy life, appreciate virtue, and seek benefits; he who can generate benefits practices the Way. Where the Way resides, the world will gravitate towards it."

Regarding governance, drawing from the exemplary models of ancient leaders Yao and Shun, Lv Wang articulated several fundamental strategies:

1. The ruler should lead a life characterized by frugality and simplicity;
2. The ruler should refrain from interrupting the populace's normal productive activities with large-scale projects;
3. The ruler should avoid grandiose behavior and govern by adhering to the principle of non-interference with natural processes;

4. Officials must remain loyal and adhere strictly to legal standards, fulfilling their responsibilities with integrity and a sense of compassion towards the populace;
5. The promotion of virtues such as filial piety, integrity, and diligence among the people should be encouraged;
6. Sound laws should be established to deter malfeasance, with a clear system of rewards and punishments that is impartial and not influenced by personal relationships;
7. The ruler should focus on the welfare of vulnerable groups, providing support and relief to those in crisis;
8. The burdens of labor conscription and taxation on the populace should be minimized.

"During Emperor Yao's reign, he eschewed adornments of gold, silver, pearls, or jade, and did not wear luxurious silks. He expressed no interest in exotic curiosities, did not value ornamental objects, nor indulged in decadent pleasures. His palatial walls were modest and his buildings simply decorated. His roofs were left in their natural state. He clad himself in deer skins for warmth and plain cloth to cover his form, subsisted on coarse grains, and millet and wild herb soups. He ensured that public works did not disrupt the agricultural and textile activities of his subjects. By curbing his desires and embracing minimalism, he practiced a governance of non-action. Officials who were loyal and abided by the law were esteemed; those who were honest and demonstrated love for the people received generous compensation. Individuals exhibiting filial piety and kindness were honored; those who diligently engaged in agriculture were encouraged. Virtue was celebrated and malevolence was repudiated, visibly manifesting these qualities at their gates. He was

equitable and principled, enacting laws to prevent dishonesty. He rewarded those whom he did not favor yet who demonstrated merit; conversely, he punished those dear to him who committed transgressions. He provided for the widowed, orphaned, and solitary, and supported families afflicted by calamities. Living austerely himself, he imposed light taxes and duties on his people. Consequently, all his subjects were prosperous and content, free from hunger or cold, and they revered their ruler as they would the sun and moon, holding him as dear as their own parents."

This succinct passage effectively unveils the core principles of governance and elucidates the populist approach to ruling, a revelation profound enough to humble those modern scholars who consider themselves intellectual think tanks. Notably commendable is King Wen of Zhou, Ji Chang, who distinguished himself not only through his astute perception of people and receptiveness to counsel but also through his exemplary leadership. When questioned about his tolerance for candid and heartfelt advice, King Wen demonstrated a level of magnanimity that should serve as a model for all leaders: "Only a benevolent person can accept direct criticism and not resent sincere truths. How could I possibly take offense?" This indicates that only individuals of true benevolence are capable of receiving straightforward advice without despising the honesty conveyed.

The text "The Six Strategies" is a treatise that articulates thoughts and strategies on politics, military, etiquette, and agricultural tools through dialogues between Grand Duke Lv Wang and King Wen of Zhou, Ji Chang. Though scholarly consensus places its composition during the Warring States period, it clearly shows that the intellectual discourse on governance during the pre-Qin era was as advanced as that of contemporary

times. Regrettably, subsequent generations have primarily emphasized the military aspects of the work, even going so far as to rename it "Grand Duke's Art of War", thereby neglecting its extensive insights into statecraft. This oversight reflects a pragmatism that has become deeply ingrained in modern thinking. For instance, while Wikipedia provides a thorough explanation of the Golden Ratio, detailing its principles and tracing its historical applications across various fields, Baidu Encyclopedia opts for a brief explanation followed by an extensive discussion on its utility in trading stocks, gold, and foreign currencies.

10.4 Institutions of the Three Dynasty Period

Throughout ancient China's political systems, there was a development from loose tribal alliances to the dominant familial rule of the Xia Dynasty, then from the enfeoffment system of the Shang Dynasty to the feudal system of the Zhou Dynasty, culminating in a unified and refined model of state governance. Historian Liu Yi-zheng in "History of Chinese Culture" stated: From the Tang and Yü dynasties to the Zhou, it was the era of feudalism where the emperor and the lords governed separately. In fact, the enfeoffment system established during the Shang Dynasty involved the emperor granting titles such as duke, marquis, and earl to tribal chiefs within his territory, with these tribes collectively referred to as vassals, while those tribes that coexisted with the Shang dynasty were called "fang", with larger "fang" often known as "fang states". The vassals were highly autonomous and maintained a basic contractual relationship with the emperor's power. The vassals did not infringe upon each other and followed the emperor's commands in external military actions.

The feudal system was the greatest innovation of the Zhou Dynasty's political structure. King Wu of Zhou, with Jiang Shang as his mentor and Duke of Zhou as his regent, bestowed the lands he controlled as imperial property to his descendants, meritorious officials, and former dynasty nobility, most of whom were not indigenous tribal leaders. To be precise, the Shang Dynasty had enfeoffment without establishment, while the complete sense of feudalism was formally established by King Wu of Zhou. Feudalism involved granting land and founding states. The emperor, as the common sovereign, directly governed the capital and its nearby regions, while the rest of the land was allotted to the vassals to establish their own states and they were granted titles such as duke or king; these vassal kings then further granted lands to ministers, known as fiefdoms. Ministers handled military and political affairs, while senior officials managed general administrative duties. Vassals and ministers had considerable autonomy within their territories, and their obligations to the emperor included: defending the capital region, making regular tributes, and paying homage during festivals. Compared to the Xia and Shang dynasties, the Zhou Dynasty established a clearer class distinction among nobles, commoners, and slaves, thereby laying a systematic foundation for the later notion of "differentiated love and hierarchical respect" in societal relations.

The Well-field system of land tenure conceptually aligns with the feudal system but originated in the Xia Dynasty, undergoing substantial historical phases through the Xia, Shang, Zhou, and early Warring States periods. Gu Yanwu in "Daily Knowledge Record: In Fact, All Are Essentially the Same" stated, "The system of land tax originally began with Yu. After he regulated the waters and lands, the land was divided into plots, and subsequent rulers merely followed his established practices."

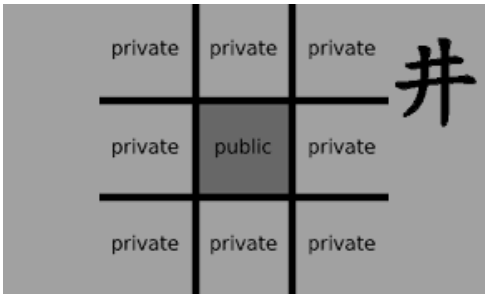
After the transformation from clan communes to a state system, lands occupied by the indigenous people and those that were ownerless all became state-owned. The king then partitioned these lands among the vassals, who in turn distributed them in the same manner to the clan communes. Eventually, the communes allocated the plots to families of farmers. Even if the original residents continued to farm their ancestral lands, legally, they were considered tenant farmers working on state-owned land under the king's dominion, embodying the principle of "till the fields without ownership."

Hence, while nominally transitioning from collective to public ownership, the land was essentially owned by the supreme ruler, the king. As the saying goes, "Under the heavens, all lands belong to the king; at the edges of the earth, all are the king's subjects" (from the Book of Songs, Minor Odes, Odes of Beishan). The land was divided into public and private fields, with private fields independently farmed by peasants, whose yields were used to sustain labor reproduction; public fields were collectively cultivated under the supervision of bureaucratic leaders. The surplus labor from these public fields, controlled by the rulers, served as a form of tribute to the feudal nobility, essentially constituting corvée labor provided to the rulers by the cultivators. In terms of its exploitative nature, the idealized Well-field system was actually quite similar to the serfdom that persisted in Eastern Europe until the 19th century. Marx noted: "The serf labored on his own or the land assigned to him for three days, and for the remaining three days, he worked on his master's land, engaged in forced, unpaid labor."[51]

[51] Karl Marx, "Wages, Price and Profit", in "Selected Works of Marx and Engels", Volume II, People's Publishing House, 1972, p. 185.

The Well-field system was symbolically represented and had reached a considerable level of completeness during the Zhou dynasty. The system involved dividing land into a grid pattern that resembled a "well" character in Chinese (井), with defined boundaries and central channels for irrigation, crisscrossed by paths that facilitated communication and transport, resembling roads leading to the capital. (Figure 10-1) The earliest record of the Well-field system is found in "The Commentary of Guliang on the Spring and Autumn Annals, Fifteenth Year of Duke Xuan", stating: "In ancient times, three hundred steps made a village, named after the Well-field"; "A Well-field consists of nine hundred acres (mu), with one part being public field." This system divided a piece of land into nine equal parts, each of one hundred acres, with the central part reserved as public land, surrounded by eight private fields. "The Rites of Zhou, Office of Earth, Lesser Director" details: "They surveyed the land and managed the fields and wilderness, with nine families forming a well, four wells forming a village, four villages forming a mound, four mounds forming a district, four districts forming a county, four counties forming a capital, to administer land affairs and levy contributions, overseeing all tax collections." "The Record of Artificers" provides more specifics: one well equals one village, and ten villages make up one town. "Mencius, Duke Wen of Teng I" describes: "No one would leave the village; villages shared the well-field, neighbors helped each other in and out, assisted during illness, and supported in emergencies, thus the people were close-knit. A well covered nine hundred mu; in it, one part was public, and eight families each privately cultivated one hundred mu, jointly tending the public field. After public duties were completed, they could attend to private affairs."

Figure 10-1 The Well-field Structure



"The Tale of Han" authored by Han Ying, advisor to Emperor Wen of Han dynasty, expands on Mencius's words, depicting a more idyllic, Utopian version of the Well-field system: "In ancient times, eight families shared one well-field, each well forming a village square of three hundred steps by three hundred steps, making one village, with nine hundred mu of land. One step wide by a hundred steps long made one mu; a hundred steps by a hundred steps made a hundred mu. Eight families were neighbors, each owning a hundred mu, the surplus twenty-five mu divided among them, ten mu per family for public land, the remaining twenty mu shared for housing, each getting two and a half mu. Eight families guaranteed mutual support, guarded each other, shared worries during illness, helped in times of trouble, lent what was needed, invited each other for meals, consulted on marriages, divided the spoils of fishing and hunting, and practiced benevolence and kindness, thus their people were harmonious, affectionate, and friendly towards one another."

Regarding the foundations and objectives of feudal enfeoffment, allocating lands to family members naturally stemmed from the dynastic state's familial structure and reflected trust in blood relatives. Enfeoffing meritorious officials both rewarded their service and incentivized loyalty

among other civil and military personnel. Bestowing lands upon nobles from former dynasties acknowledged their status and facilitated benevolent rule, helping to stabilize remnants of the previous regime. In the context of the era, this represented the most equitable and effective political system. Nevertheless, historical examples from subsequent dynasties illustrate a critical flaw: once vassals gained significant power, they often harbored ambitions of autonomy, leading to uprisings under various pretenses - a fundamental weakness of the feudal model. The drive for power, untempered by familial or ethical bonds between sovereign and subject, proved overwhelming.

Multiple factors contributed to vassal rebellions. In some cases, elements of the previous dynasty refused allegiance to the new sovereign, secretly hoping to restore their former rule. In other instances, internal crises within the emperor's dynasty prompted vassals to rebel under the guise of supporting the sovereign. Such dynamics were evident during King Cheng of Zhou's reign. Following King Wu's defeat of the Shang dynasty, he withdrew from the Shang capital and appointed King Zhou's son, Wu Geng, to govern in Yin, overseeing the Shang remnants. To prevent these forces from revolting, King Wu stationed his three brothers, Guan Shu, Cai Shu, and Huo Shu, nearby to monitor Wu Geng, a strategy known as the "Three Supervisors". Ironically, it was these brothers who incited Wu Geng to initiate what became a three-year rebellion, historically termed the "Rebellion of the Three Supervisors".

All rulers at the inception of their reigns, due to initial instability, prioritize politics and military as paramount concerns. They must safeguard against the excesses of founding heroes and the resurgence of elements from former regimes, in addition to overcoming the challenges of integrating subjects from the previous dynasty. Thus, apart from

implementing minimal taxation to gain public favor, they rarely commit fully to fostering economic development or improving public welfare, much less to advancing cultural progress. Leaders who rise to power through military prowess often find themselves ill-equipped for cultural advancements. According to historian Lv Simian, King Wu of Zhou, aside from his military exploits, made no substantial contributions to civil governance: "The real consolidation of the Zhou dynasty's achievements occurred only during the reign of King Cheng." This is understandable, considering that King Wu passed away just a year after overthrowing the Shang dynasty. His infant son, King Cheng, succeeded him, with King Wu's brother, the Duke of Zhou, acting as regent. This arrangement precipitated the so-called "Rebellion of the Three Guards". In practice, the Duke of Zhou loyally administered for seven years, harboring no intentions of usurpation. Upon King Cheng reaching maturity, the Duke willingly relinquished power and resumed his role among the ministers.

The Duke of Zhou effectively suppressed insurrections, constructed cities, and managed governance adeptly, even interceding spiritually for the ailing King Cheng and offering himself as a scapegoat for divine retribution. He left King Cheng with a robust set of policies for rule, establishing a solid foundation for his governance. Despite being a benevolent uncle and a dedicated official, the Duke could not evade the emperor's vulnerability to slander, ultimately dying in exile. When the truth eventually emerged, King Cheng's regret came too late; the Duke had already passed away in Chu. Following a remarkable celestial phenomenon, King Cheng believed it signified divine endorsement of the Duke's virtues, prompting him to conduct grand posthumous honors. Lv Simian observed, "The ancients deeply revered superstitions, neglecting the living but venerating the deceased to seek blessings—an unsurprising practice."

Indeed, in any era, addressing miscarriages of justice is essential not only for the perpetrators' redemption but also for restoring belated justice. The most critical element is drawing lessons from these incidents to avert similar tragedies. Failing to reflect and amend, and instead invoking the spirits of the wronged for blessings, only defies the natural moral order.

Regarding the fate of the Duke of Zhou, Confucianism firmly asserts that he "ended his days in honor", showcasing its consistent efforts in deification. Confucius spent his life praising the era of King Cheng of Zhou during the Western Zhou Dynasty, believing it represented his ideal society. He especially lauded the Duke of Zhou, saying, "The Duke of Zhou excelled in the cultural achievements of the previous dynasties; how splendid and cultured he was! I follow the Duke of Zhou!" On a personal level, Confucius aspired to emulate the Duke of Zhou, but as times changed, he found himself unable to fulfill his ambitions. However, had he actually assumed the Duke's position and been preoccupied with governmental affairs daily, whether he could have realized his political aspirations remains uncertain, but China would undoubtedly have lost a cultural sage. In the late Eastern Han Dynasty, Cao Cao, who controlled the emperor to command the lords yet refused to usurp the Han Dynasty for himself, also compared himself to the Duke of Zhou in his "Short Song Line", expressing his intentions: "When the Duke of Zhou spat out his food, all under heaven turned their hearts to him." After all, history is inevitably made up of a myriad of coincidences.

King You of Zhou, the twelfth monarch of the Zhou Dynasty, indulged daily in wine and women, neglecting government affairs and favoring deceitful officials; court intrigues, class conflicts, and ethnic tensions overlapped, compounded by frequent natural disasters such as earthquakes and droughts, leading to a downfall that provoked both heavenly

and human wrath. In 771 BCE, Marquis Shen led the Quanrong troops to invade the Western Zhou capital Haojing, killing King You and leading to the dynasty's collapse. The only notable cultural legacy from King You's reign that remains popular in history is the story of "signaling with beacon fires to deceive the allied lords."[52]

10.5 The Spring and Autumn and Warring States

With the reeling throne of the common emperor, kingdoms under the system of subinfeudation entered into precarious power rivalry. The Spring and Autumn period (770 - 403 BC) was ushered in where various schools of thought - Confucianism, Taoism, Legalism, Mohism, to name a few - emerged in multitude to debate on the fundamental values of the nation and principles of governance. When Chinese traditional values are mentioned, substantial reference is being made to this period of pre-Qin civilization. In the philosophical and religious sphere, the ensuing two thousand years, except for the adoption of Buddhism, by and large, can be characterized by expansion, application and distortion of those schools other than completely newly creation.

Although King You of Zhou was overthrown by tribes from the west, the institutional framework of the Zhou Dynasty and the concept of a republic desired by the feudal lords remained quite stable. The lords collectively supported the succession of his son, Ji Yijiu, who became King

[52] King You of Zhou, to win a smile from his beloved but perpetually melancholic concubine Bao Si, lit the beacon fires, deceiving the lords of his vassal states as a jest. Upon seeing this, Bao Si indeed laughed heartily. Pleased by her reaction, King You repeated the act several times. This led to the lords losing faith in the beacon fires and stopped responding. Later, the Western Rong ethnic troop invaded the capital Haojing, killed King You who lost military aid from vassal states, and brought an end to the Western Zhou Dynasty.

Ping of Zhou. To avoid further harm from the militant Quanrong tribe in the west, King Ping decided to abandon the capital Haojing, which had been devastated by warfare, and moved the capital eastward to Luoyi (now Luoyang in Henan Province), marking the beginning of the Eastern Zhou (770 BC to 256 BC). However, from the onset of the Eastern Zhou, as the region known as the original heartland was abandoned, only a small area around the new capital, known as Chengzhou, was maintained. This significantly reduced the Zhou dynasty's sphere of influence, and with the rise of powerful feudal states, the prestige of the Zhou monarch as the overlord diminished. In the early phase of the Eastern Zhou, the feudal states vied for supremacy, a period known as the Spring and Autumn period (770 BC - 403 BC), named after Confucius' revision of the "Spring and Autumn Annals". Starting in 403 BC, with the partition of the state of Jin into Han, Zhao, and Wei, the struggle among the feudal states intensified, entering a phase known historically as the Warring States period.

As the halo around the moon presages rising winds, the dimming fortunes of the Eastern Zhou royal house allowed ambitious feudal lords to rise and strengthen. First came Duke Zhuang of Zheng, followed by those collectively known as the "Five Hegemons of the Spring and Autumn Period": Duke Huan of Qi, Duke Xiang of Song, Duke Wen of Jin, King Zhuang of Chu, and Duke Mu of Qin. These leaders actively convened bilateral or multilateral alliances with other lords. Temporary peace among the states was maintained through the exchange of hostages rather than appeals to the royal court for arbitration. Even more pitiful was the situation of King Ping of Zhou, who, though a sovereign, was reduced to exchanging hostages with Duke Zhuang of Zheng, an act known as "the hostage exchange between Zhou and Zheng". This event underscores

the extent of the Zhou royal family's decline. Although Duke Huan of Qi still proclaimed "Honor the King and expel the barbarians", the vassals' offerings and respect for the emperor were mainly out of customary ritual rather than genuine allegiance. Besides the struggles among the powers in the Central Plains, the southern states of Wu and Yue along the lower Yangtze River also rose in power, repeatedly vying for supremacy. After enduring hardships to avenge earlier defeats, King Goujian of Yue conquered Wu and then moved north to form alliances with Qi and Jin at Xu, becoming the last overlord.

Within the feudal states, the power of the ministerial and aristocratic classes waxed and waned through competition. In the state of Jin, three noble families - Zhao, Han, and Wei - conspired to eliminate the Zhi clan, dividing its territories and seizing control of Jin's government. In 403 BC, the Zhou emperor officially recognized them as marquisates. This transition from wholesale to retail in the Zhou Dynasty's enfeoffment system was marked by the "Zizhi Tongjian" as the dividing line between the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. Conversely, those ministers and aristocrats who lost power during the struggles between the states often fell to the status of commoners or even slaves, thereby transferring knowledge from officialdom to the common folk. By the end of the Spring and Autumn period, private schools began to emerge, with Confucius founding his own school, standing out as a prominent leader in this movement.

During the Warring States period (403 BC - 221 BC), the Zhou royal house gradually became nominal with no real power, while the feudal states' battles and annexations intensified. This era culminated in a situation where seven major states - Yan, Zhao, Han, Wei, Qi, Qin, and Chu - stood in rivalry until 221 BC when Qin conquered the other six, ending

centuries of feudal fragmentation. Qin established a centralized state, unifying China. During this time, driven by competition, each state showcased its capabilities through internal reforms and strategic alliances, fostering favorable international conditions.

Spanning the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, the political environment facilitated an unprecedented flourishing of academic research and debate. Independent schools of thought emerged, known collectively as the "Hundred Schools of Thought", engaging in vigorous intellectual discourse. The "Book of Han - Records of Culture" records 189 academic schools, among which the most prominent ten are: Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, Legalism, the School of Names, Yin-Yang, the Strategists, the Agriculturalists, the Miscellaneous School, and the School of Minor Talks. According to historian Lv Simian, each of these schools originated from specific official functions: Confucianism from the office responsible for education, Daoism from the historians, Mohism from the protectors of the imperial palaces, Legalism from the administrators of law, the School of Names from the ritual officers, Yin-Yang from the astronomers, the Strategists from the diplomats, the Agriculturalists from the officers overseeing agricultural policies, the Miscellaneous School from the advisory officers, and the School of Minor Talks from the scribes who recorded public opinion.[53] This lineage reflects the initial state control over academic pursuits, with "scholarship residing in officialdom" and "commoners without academia". However, the School of Minor Talks gradually fell out of the mainstream scholarly communities for several reasons: its practitioners were low-ranking clerks, its content was diverse and difficult to categorize, and its leaders were hard to identify.

[53] Lv Simian. "A Brief History of Chinese Scholarship", New World Press, 2017, pages 6-7.

Consequently, later generations referred to these prominent schools collectively as the "Nine Schools", not without a touch of class bias.

The ruthless competition among states heightened their awareness of vulnerability and ignited the ambitious aspirations of rulers to unify the land. Monarchs fully understood that securing talented individuals was key to ruling effectively, thus they paid great attention to honoring and recruiting the wise. For instance, Duke Xiao of Qin expressed his concern and his desperate need for talent in his "Edict for Seeking Talent":

"In the first year of Duke Xiao, to the east of the rivers and mountains, there are six powerful states… and more than ten smaller states between the Huai and Si rivers… the feudal lords strengthen their governments, competing fiercely. Qin, isolated in Yongzhou, does not partake in the alliances with other Central Plains states and faces barbarians… Reflecting on the troubled times under previous rulers like Duke Li, Duke Zao, Duke Jian, and Chuzi, the internal strife within our nation left us unable to attend to external threats. The three Jin states seized lands west of the Yellow River from my predecessors, greatly demeaning Qin… Any guest or minister who can offer a unique strategy to strengthen Qin, I will elevate their rank and grant them land."

——"Records of the Grand Historian, Volume Five, Annals of Qin"

This era saw the emergence of numerous talents in various fields such as politics, economics, military, and diplomacy. Through a process of natural selection, true knowledge and effective strategies found wide application, and superficial ideas were quickly shattered by reality. Guan Zhong advocated the policy of "Honoring the King and Repelling the Barbarians", greatly opening the doors to commerce and laying the

foundation for Duke Huan of Qi's hegemony. Fan Li, while harboring unique insights and facing slander, supported the disgraced King Goujian of Yue in enduring humiliation and burden. Together with Wen Zhong, they implemented economic and military strategies that ultimately led to the destruction of the state of Wu and established Yue's supremacy. Shang Yang responded to Duke Xiao of Qin's call for talent, aiding in his reforms that optimized benefits and eliminated malpractices, ensuring clear laws and distinct rewards and punishments. Although Shang advocated for policies that suppressed commerce and debilitated the common people, he ultimately made Qin invincible, allowing it to conquer the other states within six generations. Confucius, a sage of his time, spent most of his life traveling among the states, promoting his ideals of governance through benevolence and virtue, but often met with failure, sometimes feeling as desolate as a "homeless dog". This was not due to a lack of genuine talent or learning, but because his ideas and proposals were perceived as outdated, akin to "marking a boat to find a lost sword". As he himself said, "Born in this age but following the ways of the old". Such was the fate of those who suffered for adhering to their convictions, a spirit that is indeed deeply moving.

Originating from declining nobility, Confucius frequently criticized his era as one marked by "collapsed rites and corrupted music", advocating for a return to the earlier Zhou era's traditions. However, the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods are considered a unique and dynamic era in Chinese history. Although they disrupted the stable social order, creating a stark survival of the fittest scenario, they also fostered the emergence of significant talents and the vigorous debate among various philosophical schools. The intense warfare during these times facilitated a form of social Darwinism, which significantly contributed to the

unification of China and the integration of its diverse peoples. The relentless pressure of external competition compelled rulers to recognize the critical importance of talent. The maxim "Born in adversity, die in comfort" captures the poignant essence of this competitive mechanism - it is tragic due to the bloody conflicts involved, yet beautiful because it aligns with the principles of natural selection.

Liang Qichao, in "The Way of the Chinese Warrior" (1904), discussed the differentiated impact of competition on the states under the feudal system. He observed that states near foreign tribes were strong, whereas those in the hinterlands were weak. Lv Simian added that proximity to foreign tribes often meant the land was barren, which paradoxically facilitated territorial expansion. This likely refers to Duke Mu of Qin's westward campaigns, where he defeated many Rong tribes and expanded his territory by thousands of miles. However, this does not suggest that geographical conditions alone determined Qin's strength. If the sparsely populated lands were so conducive to expansion, why did the native tribes not become stronger? Ultimately, the strength or weakness of a nation depends on its competitive awareness and pioneering capabilities. Duke Mu of Qin initially preferred to expand eastward but turned westward after facing repeated setbacks against his neighbor, Jin. Ultimately, the core strength of Qin lay in its governance capabilities. Typically, the decline of a nation accompanies foreign invasions, but this is usually a result of the ruling class's prolonged complacency and decay. It is exceedingly rare for a robust system to be toppled by external forces. The poetic depiction "A long wind sweeps the grass, binding the sky", imagined as occurring in midsummer, is fanciful; such a scene unfolds in deep autumn when the grass is already withered. As stated in the

"Commentary of Zuo": "Disasters and blessings have no gate; they are summoned by people themselves." This adage aptly describes the situation.

Taiwanese scholar Fu Peirong has remarked that Chinese civilization matured too early, implying that it reached its zenith during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. As time progressed, its developmental pace slowed, and in many respects, there was even a regression. Indeed, agricultural tools such as the iron plowshare, iron hoe, flail, and stone mill, as well as rammed earth techniques invented during the Spring and Autumn period, were still in common use in rural areas up until the 1970s. The culture created during that era was dazzling, with profound thoughts and exquisite expressions, commanding respect and admiration from contemporary observers. What we commonly refer to as traditional Chinese culture primarily denotes the cultural heritage from the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods.

Mencius summarized the fundamental reasons for the rise and fall of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties: the dynasties gained the world through benevolence and lost it through a lack of benevolence. Mozi went even deeper in revealing the common flaws of rulers who led their states to ruin: "Tyrants like Jie, Zhou, You, and Li combined their evil towards the people under heaven, generally cursing the heavens and despising the spirits. Their crimes against the people were numerous, thus heaven brought calamities upon them, leading to the loss of their states. They died disgracefully under heaven, and their descendants were reviled, a scorn that continues unabated to this day."

11

THE SHORT-LIVED QIN EMPIRE

The Qin Dynasty (221 - 207 BC) rose to power by skillfully applying Legalist doctrines, which emphasized strict laws and centralized control, to unify and rule ancient China effectively. Beginning as one of the many warring states, Qin, under the ambitious leadership of King Zheng (later known as Qin Shi Huang), conquered its rivals through military might and strategic alliances, culminating in the unification of China. (Figure 11-1) This marked the end of the Warring States period. Qin Shi Huang established a highly bureaucratic state with standardized laws, measurements, and writing systems, laying the foundation for the imperial structure that dominated Chinese governance for centuries.

The Qin Dynasty ended the era of warring states by conquering neighboring kingdoms, creating a powerful unified empire. Despite its brief duration, the Qin Dynasty achieved monumental feats within just 14 years. It reshaped Chang'An into the greatest capital city with a magnificent palace and extensive road connections, and rebuilt the Great Wall. Crucially, it established the institutional framework that would guide successive Chinese empires and standardized written language, measurements, and road rules. The rise of Qin was fueled by the strict enforcement of Legalist

doctrine, but its downfall was precipitated by judicial overreach, aiming to enforce totalitarian control through rule-by-law rather than true rule-of-law. The execution of nearly 500 scholars and the destruction of countless books in an attempt to erase historical memory marred the emperor's legacy, as did the exploitation of massive slave labor for infrastructure projects, which ultimately contributed to the dynasty's collapse through widespread peasant uprisings.

Figure 11-1 The Territory of Qin Empire



11.1 The Great Dictator

King Zheng, the son of King Zhuangxiang of Qin, was held as a hostage in the state of Zhao during his youth. Later, he was identified by the wealthy merchant Lü Buwei as a "valuable commodity", thus helped him return to Qin through various bribes and strategies, and supported his accession as the ruler of Qin.

King Zheng of Qin annexed the six states, expanded northward against the nomadic tribes, and southward to assimilate the barbarian ethic tribes, fortifying his realm with the Great Wall and the Lingqu Canal to enhance defensive and administrative cohesion. His empire stretched from Lintao in the west to Liaodong in the east, bordered by the Great Wall to the north and reaching Xiangjun in the south. This ended the fragmentation of feudal lords and persistent warfare, ushering in an era of unprecedented unity in China. In recognition of the peace he established, court official Li Si and others lauded King Ying Zheng's achievements as surpassing those of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors. Gratified by this, he assumed the exalted title "Sovereign Emperor", becoming known as "Shi Huangdi" or the "First Emperor", with aspirations for his dynasty to endure indefinitely. Thus, the Qin Dynasty transformed the feudal mosaic of "all under heaven as one family" into a singularly ruled "one family under heaven".

Ironically, King Zheng simplified the royal self-reference from "I alone", a term used by former kings of the Shang and Zhou dynasties in humble acknowledgment of their sole responsibility, to "Zhen", meaning a solitary person. While the literal translation remained similar, the connotation shifted dramatically. Under him, "Zhen" came to

symbolize the sole ruler and autocrat of the entire realm, marking a significant departure from the previous expression of shared culpability among rulers.

Despite surviving two assassination attempts, King Zheng faced grave dangers. The first attempt was in 227 BC, when Prince Dan of Yan commissioned the warrior Jing Ke to assassinate the king under the guise of presenting a map in the Qin palace. The second attempt occurred in 218 BC, when Zhang Liang, a noble from Han, hired a strongman to throw an iron hammer at the king's chariot during his eastern tour at Bolangsha. The former was aimed at averting the imminent threat of Qin's advancing troops, while the latter sought revenge for the destruction of his state. Interestingly, in 44 BC in Tacitus, Julius Caesar, who controlled Rome for four years, was assassinated for "attempting to rise above the republic like a king". His loyal follower Brutus, after successfully assassinating him, proclaimed, "I loved Caesar, but I love Rome more!" This occurred because, since the last king, Tarquin, was expelled in 509 BC, the Romans decided to abolish monarchy and embrace a republic, decreeing death for any return to personal dictatorship.[54]

Among the three parties involved in the assassination attempts on King Zheng, Prince Dan acted out of self-preservation, Zhang Liang sought vengeance, and the direct assassins were motivated by chivalrous spirit, willingly facing death. In contrast, Brutus acted to defend the republican system, thus his actions were more idealistically driven. This can be compared to Cao Cao's risky assassination attempt on Dong Zhuo during the late Eastern Han Dynasty. However, even though Cao Cao did not declare himself emperor, he still monopolized power without establishing

[54] R.H. Barrow, translated by Huang Tao, "The Romans", Shanghai People's Publishing House, 2000, page 58.

a system like ancient Rome's, consisting of assemblies, the Senate, and tribunes to check absolutism. The lack of checks in such an authoritarian system is like a heavy armored vehicle without brakes, speeding on inertia until the people, overwhelmed by its oppressive load, rise in rebellion, or it crashes disastrously under external pressures.

In addition to the infamous Burning of Books and Burying of Scholars, Qin Shi Huang was also criticized for four other major misdeeds by later generations:

1. To highlight his unrivaled status and centralize his pleasures, he began massive construction projects during the military campaigns to unify the six states. He conscripted over 700,000 laborers to build his palaces, including the magnificent Epang Palace, which spanned 15 kilometers and housed beauties and musical instruments captured during wars.
2. He sought immortality and traveled extensively to consult with immortals and alchemists, gathering many magicians along with thousands of young boys and girls, assisted by armed soldiers, to sail in search of the elixir of life.
3. Believing that the soul lives forever in the universe, he soon after ascending to the throne began conscripting over 700,000 laborers and criminals to construct his tomb over 30 years. Located in Mount Li, the tomb covered 56.25 square kilometers and featured various underground palaces displaying countless treasures collected from across the country.
4. To prevent unrest from the remnants of the six states, he ordered the confiscation of all weapons in the realm, which were then transported to Xianyang to be melted down and recast into a giant bell and twelve bronze statues, each weighing 120,000

kilograms, placed within the palace. Without weapons, the possibility of public rebellion was thoroughly eliminated. To boost the capital's economy and prevent wealthy elites and nobles of the former states from conspiring against him, he forcibly relocated 120,000 wealthy households to the capital, Xianyang, for closer supervision.

Despite all his tough measures, these oppressive tactics did not prevent public resistance. Overburdened, the people eventually rose up in revolt, led by figures such as Chen Sheng, Wu Guang, Xiang Yu, and Liu Bang. Xiang Yu set fire to the Epang Palace, reducing it to ashes over three months. Qin Shi Huang himself died on a tour seeking immortality, and his vast empire collapsed soon after his death, surviving only until his second successor. The only thing that went according to his wishes is that he still rests in his vast and mysterious tomb, the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor.

11.2 Unified Administration and Standardization

After engulfing the six states, the Qin Dynasty faced the crucial task of establishing an administrative system to manage its vast territories amid various internal and external instabilities. Emperor Qin Shi Huang convened his ministers to discuss this issue. Most ministers favored continuing the Zhou Dynasty's feudal enfeoffment system, arguing, "The feudal lords have just been defeated; the distant regions of Yan, Qi, and Jing cannot be managed without appointing kings. We propose establishing princes favored by Your Majesty." However, Chancellor Li Si's "techniques of peace" were adopted, which included: 1) Abolishing the feudal system for a unified, centralized government. 2) Implementing a

uniform system of prefectures and counties across the country, dividing the national territory into numerous prefectures, each containing several counties, managed directly by imperial appointees; county magistrates were responsible for local governance, with military matters handled by commandants; further, each county was divided into townships, townships into precincts, and precincts into villages, with each township managed by three elders responsible for local education, litigation, and taxation. 3) Abolishing the hereditary nobility and stipends system that had been in place since the Western Zhou, replacing it with a central bureaucracy represented by the Three Dukes and Nine Ministers, thus establishing the first autocratic dynasty in Chinese history. 4) Standardizing script, clothing, infrastructure, measurement methods, currency and laws, strictly enforced nationwide. Li Si critiqued the disadvantages of the feudal system, where royals and meritorious officials soon became enemies and waged wars against each other, leaving the emperor powerless. Thus, he suggested using financial rewards instead of land grants for princes and meritorious officials under the unified system of prefectures and counties, effectively maintaining imperial control.

Historically, politicians and thinkers have highly regarded the system of prefectures and counties. For instance, during the Tang Dynasty, Liu Zongyuan commented on Qin's rapid demise, stating, "The failure was in its policies, not in its system", and believed that the establishment of prefectures and counties as permanent administrative units was unchangeable. In the late Ming and early Qing period, the thinker Gu Yanwu remarked, "The abolition of feudalism was not an overnight occurrence; even a sage, if arising, would have shifted to a system of prefectures and counties," highlighting the inevitability of this administrative evolution. "Governance of the prefectures ensures peace under heaven." Since the

Qin and Han dynasties, achieving unified governance through the prefecture-county system has been a consistent goal for rulers, encapsulated in the saying, "Affairs are throughout the realm, but the essence lies in the central government." The political foundation of this unity is centralized power, with the prefecture-county system at its core. The top-down, centralized governance model established by the Qin Dynasty has been upheld by mainstream scholars and politicians as a governance strength characteristic of China.

"The unification of script, the standardization of track width, and the alignment of social conduct" was originally described by Zisi in the early Warring States period in the "Doctrine of the Mean" of the "Book of Rites", depicting the local social conditions of that time. However, it was not until the Qin Dynasty that these principles were fully implemented nationwide. "Script" refers to the characters and their writing style; "track" pertains to the gauge of vehicles and roads; "conduct" relates to the order of social relationships. To unify the script, Li Si adopted the clerical script developed and organized by Cheng Miao (who, after being imprisoned and enslaved, created this script style, hence its name), replacing the difficult-to-write seal script. He personally wrote the "Cangjie Chapters", seven chapters each with four characters per sentence, serving as a textbook for learning through copying.

The standardization of track widths not only facilitated Emperor Qin Shi Huang's five imperial tours but also objectively smoothed the transport of materials and troops. With the capital Xianyang at the center, the Qin Dynasty extensively dismantled the barriers and fortresses between the former feudal states, successively building three long thoroughfares extending thousands of kilometers to the east, south, and north, creating a vast network of roads. These roads were 50 steps wide with a track

width of six feet. Trees were planted every three zhang (a unit of length) along the roads, with the central path marked clearly for the emperor's use, off-limits to ordinary citizens. Aiming to "transform the people and standardize practices across distant and near regions", the Qin Dynasty vigorously promoted the unification of legal standards to integrate and standardize Chinese civilization. Additionally, the standardization of weights and measures enhanced operational efficiency across various sectors, increased the fairness and transparency of trade and taxation, and had a profound historical impact on the development of various enterprises.

11.3 The Ruthless Legalism

The legal foundation of the Qin Dynasty was primarily established by Shang Yang during the Warring States period with the help of Duke Xiao of Qin. Emperor Qin Shi Huang deeply believed that "governing the country with benevolence and righteousness is the path to destruction". Therefore, with the assistance of Han Feizi and Li Si, he further refined these laws and rapidly implemented them nationwide. Although Xunzi was a Confucian, he was unique in advocating the theory of human nature being inherently evil and realism. His disciples, Han Fei and Li Si, drawing from Shen Buhai and Shang Yang's studies of penal law, integrated Legalist thought and put it into widespread practice under Emperor Qin Shi Huang's strong rule. Legalists believed that soft moral education was ineffective for governance efficiency. Confucian concepts of tolerance such as "harmony without uniformity" and "benevolent governance loving the people" would only indulge the people's whims and misconduct. Therefore, they advocated "law as the foundation" and "law emanating

from the ruler", enforcing strict penalties to ensure compliance with the law.

Figure 10-2 The Dismemberment by Five Horses



Emperor Qin Shi Huang monopolized legislative, judicial, and administrative powers, adjudicating cases during the day and managing affairs at night. He changed "commands" to "decrees" and "orders" to "edicts", turning his personal ideas into laws with the highest effectiveness. The variety of punishments and the cruelty of their execution were extremely severe, encompassing approximately eight major categories and over thirty types. Execution methods alone included strangulation, slow slicing, cutting at the waist, dismemberment, tearing apart by chariots, and public execution. Other physical tortures were even more inhumane, such as tattooing the face, cutting off the nose, castration, amputation of both feet, and removal of the kneecaps. (Figure 10-2) Clearly, the legal system of the Qin Dynasty was a terrifying governance model that controlled the populace through the laws of one man, fundamentally at odds with the modern concept of law-based governance.

Through warfare and torture, Qin Shi Huang killed countless people in his lifetime, but these stains have been washed away by time. However, his crimes of burning books and burying scholars alive have been permanently nailed to the pillar of historical shame, for he destroyed culture and intellectuals. In fact, the burning of books and burying of scholars were two separate events. From Shen Buhai to Shang Yang, Han Fei, and Li Si, the Legalist school was a continuous lineage, akin to the forefathers of Machiavellianism, advocating from the perspective that human nature is evil, promoting the idea that "politics has no morality", and that rulers should use any means necessary to achieve their ends. Unfortunately, Machiavelli's "The Prince", published 15 centuries later, did not cover Chinese history, otherwise it would have had richer material. While assisting Duke Xiao of Qin, Shang Yang advised two things: one was to implement the penal system of collective punishment, and the other was to burn books. The system of collective punishment involved punishing a group of people related to a single offender, exploiting human weaknesses and using familial relationships as tools to coerce relatives into betraying each other. The purpose of burning books was to sever connections with history, imprison the thoughts of the populace, and eliminate scholars' idle discussions of central imperial politics, especially to erase the memories of those who had lost their kingdoms. Qin Shi Huang was a faithful practitioner of this ideology. In 213 BC, he adopted Li Si's suggestion, ordering officials at all levels to confiscate and burn poetry, books, philosophical discourses, and historical records from various states, preserving only Qin's historical records and practical books on medicine, divination, and agriculture. Those who wished to learn about laws could seek instruction from local officials.

The scholars do not take today's world as their teacher but study the ancients, rejecting the present era and confusing the common people... I ask that all historical records except those of Qin be burned. Only books pertaining to the official duties of scholars should be spared. If anyone in the realm dares to hide works of poetry, historical books, or the discourses of the various schools, they must bring them to the local magistrates to be burned. Anyone who dares to speak casually of poetry or historical records shall be abandoned in the marketplace. Those who criticize the present by citing the past shall have their clans punished. Officials who know of such cases and do not report them shall be deemed complicit. If books are not burned within thirty days, those responsible shall be tattooed and sent to work on the city walls. The exceptions to this decree are books on medicine, divination, and agriculture. Those who wish to study the laws may take officials as their teachers.

——*Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of Qin Shi Huang*

For anyone possessing supreme power and vast wealth, everything can be controlled by human hands, including the joys and sorrows, life and death of others, yet their own life remains the only exception. In his quest for longevity, Qin Shi Huang reached a state of frenzy. He hedged his bets; at the beginning of his reign, he conscripted over seven hundred thousand laborers to construct his mausoleum, while also sending alchemists like Han Zhong, Hou Gong, Shi Sheng, and Lu Sheng to search for immortals and inquire about the elixir of life. Greed and superstition, these twin brothers, are always the enemies of reason - the higher the expectations, the greater the disappointment. In 212 BC, deluded Qin Shi Huang, after being repeatedly deceived, flew into a rage and ordered the arrest and severe punishment of Hou Gong and Lu Sheng, who had fooled

him and slandered him in secret. After the trial, these two alchemists implicated over 460 individuals who had slandered the emperor. Qin Shi Huang ordered all these implicated to be executed in pits, both to soothe his wrath and to serve as a warning to others.

Upon hearing of the escape of the alchemists, Emperor Qin Shi Huang became furious and exclaimed: "I previously ordered the collection of useless books from across the realm to be disposed of. I summoned a great many scholars and experts in the arts, hoping to foster an era of great peace, and the alchemists were tasked with refining and seeking miraculous medicines. They left without reporting back, and despite spending vast sums, they never found the medicine, merely engaging in deceitful profiteering, which I hear of daily. I had bestowed great honors upon Lu Sheng and others, yet now they slander me, thus magnifying my perceived immorality. Regarding the scholars in Xianyang, I had investigators inquire into the matter, some were fabricating words to confuse the common people." Consequently, he ordered the imperial censors to thoroughly investigate the scholars. The scholars, implicating each other, led to the execution of over four hundred sixty individuals who were guilty of breaking the bans, all buried in Xianyang, as a demonstration to the realm and a warning to future generations. Further, he exiled many to the borders. When the crown prince Fusu remonstrated, saying, "The empire is newly settled, and the remote peoples are not yet appeased, and all scholars recite the teachings of Confucius; now, if the Emperor severely punishes them, I fear that the empire will not be at peace. May the Emperor reconsider." Emperor Qin Shi Huang, enraged, ordered Prince Fusu to go north and oversee Meng Tian in Upper Province.

——*Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of Qin Shi Huang*

Strictly speaking, the "burying of scholars" was an escalated case of fraud and defamation rather than a political campaign aimed at completely exterminating Confucian scholars. However, when linked with the book burning of the previous year, it was portrayed as a cultural revolution akin to "burning books and burying scholars". Since those who criticized the government, including the alchemists absorbed in the pursuit of immortality, were mostly scholars reciting Confucius and Mencius, it is not unreasonable to call it "burying scholars". Liang Qichao believed that these two actions were acts of tyranny, but their outcomes should not be uniformly judged. True masters of Daoist arts secluded themselves deep in caves, detached from the world, while those who scurried about the Qin court were mostly charlatans, deserving of their fate. Thus, Qin Shi Huang's actions could be seen as having more merits than faults. However, Liang did not explore deeper reasons: why were so many folk magicians frequenting the Qin court, if not because the leadership itself set the precedent? Moreover, greed is always the passport for deceit. Ultimately, the fault still lies with Qin Shi Huang.

Additionally, Qin Shi Huang overlooked that although scholars were powerless before the authority of the court, this unique group, as historians and conveyors of history, would ensure that their engraving tools and pens would ultimately triumph over the sharp blades of the rulers. Consider, for instance, the sheer brutality of Qin Shi Huang executing over 460 Confucian scholars, Bai Qi burying 400,000 surrendered Zhao troops at the Battle of Changping, and Xiang Yu killing 200,000 surrendered troops after the Battle of Julu - which was more heinous? And who has left a more lasting stench in history? What lesson can rulers, who wish to be remembered favorably in history, take from this?

In terms of attitudes towards historical documents, Emperor Cheng of Han was much wiser. He sought talents throughout the empire to study the "Book of Documents". Zhang Ba from Donghai Commandery responded and compiled 102 chapters of the "Book of Documents" in the style of "Zuo Zhuan". When Emperor Cheng tested these against his secret archives of the "Book of Documents", not a single word matched, and he initially wanted to punish Zhang Ba for deceiving the emperor. However, after calming down, he pardoned Zhang Ba due to his appreciation of Zhang's talents and even preserved his version of the text. From then on, the popular version of the "Book of Documents" in circulation was actually authored by Zhang Ba. (Wang Chong, "On Measurement")

11.4 The Fallout of Qin Empire

Qin Shi Huang unified China, ending the chaos of war. He implemented the commandery and county system and standardization, accomplishing astounding projects like the Lingqu Canal, the express roadways, and the Great Wall in an incredibly short period. These were monumental achievements in Chinese history. However, his lust for grandeur and speed, his disregard for wise counsel as if it were a plague, his view of the people as expendable, his maintenance of a vast treasury through oppressive levies, his distortion of moral and ethical norms through collective punishment, and his suppression of dissent with harsh penalties caused the literati to be silenced and the common people to despair. This laid the groundwork for an explosive situation across the nation, somewhat similar to the forced labor models implemented by Stalin in the Soviet Union after World War II. Under his tyranny, the people could only hope for heroes like Zhang Liang and Jing Ke to eliminate the menace; otherwise,

they were at his mercy. Upon the news of Qin Shi Huang's death, and once his son Hu Hai ascended the throne as the Second Emperor, these metaphorical powder kegs exploded: first Chen Sheng and Wu Guang revolted, followed by Xiang Yu and Liu Bang leading their troops into Guanzhong. Alas, the seemingly invincible Qin Empire collapsed abruptly, and within just 14 years, the Second Emperor squandered the realm painstakingly established over 700 years by his ancestors - Dukes Fei, Zhuang, Mu, Xiao, and others of the Ying clan.

Sima Qian wrote a passionate critique in the "Discourses on Fallout of Qin Empire":

The early kings of Qin "turned a small land into a power of ten thousand chariots, aligning eight states in veneration," and Qin Shi Huang "rallied the valor of six generations, wielding supreme strategies to dominate the world, swallowing the two Zhous and eliminating the feudal lords, stepping onto the highest throne to govern all under heaven, brandishing authority and whipping the world, his might shaking the four seas." The world was not weak, nor were its defenses feeble. Yet, Chen Sheng, a mere common farmer "rising from the paths between fields", with no extraordinary talents or noble status, managed to "lead tired troops, commanding hundreds, to turn against Qin, fashioning weapons from wood and using poles as banners", causing the downfall of the "seven ancestral temples and dying by human hands, becoming a laughingstock for the world. Why?" It was all because "the King of Qin harbored a greedy and petty heart, acted on impulsive strategies, distrusted his accomplished ministers, alienated scholars and commoners, abandoned the kingly way for personal favoritism, burned scholarly works and enforced

cruel laws, prioritized deceit and power over benevolence and righteousness, and ruled with tyranny as a foundation for the world."

——*Records of the Grand Historian · Annals of Qin Shi Huang*

At the core, the rise and fall of a dynasty do not depend on how powerful its national strength or sharp its claws are, but rather, the support or opposition of the people is the ultimate determining factor. In contrast, ancient Rome, which grew almost simultaneously with the Qin state starting around the 9th century BC, was rejuvenated by transitioning from a monarchy to a republic in 509 BC. This change laid the institutional foundation for the Roman Empire, which dominated the Eurasian continent for over a thousand years (from 27 BC to AD 476/1453). The northern barbarian conquerors inherited Rome's complete rational law and merged it with their own secular laws, further consolidating the Roman republican system. The essence of a republic is a weak monarch and strong citizens, whereas the autocratic Qin state, following Shang Yang's advocated techniques of controlling the populace - keeping them ignorant, weak, tired, humiliated, and poor - strayed from the Confucian and Mohist traditions of valuing virtue and universal love and completely shut the door on subjects' admonitions to their ruler. Especially after eliminating external competitive checks, the expansion of monarchical power quickly reached a boiling point.

After achieving republicanism, the Roman assemblies, through struggles with the power-curbing Senate, won comprehensive legislative powers. A committee of ten jurists codified various public and civil relations and judicial procedures into law, casting them in bronze and erecting them in the public squares, thus establishing the precursor to written human law. After unifying China, although the Qin Empire took various preventative

measures, such as “confiscating all weapons across the country to weaken the populace”, the rulers positioned themselves completely opposite the interest of the people. It is not surprising, then, that the seemingly majestic imperial edifice collapsed abruptly.

12

THE MANIFICENT HAN DYNASTY

After the collapse of the Qin Empire and a subsequent bloody civil war, China was reunited under the Han Dynasty by the Liu family. This long-standing dynasty, lasting over 400 years (202 BCE - 220 CE), saw 29 emperors succeed each other. It is traditionally divided into two eras: the Western Han (202 BCE - 9 CE) and the Eastern Han (25 CE - 220 CE), separated by the brief interlude of the Xin Dynasty under Wang Mang. This dynasty marks a defining period in Chinese history, known for solidifying the foundations of imperial China, particularly through the establishment of a centralized bureaucracy and the expansion of its borders.

The Han Dynasty witnessed significant developments in economics, politics, and culture. The initiation of the Silk Road during this period was instrumental in connecting China with the West, facilitating not only trade but also cultural exchanges, including the introduction of Buddhism to China. This era saw profound advancements in arts, science, and literature, with Confucianism promoted as the state philosophy, shaping Chinese identity and governance. However, as Confucianism was reengineered

into a governing instrument, its original philosophical glamour began to diminish.

Under Han rule, China experienced a golden age of innovation and consolidation. Techniques in papermaking and iron tool production were refined and widely disseminated. The introduction of civil service examinations selected government officials based on merit rather than birthright, a practice that left a lasting imprint on Chinese administration. The Han Dynasty's legacy is profound, influencing subsequent Chinese history and the development of the East Asian cultural sphere.

The fall of the Han Dynasty led to the resurgence of war among the Three Kingdoms (220 - 280 CE) when the last Han emperor descended into decadence. Although little social progress was made during their dramatic rivalry, the quasi-documentary novel The Legend of the Three Kingdoms - widely popular - imprinted two profound ethical notions among the Chinese: a penchant for leadership by those of royal blood, as exemplified by Liu Bei, who governed the Shu-Han Kingdom in the southwest, and a celebration of faithful righteousness among individuals united by sworn brotherhood.

12.1 The Struggle between Chu and Han

Whether resisting the oppression of tyranny or foreign invasions, heroes from all walks could generally unite against a common enemy. However, once victory was in sight and the former rulers' territory appeared as ownerless wealth, these heroes, who had risen to overthrow tyranny or expel invaders under the banner of saving the people from misery, revealed their ambitions to claim it all for themselves. Unable to find a long-lasting mechanism for distribution or joint governance of this wealth,

allies in battle inevitably fought each other in a deadly struggle, culminating in a situation where "the victor becomes king, and the defeated become outlaws". The people who fought alongside them were inevitably forced to pay a heavier price a second time.

Liu Bang's Han forces and Xiang Yü's Chu forces were both key players in the elimination of the Qin dynasty in 207 BCE. According to the agreement made before King Huai of Chu – "the first to enter Guanzhong shall become its king" - Liu Bang, who entered Guanzhong first, should have rightfully been the king. However, Xiang Yü disregarded this agreement. To prevent Liu Bang from seizing control of all under heaven, he initially planned to kill him at the famous Feast at Hong Gate, based on the advice of his counselor Fan Zeng. Fortunately, Liu Bang managed to escape through clever strategy. In 203 BCE, with his overwhelming military strength, Xiang Yü acted as the overlord of the world and distributed territories to eighteen feudal lords, relegating Liu Bang to the remote Hanzhong as king, while taking for himself the fertile and expansive nine prefectures of Liang Chu. He killed the puppet Emperor Yi, whom he had previously installed before attacking Qin, and declared himself the Hegemon-King of Western Chu. Liu Bang bided his time and, while on his way to his kingdom, destroyed the plank roads to show his determination not to return and compete for imperial power. Still harboring resentment, the following year (206 BCE), Liu Bang openly repaired the plank roads while secretly crossing Wei River through Chen Cang, initiating a fierce contest with Xiang Yü for supremacy. During the civil war, there were moments when both sides were evenly matched, leading to negotiations at Chu River and Han boundaries, and instances where Xiang Yü took Liu Bang's family hostage. Ultimately, Liu Bang managed to corner Xiang Yü at the Battle of Gaixia with tactics like "Ambush from Ten

Sides" and "Surrounded by Chu Songs", forcing him to commit suicide at the Wu River, thus unifying the realm under the powerful Han Dynasty.

Xiang Yü's distribution of territories resembles the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. Due to the uneven sharing of spoils by the victorious nations and the failure to establish an effective mechanism for maintaining the established order, the groundwork was laid for future conflicts from the outset. In contrast, the Yalta Conference towards the end of World War II achieved a relatively balanced division of power among the major nations. Most importantly, it established clear rules and a multilateral maintenance mechanism, including the United Nations, which fostered nearly a century of global peace. When Kim Il-sung made a preliminary attempt to break the established military demarcation line and unify the Korean Peninsula, the newly-formed United Nations deployed multinational forces for the first time. They counterbalanced the Korean People's Army and the Chinese Volunteer Army. After two years of arduous negotiations, a ceasefire agreement was successfully signed at Panmunjom on July 27, 1953, thus upholding the dignity of the Yalta system and setting a precedent for turning a gentlemen's agreement into an enforceable treaty.

Regarding the spirit of the agreement, whether it's the king's enthronement in Guanzhong, the declaration of no return, or the agreement to divide the realm at the borders of Chu and Han, both sides knew well that these were temporary measures to earn time, unlikely to be seriously adhered to. Even if Liu Bang obtained the position of King of Guanzhong as agreed, he could not be expected to abide by it and remain content with his granted land. In terms of magnanimity, King Wu of Zhou is an example; after defeating the tyrant Zhou, he did not eradicate the tyrant's

lineage but instead enfeoffed the tyrant's son in the land of Yin. This was a display of benevolent politics rather than a spirit of contract.

Against the backdrop of legitimacy and morality, contracts appear particularly weak. Taking the emperor hostage or kidnapping a rival's relatives proved to be more reliable and effective than contracts. In the hearts of the people, legitimacy as a symbol of justification is a more powerful controlling force. Zhao Gao of the Qin dynasty took the second emperor hostage and later promoted Ziying; Dong Zhuo and Cao Cao of the Eastern Han dynasty manipulated Emperor Xian; the Yongle Emperor of the Ming dynasty dispatched naval expeditions to eradicate the overthrown nephew Emperor Jianwen; the Japanese invaders supported the deposed Puyi to establish a puppet government; Liu Bei and Kang Youwei each claimed to hold the emperor's secret edicts... Xiang Yü took Liu Bang's parents and wife hostage, threatening to cook them, and Liu Bang's response revealed the power of ethics in his mockery: "Since we both pledged brotherhood before the Righteous Emperor, if you must cook my father, then kindly share a bowl of the soup with me."

Just as they united to overthrow a common ruler and subsequently determined the way to coexist after victory, we are reminded of the two Continental Congresses held by the thirteen American colonies around the time of their independence movement. In 1774, to unite against the unwarranted taxation by the British Parliament and the military threat of the British forces, Samuel Adams, a Puritan and a distinguished graduate of Harvard College, strongly advocated for action. As a result, the Massachusetts assembly took the lead by passing a resolution to convene a congress of representatives from all North American colonies, and it tasked its committee of correspondence to notify the colonial assemblies. Adams is celebrated for designing "American Federalism" but also

criticized for inciting violence against the British. The meeting in Philadelphia, known as the Continental Congress of the United Colonies, lasted from September 5 to October 26, historically known as the "First Continental Congress". With the exception of Georgia, 55 delegates from the other 12 colonies attended the congress. After intense debates about national independence, the delegates decided to establish the "Continental Association", and the charter they passed, known as the "Declaration of Rights", listed 14 assertions of rights. The congress was filled with fierce debates and inevitable compromises, but it reached resolutions that all parties could adhere to through open negotiation, laying the foundation for the Revolutionary War under a unified banner.

One year after the commencement of the armed struggle against the British, the Second Continental Congress convened on May 10, 1775, in Philadelphia. Boston merchant John Hancock was elected as the chairman of the congress, and Washington was appointed as the commander-in-chief of the newly formed Continental Army. On July 4, 1776, the congress adopted the "Declaration of Independence", drafted by Jefferson, officially known as the "Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America". The declaration begins by explaining the purpose of independence, then elaborates on the enlightened ideas of "inalienable human rights" and "sovereignty of the people", follows with a list of grievances against the British colonizers, and concludes with the solemn establishment of the United States of America. Here are some excerpts from the document:

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and

equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.

The title of the "Declaration" emphasizes the word "unanimity", with all delegates present swearing and signing the document, thereby eliminating the causes of inter-state warfare for a considerable period. The Continental Congress functioned as the provisional central government under the Articles of Confederation until the new Constitution was adopted in 1789, which established the federal government of the United States with a system of divided sovereignty. Although the Founding

Fathers were visionary, they did not foresee the conflict that would erupt eighty years later between the North and South over the issue of slavery. Due to the Constitution's failure to explicitly address the rights of black people, the agriculturally dominant Southern states, which comprised 11 states, resisted congressional resolutions on the emancipation of slaves, seceded from the Union, and formed the Confederacy, initiating a civil war against the rapidly industrializing North advocating for emancipation. The Civil War (1861-1865) lasted four years and ended with the defeat of the Confederacy, both sides paying a heavy price. After the establishment of basic rights for black people through the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, a major underlying issue of the Civil War was resolved. The contrast between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War demonstrates the importance of consensus mechanisms and rule awareness. It is noteworthy that the U.S. did not subjugate the Southern Confederacy following the Northern victory, instead, Congress passed a post-war reconstruction plan for the South. This did not lead to a centralized political model in the U.S., thanks to the values recognized by the Founders, the institutional design of separation of powers, and established rules represented by the Constitution.

If China could have a forum similar to the U.S. Continental Congress, laying out the demands of various interest groups on the table, and reaching agreements and rules through arguments, debates, communications, compromises, and possibly third-party mediation both before and after the fact, could it have avoided or mitigated conflicts such as the wars following the downfall of the Qin Dynasty, the Three Kingdoms strife at the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, the Northern Expedition at the end of the Qing Dynasty, and the Civil War between the People's Liberation Army led by Mao and the National Army led by Jiang after the Second Sino-

Japanese War? Would the protracted tension across the Taiwan Strait that continues to plague the peaceful development of Chinese nation be succefully avoided? Would the livelihoods of the people have presented a different picture? This, of course, belongs to the realm of retrospective speculation.

12.2 Reunification and Turmoil of the Han Dynasty

After a four-year-long conflict known as the Chu-Han Contention, Liu Bang emerged victorious and formally declared himself emperor (historically known as Emperor Gaozu - the founding emperor of Han Dynasty) in 202 BC, establishing the Han Dynasty and making Chang'an the capital. This dynasty, the second major unifying dynasty after the Qin Empire, lasted for 407 years through the reigns of 29 emperors. Divided by historians into the Western Han and Eastern Han, or Former Han and Later Han, marked by a brief period of usurpation by non-family members at the beginning of the millennium and a change of capitals, the Han Dynasty greatly promoted ethnic integration and social stability by reforming and spreading the surname system, supplemented by the relocation of noble families. Over time, the Huaxia people gradually evolved into the Han ethnic group. In multi-ethnic China, apart from being partly known as Tang people after the Tang Dynasty, their status as the majority ethnic group has continued to this day.

Building on the lessons from the Zhou and Qin dynasties, the Han Dynasty adopted a dual governance system, inheriting the administrative division management from the Qin's "commandery-county system" and applying the Zhou's feudal system to deal with meritorious sons and officials, thus known as the "commandery-principality system".

To overcome the drawbacks of both systems, the Han bureaucratic system employed the Three Ducal Ministers and Nine Ministers system. The Three Ducal Ministers were the highest administrative officials assisting the emperor, comprising the Chancellor, the Grand Commandant, and the Imperial Censor. The Chancellor was the chief of all officials, assisting in all affairs; the Grand Commandant was the chief military officer, solely in charge of military matters; the Imperial Censor was responsible for the supervision of officials; the Nine Ministers each managed one of the nine specialized administrative departments. (Table 12-1)

Table 12-1 The Bureaucracy of the Han Dynasty

No.	Position	Responsibilities
1	Minister of Rites (太常)	In charge of ancestral temple rituals and ceremonies
2	Minister of the Imperial Household (光禄勋)	Palace security affairs
3	Commandant of Guards (卫尉)	Royal guards, guarding the palace gates
4	Minister of the Imperial Chariots and Horses (太仆)	Palace chariots, horses, and other livestock
5	Minister of Justice (廷尉)	Judicial and penal matters
6	Minister of the Imperial Clan (大鸿胪)	Foreign affairs, especially relations with tribal regions
7	Minister of the Imperial Clan Affairs (宗正)	Affairs of the imperial family
8	Minister of Finance (大司农)	Management of the nation's grain and financial resources
9	Minister of the Imperial Treasury (少府)	Financial affairs of the imperial family, taxes on natural resources

Liu Bang, in addition to enfeoffing his descendants, initially granted eight non-relative meritorious officers the title of king. However, six years later, he found various pretexts to depose them, achieving the goal of executing the founding contributors. Subsequently, he established the "White Horse Oath" with his ministers, vowing that "no one outside the Liu family shall become king". Although this oath provided a basis for the ministers to eliminate the power of the Empress Dowager Lv's relatives after Liu Bang's death, it did not eradicate the root cause of the princes' rebellions.

After initially quelling the princes' rebellions, Emperor Wen of Han, Liu Heng, adopted the advice of Jia Yi, who proposed "creating numerous but less powerful princely states" to prevent any single prince from becoming too powerful. Jia Yi argued that "weakness promotes compliance with righteousness, and small states harbor no wicked ambitions". He suggested a reduction of princely power to merely alleviate the potential conflict between the princes and the central government, but he failed to address the root issue. In the early Western Han, large marquisates did not exceed 10,000 households, and the smaller ones had only five to six hundred; by the time of Emperor Jing, the larger marquisates had grown to 30,000 to 40,000 households, and even the smaller ones had doubled in number. This was a result of the benign rule of Emperors Wen and Jing, but also laid the groundwork for the princes to grow powerful and harbor rebellious intentions again.

Chao Cuo, who was highly regarded by Emperor Jing for his governance strategies, took up Jia Yi's mantle and submitted the "Memorial on the Reduction of the Feudatories", detailing the transgressions of the princes and requesting a reduction of their lands and the reclamation of adjacent territories. When the decree to reduce the feudal states was issued,

it ironically prompted Wu, Chu, and five other states to launch a joint rebellion under the banner of "requesting the execution of Chao Cuo to purify the emperor's side". In desperation, Emperor Jing had to adopt Yuan Ang's suggestion to publicly execute Chao Cuo in the eastern market to secure the withdrawal of the rebellious forces. However, Deng Gong, a military officer returning from the front, reported to Emperor Jing that "purifying the emperor's side" was merely an excuse used by the princes to rebel, and that peace would not be achieved by the execution of a single strategist like Chao Cuo. Emperor Jing agreed, and ultimately, military suppression was necessary.

"In tender hopes, my heart sought the moon's bright gleam,
Alas, upon the ditches does its silver beam;
Fallen blossoms drift with currents, dreams to pursue,
Yet the heartless stream flows on, without a rue."

The poem, originally from the Yuan Dynasty's play "The Pipa Record" by Gao Ming, was meant to express the frustration of someone who sincerely offers their affection but is ill treated in return. For the countless scholars and strategists who loyally hoped to gain favor from those in power to achieve great ambitions, this poem profoundly captures their desolate mood during times of disappointment.

Chao Cuo's actions were undoubtedly motivated by loyalty to the emperor and a desire to stabilize the state. His judgment was sound, and his advice was both timely and appropriate: "Reducing their power now will lead to rebellion, as will not reducing it. If reduced, the rebellion will be swift and the disaster small; if not, the rebellion will be delayed, and the disaster great." However, his tragic end offers a profound lesson for

scholars and strategists across the ages. Initially, his rapid ascent to the rank of Imperial Censor, one of the Three Ducal Ministers, fueled by the emperor's favor, led to his arrogance, neglect of popular support, and envy among his peers. The elder statesman Dou Ying persuaded Emperor Jing to consult Yuan Ang, a trusted minister who had also supported Emperor Wen's reduction of the fiefs. He was well aware of King Wu's determined rebellion regardless of Chao Cuo's proposal, yet he still suggested that executing Chao Cuo would quell the rebellion. This reflected how unfavorable was Chao Cuo's reputation among his colleagues.

Secondly, unlike some wise scholars who loathe obscurity when frustrated and endangered, he was firmly convinced that his strategies were correct and beneficial for the emperor, and thus was eager to assert and defend them. However, he underestimated the opposition's strength and overestimated the emperor's reliance on him. Unbeknownst to him, the emperor, backed by supreme power and abundant rewards, was never short of talented advisors, much like his harem was never short of concubines. Thus, any official, no matter how seemingly indispensable, could be discarded after weighing the immediate pros and cons.

Indeed, once Chao Cuo's strategy was proposed, his father recognized the perilous situation and consequences. After failing to persuade his son to abandon the plan, he took his own life by poisoning. Sima Qian observed that although Chao Cuo's strategy for reducing the fiefs considered the long-term benefit of the state, his haste to implement it, without foreseeing the personal risks, led to his brutal demise. Later, Zhu Fuyan continued to implement Chao Cuo's policy of "building numerous princely states with less power". Rather than forcefully splitting the already powerful fiefs with administrative orders, Zhu's "Edict of Grace" adopted a subtle approach - allowing princes to divide their territories among their

sons, thus establishing smaller marquisates. The princes and their sons, rejoicing in the emperor's grace, quickly dispersed their power, and this reduction of individual oligarchs helped Emperor Wu of Han successfully consolidate central authority. The historian declared, "With the rise of Han, Emperor Wen implemented great virtue, and the world was at peace; by the time of Emperor Jing, there was no longer fear of princes of different families. Yet Chao Cuo's harsh reductions of the fiefs led to the simultaneous uprising of the seven states, because the princes were too powerful, and Chao Cuo did not act at a caculated pace. With Zhu Fuyan's advice, the princes were weakened, ultimately peace was achieved. Is not the turning point of safety and danger a matter of calculated strategy?"

12.3 The Tanacious Chinese Concept of Hometown Reflected by the Emperor's Magnificent Home Visit

During the Qin and Han periods, the concept of hometown among the Chinese was already quite strong, indicating that their modes of production and lifestyle were highly stable. The Chu army, surrounded at Gaixia and inspired by the melancholic song "The Besieged Chu", experienced a surge of homesickness that led to the disintegration of their morale. After Xiang Yü conquered Xianyang, someone suggested that he could exploit the geographical advantages and fertile lands of Guanzhong to establish dominance there, but he responded, "What good are riches and honor if I cannot return to my hometown? It is like walking at night in embroidered clothes, unnoticed by anyone!" The adviser who mocked him for this view was subsequently boiled alive by Xiang Yü.

Once Liu Bang had secured his empire, a significant event was his "Grand Homecoming". As he passed through Pei County, where he had

once been a local official, he joined old friends and family in a revelry of drinking and singing, nostalgically recalling the past and expressing his deep emotional connection to his hometown and the joy of returning in glory. Ultimately, he decided to continue the Zhou dynasty's system of granting fiefs, designating the land of Pei as an imperial domain, "Tangmu Yi", and exempting it and his birthplace, Feng, from taxes and corvée labor for generations to come.

During his return, he stayed in Pei. There, he organized a banquet at the palace of Pei, calling all his old acquaintances to drink freely. He selected 120 local boys and taught them to sing. As the wine flowed, Gaozu played the zhu and sang a poem he composed: "Great winds stir, clouds soar, with power that spans the sea, I return to my homeland. Oh, where are the warriors to guard the four quarters!" He had the boys learn and sing along. Gaozu then danced with a deep emotional expression, shedding many tears. He said to the elders and brothers of Pei, "The wanderer grieves for his hometown. Though I reside in Guanzhong, a thousand years hence my soul will still joyfully think of Pei. Since I, starting as the Duke of Pei, have crushed the tyrants and thus won the empire, let Pei be my Tangmu Yi, restoring its people, to be free from obligations forever." The elders, brothers, and old friends of Pei then joyously drank and laughed, recalling old times.

——*Records of the Grand Historian: Annals of Emperor Gaozu*

In the highly stable agrarian society, the centripetal force generated by generations living together in clans was immense. The idea that "one should return to one's roots" has become deeply ingrained in the Chinese psyche, with wanderers always harboring a natural affection for their

birthplace and kin. Although the Chinese autocratic dynasties emphasized ideological uniformity, their methods were primarily designed to prevent rebellion and did not involve fostering a steadfast faith through an organized religious force. Confucianism during the Han dynasty remained merely an ethical teaching tool. Hence, the Chinese never fled overseas to escape religious persecution like the Puritans, nor did they carry out their mission to spread the gospel with relentless zeal like missionaries. At the same time, they were not stripped of their memories of home like the enslaved Africans in America.

In the late 19th century, many Chinese headed to the western United States to build railways, and in the early 20th century, people from Hebei and Shandong ventured to Northeast China; nowadays, many migrate to coastal areas for work, all driven by pragmatic motives - either to avoid disasters or to seek fortune. They endure hardships and live frugally, hoping to return home soon. Their immediate goals might be to build homes and support the elderly, or help their descendants marry and have children; more ambitious aims include continuing the family genealogy, erecting ancestral graves, acquiring land; and the highest aspirations involve building bridges, establishing schools, and gaining honor for their hometowns to become respected local gentry.

The widespread adoption of surnames during the Han dynasty, coupled with the household registration system established by the Qin dynasty and the reformed Confucian culture promoted by Dong Zhongshu, significantly reinforced the clan-centric views on filial piety and ancestral rites. For instance, a formal system established during the Han dynasty mandated that officials return to their hometowns to observe a three-year mourning period following the death of a parent. Additionally, while the Qin dynasty unified written script, it did not standardize the spoken

language, which impeded broader cultural integration and solidified local ethnic identities. Today, hometown and family associations continue to play a crucial role in Chinese community culture. Notably, every Memorial Day, occurring in the first week of April, sees hundreds of millions of individuals traveling to their ancestral cemeteries to burn joss paper. Furthermore, the Spring Festival in January 2024 witnessed approximately 900 million people traveling, the majority of whom were visiting relatives in their hometowns.

12.4 Political Power vs. Family Ethics

In examining the relationship between family ethics and political ethics, Emperor Gaozu of Han, Liu Bang, provided a classic example. Let's look at how three characters weave a stringent logical thread through mutual concessions:

1. Initial Phenomenon: Liu Bang visited his father, grand Duke Liu, every five days, performing the customary rites between father and son.
2. Initial Principle: The official in charge of grand Duke's household affairs (the Family Director) told the old man, "There cannot be two suns in the sky, nor two kings on the earth."
3. Affirming the Premise: The official said, "Although you are the Emperor's father, you are now also his subject. Where is it ever justified for a sovereign to bow to his subject? How then can the dignity of a monarch be maintained?"
4. Validation: When Gaozu visited again, his father greeted him at the doorway, holding a broom and walking backwards step by step towards the Emperor.

5. Behavioral Transition: Pretending to be shocked, Gaozu quickly dismounted his carriage to assist his father.
6. Assertion: the grand Duke proclaimed, "The Emperor is the sovereign; how can he disrupt the laws of the realm for my sake!" (acknowledging the applicability of the initial principle).
7. Confirmation: Therefore, Gaozu honored his father as the Emperor Emeritus on top of the grand Duke, genuinely appreciating the Family Director's words, and rewarded him with five hundred catties of gold.

Reflecting on the life of Liu Bang, what was his moral conduct like in everyday life? He was the second eldest in his family, thus known as Liu Ji. Unlike his older brother Liu Zhong, who diligently engaged in farming and sericulture, Liu Bang did not participate in his family's productive work from a young age. As an adult, he idled away his days, indulging in drinking and womanizing. Xiao He, who was the chief official of Pei County and later assisted him in conquering the realm, described him as "often boasting big, achieving little". For his own swift escape, he infamously pushed his own children (Crown Prince Liu Ying and Princess Lu Yuan) out of his carriage three times on the road. When Xiang Yü threatened him by cooking his parents and children, his response was, "Please, let me have a bowl of that soup!" In the ninth year of his reign, after the grand Weiyang Palace was completed, Liu Bang held a grand banquet for the dukes and ministers. Standing up with a jade cup to toast his father, he said: "In earlier years, you saw me as a good-for-nothing, incapable of managing property, not as diligent as Liu Zhong. Now, whose estate is larger, mine or Liu Zhong's?" The ministers all shouted "Long live the Emperor!" and laughed heartily. From a common ruffian to the highest sovereign, if judged by ordinary ethics, Liu Bang's life indeed seems

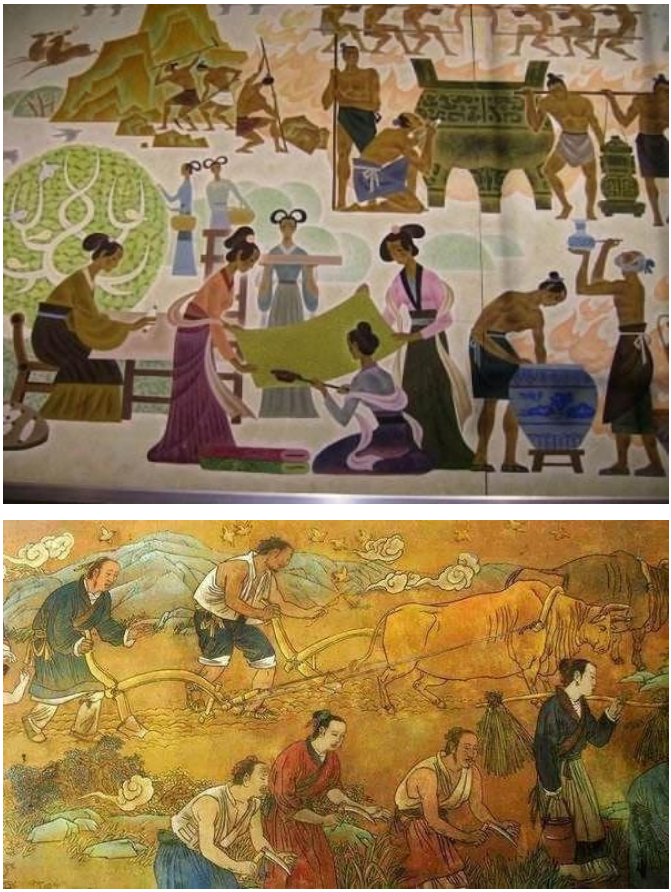
laughable. However, his great achievements consistently reflected the outstanding qualities of a statesman: wild and unruly yet capable of acting for the common good; flexible yet decisive in crucial moments; often defeated yet always persevering; lacking grandeur yet skilled in recognizing and employing talent; indulgent in pleasures yet generous with wealth; not known for gentle kindness yet undeniably compassionate towards the people…

12.5 The Grandiose Rule by Emperor Wu

In history, the unification of China was most profoundly achieved by the Qin and Han dynasties. The former unified the feudal lords, administrative patterns, writing, and measurement standards, while the latter unified the thoughts of the people through Confucian ideology.

In the early Han Dynasty, from Emperor Gaozu to Emperor Jing, the governance largely followed the Daoist strategy of "governing by doing nothing", focusing on internal recuperation and external peace, leading to an economic boom evidenced by the saying, "The granaries are full, and the money decays in the capital". (Figure 12-1) Emperor Wu of Han, Liu Che, shifted from this style, opting for an ambitious and proactive governance. Fortunately, he was born at the right time - proclaimed heir at 7, ascending the throne at 16, and ruling for 54 years, which allowed him to fully implement his political ambitions. His governance was characterized by several key achievements:

Figure 12-1 People at Work in the Beginning of Han Dyansty



1. He adopted the advice of his counselor, Zhufu Yan, and issued the "Order of Grace", which successfully reduced the power of regional princes, creating a situation where "no large state had more than a dozen cities, and small lord with no more manor over five kilometers", significantly mitigating the threat of feudal rebellion.

2. Following the suggestions of Dong Zhongshu, he "dismissed the hundred schools of thought to exclusively honor Confucianism", solidifying it as the orthodox ethical framework of the Chinese autocratic society.
3. He reformed the bureaucratic system, weakening the power of the chief ministers in the "outer court" and consolidating central power in the "inner court" around the emperor, and established a surveillance system to monitor the integrity of officials.
4. He improved governance capabilities by adopting the recommendation and selection systems for recruiting talents into the bureaucratic hierarchy.
5. Leveraging the national strength accumulated by his ancestors, he expanded the empire extensively - driving the nomadic Huns to further north, conquering Dayuan to the west, eliminating Wiman Joseon (Korea) to the east, reclaiming the Min-Zhe region from the barbarian tribes in the southeast, and subduing the southwestern tribes in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan - significantly expanding the territorial range of the Chinese empire. He not only sent Zhang Qian and Ban Chao to open the Hexi Corridor and develop the Silk Road but also sent Gan Ying to explore the legendary Roman Empire (known then as "Daqin").

However, his glorious reign also had significant regrets. First, his relentless military campaigns and strict punishments depleted the treasury and exhausted the populace, triggering several uprisings. Second, his later years were marred by confusion, superstition, and violent temper, leading to the tragic downfall of the families of Sima Qian and Li Ling. The infamous witchcraft scandal not only resulted in rare large-scale fratricide but

also claimed the lives of over a hundred thousand elites. Two years before his death, Emperor Wu issued the "Luntai Edict", publicly repenting for the severe consequences of his aggressive militarism and harsh governance, and resolved to rectify his ways: "Now we must prohibit cruelty, stop arbitrary levies, focus on agriculture, and restore the horse breeding decree to compensate for deficiencies, ensuring there is no lack of military preparedness." His ability to acknowledge his faults and reinstate the people-oriented policies of the Wenjing era - lightening taxes and allowing people to rest - during his final years was not only admirable but also stabilized the nation's development, laying the foundation for the subsequent revival under Emperors Zhao and Xuan.

Ban Gu, in the "Book of Han", praised Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty highly but also expressed significant regret: "If his successors could follow his great undertakings and maintain the ethos of the three dynasties, possessing Emperor Wu's heroic talent and grand strategy, without changing the frugality of Emperors Wen and Jing to aid the people, then even the praises in the 'Book of Poetry' and 'Book of Documents' would not surpass his." On June 13, 1957, Mao Zedong discussed several Han emperors with Wu Lengxi, a leader of the People's Daily. Mao critiqued the widely praised "Emperors Wen and Jing" as obscure and conservative rulers because they merely followed their predecessors, adhering conservatively without innovation. He commended Emperor Wu for his bold strategies and efforts to expand Liu Bang's legacy. In his later years, Emperor Wu recognized the pitfalls of luxury, aggressive militarism, and reliance on alchemists, issuing an edict to admit his faults, marking a pinnacle era.

However, Mao's comments and political practices overlooked an essential premise: without Emperors Wen and Jing learning from the

collapse of the Qin Dynasty, persisting in recuperation, practicing simplicity and frugality, and following the policies of their advisors Xiao and Cao, who implemented non-interference and aligned with the desires of the people without causing disturbances - policies that accumulated a robust economic foundation and a stable environment for seventy years - Emperor Wu's ambitions might not only have been difficult to fulfill, but could have potentially repeated the tyrannical mistakes of the Qin Dynasty. The early Han dynasty's policy of peaceful marriages with neighboring fierce minorities, although seemingly a humiliating compromise, in fact secured a necessary environment for peaceful development for the war-torn nation; moreover, during the Wen and Jing periods, the "Horse Breeding Decree" mobilized civilians to raise hundreds of thousands of war horses, fundamentally aiding Emperor Wu in overcoming the Han army's disadvantage of slow mobility in wars. Even with the political and economic groundwork laid by his ancestors, Emperor Wu nearly exhausted these resources. According to the "Book of Han", Wei Qing and Huo Qubing's campaigns against the Xiongnu resulted in the loss of over 100,000 horses – "from 140,000 private horses, fewer than 30,000 entered the battlefield". This does not negate Emperor Wu's achievement in removing the century-old border threat, causing the "Huns to flee far away, leaving no royal court south of the desert", but the decline of the Han Dynasty after him was fundamentally due to the seeds sown by his unrestrained and arbitrary decisions in his later years.

The life of Emperor Wu of Han prompts us to ponder a fascinating phenomenon. Throughout history, both in China and abroad, dominant rulers who have made remarkable achievements often did so with great trepidation, as if treading on thin ice. In return, they rightfully earned the people's support. However, amidst the thunderous cries of "long live the

king", these rulers gradually became obstinate and self-righteous, beginning to believe in their own infallibility and that every action they took was wise and correct. Consequently, they harshly purged loyal ministers and brave generals who dared to offer frank advice, to indulge in the people's utmost reverence. They even used state machinery to legally cement this pleasurable sensation; meanwhile, the people quickly lost their reason. Among them, the ambitious and mediocre individuals seized the opportunity to create thunderous chaos, aiming to eliminate any remaining integrity as a display of their loyalty. The artificially created era of peace, marked by silencing dissent and preventing public criticism, is in reality a sad tableau of uniform silence and desolate paths. This is evidenced by the poem "Laughing at the Lonely King" by the author of this book:

In the deep dreams of the celestial rooster, calls at dawn with a lonely song;

Insects and birds, each with their own delight, why force them to sing as one?

Clearly, Emperor Wu of Han's exclusive promotion of Confucianism was not borne out of personal belief but rather as a means to unify the national values. His policy practice fundamentally continued the legalistic approach of the Qin Dynasty. Dong Zhongshu elevated the Confucian idea of unifying under the Spring and Autumn principles to "the constant way of heaven and earth, the common bond across ages". Based on its core concepts of governing the country, hierarchical ethics, and clan ritual systems, he integrated thoughts from Daoism, Legalism, and Yin-Yang philosophy to create a system that sanctified imperial power and maintained social order. His stance that "all doctrines not within the six arts of

Confucius should be completely eradicated, not allowing them to progress" greatly impressed Emperor Wu. Thus, the policy of "dismissing all other schools of thought to honor only Confucianism" was swiftly implemented as a national strategy, overshadowing the previously vibrant intellectual diversity of the pre-Qin era. Given Emperor Wu's best practices, subsequent rulers emulated this approach, allowing Confucian thought to thrive for two millennia. However, as time passed and successive dynasties adapted it to their needs, its essence gradually drifted further from the original pre-Qin Confucianism.

12.6 The Eastern Han Dynasty

At the end of the Western Han Dynasty, the Liu imperial lineage weakened, and the powerful in-law relatives dominated the court. Seizing this opportunity, the ambitious and scheming Wang Mang usurped the throne in AD 9, proclaiming himself emperor and renaming the state "Xin". Despite his years of calculated political maneuvering and favorable public reputation, the concept of legitimate imperial authority was insufficient to prevent his downfall. He attempted to mold himself as a sage king akin to the ancient Zhou monarchs, implementing radical reforms to restore the well-field system and Zhou rituals. Driven by impractical ideas, these reforms backfired, ultimately leading to his demise. This illustrates that while reform is necessary in any dynasty, if the direction and measures of reform deviate from social reality, the reformers essentially dig their own graves.

The reintroduction of the well-field system faced fierce resistance from landlords and magnates; his nationalization policies regarding salt, iron, alcohol, coinage, and the five equalizations of credit, along with the

erratic currency reforms and unrealistic government-set prices, harmed the interests of ordinary merchants and the populace, leading to "unemployment among farmers and merchants, and the collapse of the economy". His deliberate downgrading of the status of vassal states like the Xiongnu, Goguryeo, the Western Regions, and the southwestern tribes provoked numerous border conflicts. In terms of administrative management, he was bogged down in endless bureaucratic meetings and futile discussions on rituals and classics, "with ministers entering at dawn and leaving at dusk, discussing issues year after year without resolution".

The situation escalated with the uprising of the Green Forest Army hidden in the Green Forest Mountains of Hubei, followed by the Plains of Reeds Army in Sui County proclaiming Liu Xuan of the Han lineage, and the Red Eyebrows Army crowning Liu Penzi, a descendant of the Han dynasty. Liu Yan and Liu Xiu, descendants of Emperor Jing, also rose up in Chongling. In AD 23, Wang Mang was killed in the chaos of the armies storming Chang'an. Liu Xiu stepped forward to resolve the disorder, restoring the Liu family's rule and claiming the title of Emperor Guangwu. He moved the capital to Luoyang, inaugurating the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 23-220).

The policies implemented by the first three emperors of the Eastern Han Dynasty - Emperor Guangwu, Emperor Ming, and Emperor Zhang (AD 23-88) - were consistently focused on strengthening imperial authority: 1) They strictly limited the power of the imperial in-laws and senior ministers; 2) They welcomed and resettled displaced populations, vigorously restoring production, which significantly increased both the population and the amount of land under cultivation; 3) They gradually regained control over the frontier regions, notably with the allegiance of the Ai-lao Kingdom in the great southwest and Ban Chao's pacification of the

Western Regions being particularly noteworthy. As a result, the early Eastern Han Dynasty saw a period of prosperity known as the "Restoration of Guangwu" and the "Governance of Ming and Zhang". However, starting with the accession of Emperor He in AD 88, the alternating influence of the imperial in-laws and the eunuchs increasingly disrupted the imperial court, leading to the decline of the Eastern Han Dynasty. The peasant rebellions, epitomized by the Yellow Turban Rebellion, were frequent, and local state and powerful landlords used the suppression of these uprisings as a pretext to strengthen their armed forces and consolidate their power, eventually leading to a situation where warlords divided the territory. In 196, Cao Cao took control of the court by relocating Emperor Xian to Xuchang. In 220, Cao Pi usurped the Han throne, moved the capital to Luoyang, renamed the state "Wei", and thus ended the Eastern Han Dynasty, ushering in the period of the Three Kingdoms: Wei, Shu, and Wu.

During the more than 200 years of the Eastern Han Dynasty, four significant developments in science and culture occurred: 1) Cai Lun invented papermaking using materials such as tree bark, hemp, rags, and old fishing nets, replacing the costly and cumbersome bamboo slips, wooden tablets, and silk as writing materials, which greatly facilitated record-keeping and cultural transmission; 2) Zhang Heng invented scientific instruments such as the armillary sphere and the seismoscope, which played a significant role in the exploration of astronomy and earthquake prediction; 3) Zhang Zhongjing wrote the "Treatise on Febrile Diseases and Miscellaneous Illnesses", establishing the foundations of traditional Chinese medicine; 4) Buddhism was introduced to China, and the first state-sponsored temple, White Horse Temple, was built in Luoyang.

13

THE ERA OF DIVISION AND TURMOIL: FROM THE THREE KINGDOMS TO THE WEI, JIN, SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN DYNASTIES

The opening of “Romance of the Three Kingdoms” provides a succinct summary of the changes in the historical landscape of China: “It is said that the great trends of the world undergo cycles of division and union. At the end of the Zhou dynasty, the seven states fought among themselves and were unified under Qin. After the destruction of Qin, Chu and Han emerged and fought until they were united under Han. From the time Emperor Gaozu of Han rose up by slaying the White Serpent, the realm was unified, later revitalized by Emperor Guangwu, passing down to Emperor Xian, which ultimately led to the division into three kingdoms.” Indeed, from the establishment of the Three Kingdoms in AD 220 to the reunification under the Sui Dynasty in AD 589, China experienced an era of profound instability and upheaval.

13.1 Rivalry of the Three Kingdoms

At the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty, Emperor Ling, addressing widespread uprisings, followed Liu Yan's advice to transform the Imperial Inspectors, who oversaw the provinces for the central government, into Governors. This move granted them substantial military and administrative powers locally. Initially, this strategy appeared to serve dual purposes: it reduced costs for the central court and placed mostly members of the Liu imperial clan or trusted central officials in power. However, it inadvertently weakened central authority, emboldening governors and local strongmen, and swiftly leading to fragmentation and warfare among warlords. Eventually, after extensive consolidation, three dominant powers emerged from 220 to 280 AD - Cao Wei, Shu Han, and Sun Wu - each frequently competing in conflicts that drained resources and inflicted widespread suffering. (Figure 13-1)

Figure 13-1 The Three Kingdoms



This era is immortalized by Luo Guanzhong in the 14th-century epic "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" and is one of the most enthralling chapters in Chinese history. The period was marked by the tripartite division of China into these three states, each led by ambitious rulers and characterized by a complex interplay of military strategy, political intrigue, and personal valor.

The King dom of Wei, under the leadership of Cao Cao and his successors, was the most formidable, boasting significant military strength and resources. Cao Cao, a brilliant strategist, had consolidated much of northern China under his control. His son, Cao Pi, later declared the end of the Han dynasty and established Wei, seen as a continuation of centralized Han rule.

In the southwest, Liu Bei founded the Kingdom of Shu in the fertile, mountainous region of Sichuan, positioning his regime as the legitimate successor to the Han dynasty. Supported by his sworn brothers and the strategic genius of advisor Zhuge Liang, Shu epitomized the ideals of loyalty and justice.

The Kingdom of Wu, led by Sun Quan in the economically prosperous lower Yangtze River valley, was known for its pragmatic governance and military tactics. The battle of Red Cliffs, a crucial victory over Cao Cao's forces, highlighted the tactical acumen of Wu's leadership.

Throughout this period, the interactions among the states were a mixture of fleeting alliances and protracted conflicts, featuring military campaigns, strategic battles, diplomatic maneuvers, and betrayals. Despite the ongoing wars, there was significant cultural, technological, and philosophical advancement, influenced by Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. The eventual unification of China under the Jin dynasty marked

the end of this turbulent era, but the stories and lessons from this time continue to resonate in Chinese culture and historical consciousness.

13.2 Literary Spendor during the Three Kingdoms Period

In the realm of literature, spanning the end of the Eastern Han dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period, Jian'an literature, led by the "Three Caos" and the "Seven Scholars", is highly acclaimed. This literary movement developed the style of Han dynasty folk ballads and perfected various poetic forms, including four, five, six, seven, and miscellaneous-character lines. A distinguishing feature of Jian'an literature is its straightforward and robust writing style that vividly expresses the authors' grand political ambitions and their profound emotional depths.

Under the leadership of the "Three Caos" - Cao Cao, Cao Pi, and Cao Zhi – China's literary history witnessed its first major surge of literary creation by scholars. The term "Seven Scholars" refers to Kong Rong, Chen Lin, Wang Can, Xu Gan, Ruan Yu, Ying Yang, and Liu Zhen, identified by Cao Pi in his "On Classics: Treatise". "Jian'an" refers to the era name of Emperor Xian of Han.

Cao Cao was not only a great military leader and politician but also highly literate. He advocated a national policy of "securing military achievements outwardly and fostering literature inwardly". His principle of "appointing talent" did not solely attract capable warriors and cunning strategists but also granted exceptional honors to literati, whom previous rulers had considered mere entertainers. Cao Cao himself was a major figure and pioneer in Jian'an literature, famously declaring, "Thirty years a general, my hand never parted from the book; by day I discussed

military strategies, by night I pondered over classics. Ascending a height, I was compelled to compose; creating new poems to the accompaniment of strings, all turned into melodies."

His works such as "Row of Xie Lu", "Row of Hao Li", and "Row of Bitter Cold" depict the hardships brought by the chaos at the end of the Han dynasty, with famous lines like "White bones exposed in the field, for a thousand miles no roosters crow" resonating widely. In his "Short Song Row", the line "Like Duke of Zhou, who fed the masses and won all hearts" reflects Cao Cao's ambition to assist the Emperor and unify the land, akin to King Cheng of Zhou, while "Though a tortoise lives long" with "An old steed in the stable still aspires to gallop a thousand miles, and the hero in his waning years keeps his ambition unabated" expresses his unrelenting drive and determination in life.

Sing with our cups, how long lives the man?
Like morning dew, days past full of sorrow's span.
With a heart intense, troubled thoughts never fade.
What can dissolve such woes? Only Du Kang made.
My robe's green edges, my heart endlessly roams,
For you, my lord, I muse alone in quiet homes.
The deer softly calls, on wild apples it feeds,
I have noble guests, with zithers and flutes' deeds.
Bright as the moon, when can it be held?
Worry arises within, its tide never quelled.
Wandering past fields and lanes, in vain we try to keep,
At wide tables talking, old kindnesses we reap.
Moonlit and star-sparse, the magpies southward fly,
Thrice around the tree, on which branch can I rely?

Mountains never tire of height, seas of their depth,
Duke Zhou once paused feeding, to him hearts leapt.
——*Cao Cao: A Short-Song Ballad*

Curiously, historians and literary scholars have shown immense interest in this brief and tumultuous period. Detailed historical accounts were provided by Chen Shou's "Records of the Three Kingdoms", Pei Songzhi's "Annotations to Records of the Three Kingdoms", and Fan Ye's "Book of the Later Han" from the Western Jin and Southern Dynasties. Most notably, a millennium later, the novelist Luo Guanzhong of the late Yuan and early Ming periods wrote "Romance of the Three Kingdoms", which brought this era to a climax. This episodic novel, with its vivid characters, dramatic plot twists, grand battle scenes, and underlying philosophical ideas, captivated a broad audience. Enhanced by various traditional performing arts over the generations, it eventually earned its place at the forefront of China's four great classical novels.

As the name suggests, "romance" refers to the elaboration and interpretation of stories related to certain historic facts with the aim to expound on ethical principles. The term was first used in historical novels with the Jiajing edition of "Romance of the Three Kingdoms". Romance-style novels primarily draw from established historical records and biographies, integrating a significant amount of folklore and anecdotal tales, shaped by the author's imagination and literary craftsmanship to create a distinctive, popularized literary genre. Its style is neither too profound in language nor too colloquial, aiming to record events truthfully, almost reaching the historical standard. It is designed so that "everyone who reads may understand, similar to the essence of folk songs sung in the streets."

The pre-Qin "Classic of Mountains and Seas" recorded a multitude of bizarre myths, embodying the fantastical and magnificent imaginations of the ancient Chinese, and also marked the genesis of romanticism in Chinese literature. From "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" and "Water Margin", to Cai Dongfan's renditions of various dynastic histories, flourishing during the Yuan and Ming dynasties, popular arts such as mixed drama and storytelling further embellished these narratives. Not to mention the countless contemporary entertainment-oriented films and TV shows, which have played a dominant role in shaping the spiritual world of the Chinese people. Unlike poetry, essays, novels, and traditional opera, Yanyi, because it closely adheres to historical characters, stories, and contexts, has a strong capacity to mislead about the true events of history. While they invigorate popular cultural life, they also significantly dilute the public's perception of historical accuracy, thereby becoming a distinctive feature of Chinese culture. Yang Er once said in the preface to "Romance of Eastern and Western Jin": "Each era initiates its own history, with both credible and wild histories existing. Enthusiasts gather and perform these to educate the common people in a popular manner, termed Yanyi." The difference now is that while earlier versions emerged from personal interest in "good stories", today's entertainment-oriented adaptations of historical material are often masterpieces driven by capital, catering to the "market".

13.3 The Ethical Principles Manifested in the "Romance of the Three Kingdoms"

The "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" exemplifies two key Confucian virtues: loyalty and righteousness. However, the version of

Confucianism promoted by Dong Zhongshu had taken deep root, emphasizing that subjects must exhibit unwavering loyalty to their ruler. This principle was underscored by Emperor Gaozu's "White Horse Oath" with his ministers, which asserted that supporting an emperor from the Liu family was paramount, regardless of the competence of his descendants. The concept of righteousness extended beyond blood relations, allowing individuals from different families to form allegiances for mutual support. This type of alliance, akin to modern political parties, did not necessarily require a shared ideology but fostered close-knit assistance among members.

As these sworn brotherhoods expanded, they had the potential to create organized disruptions within society or against the regime. Consequently, such forms of self-organization at the civic level made rulers increasingly vigilant, ultimately leading to their explicit prohibition.

The "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" begins with the conflict between the imperial in-laws and the eunuchs following the reign of Emperor Ling, initially highlighting the concept of legitimate imperial authority. For the powerless imperial family, several key strategies were advanced: Jia Xu suggested to Li Jue to "uphold the nation to rectify the world", Mao Jie advised Cao Cao to "support the Emperor to command the disloyal", Liu Bei, as a relative of the Han dynasty, upheld the Emperor's secret edict to campaign against Cao Cao, who held the Emperor hostage. Guan Yü, after his defeat, insisted on surrendering to Han rather than to Cao Cao; Zhao Yun risked his life to rescue the young lord Liu Shan during the Battle of Changban, demonstrating his fierce loyalty; Zhuge Liang, with his brilliant intellect, willingly supported the incapable Liu Shan, bearing the heavy responsibility entrusted to him by Liu Bei. These instances illustrate the intangible power of the concept of imperial

legitimacy. This concept persisted into modern times, with Kang Youwei falsely claiming to have an imperial edict from Emperor Guangxu, and the Japanese establishing the puppet state of Manchukuo in Shenyang for Puyi, the last emperor, attempting to exploit the vestiges of royal legitimacy for their purposes.

Furthermore, the fraternal spirit championed in "Romance of the Three Kingdoms" has had a profound impact on Chinese folk culture. The oath of brotherhood in the Peach Garden between Liu Bei, Guan Yü, and Zhang Fei, elevating like-minded friends to sworn brothers ready to live and die for each other, reflects an extension of traditional kinship relations and diverges from the Confucian admonition against forming factions. (Figure 13-2) This oath became widely popular and imitated among the people, continuing the Wei, Jin, Northern, and Southern Dynasties' tradition of forming brotherhoods with non-relatives, such as Li Shimin's sworn brotherhood with the Turkic people using a ritual involving the burning of incense.

The ritual of forming sworn brotherhoods became formalized, including burning incense, kneeling, swearing oaths, exchanging tokens (orchid registers), and determining seniority by age. This extended to practices described in "Yan's Family Instructions", where one would kneel and call another man "father", showing respect due to a father, serving him as one would his own parents, and adding courtesy. This practice, known as "righteous ties of golden orchids" or colloquially as "swearing brotherhood", evolved beyond familial and religious bonds into a contractual tie among bandits and fraternal organizations in the underworld.

Figure 13-2 Liu, Guan and Zhang Forming sworn brotherhood



The term “orchid” first appeared in Liu Yiqing’s “A New Account of the Tales of the World” during the Southern Dynasties, describing an instant bond of deep friendship between Shan Tao, Ji Kang, and Ruan Ji. The metaphor of “orchid” likely originates from an earlier reference in the “I Ching” which says, “When two people are of one mind, their strength can cut through metal; their agreement is as fragrant as orchids.”

During the late Sui Dynasty, as recounted in “Romance of Sui Tang”, and in “Water Margin” during the Song Dynasty, stories of mass oaths of brotherhood like those of the 108 heroes of Mount Liang, who banded together to challenge the imperial court, aroused the court’s wariness towards such alliances. To strengthen their rule, Qing Dynasty rulers repeatedly outlawed such oaths legally. During the Shunzhi era, it was decreed that “anyone who forms alliances by blood oath and swearing

brotherhood must be executed by law". The regulations of the "Great Qing Legal Code on Plotting Rebellion" are more detailed: "For all unrelated individuals, if they form a blood oath alliance or swear brotherhood by burning tokens, they are subject to the unexecuted laws of plotting rebellion. The leader shall be sentenced to death by hanging after a period of custody; followers will receive a reduced sentence. If the group assembles more than twenty people, the leader will be executed immediately; followers will be sent to serve in the military in remote and malarial regions like Yunnan and Guangdong. For those who have not formed a blood oath but merely arranged brotherhood based on age and held meetings with more than forty people, the leader shall be held in custody pending execution; if the group consists of twenty to forty people, the leader will receive one hundred lashes and be exiled three thousand miles away; if there are fewer than twenty people, the leader will receive one hundred lashes and be put in the stocks for two months; followers will receive a lesser sentence accordingly."

"Romance of the Three Kingdoms" portrays Guan Yü as a paragon of both martial and scholarly virtues, and a model of loyalty, elevating him to the foremost of the "Five Tiger Generals" of Shu and setting the stage for his deification in later generations. He formed a sworn brotherhood with Liu Bei and Zhang Fei, remaining steadfastly loyal and righteous through hardships, and rejecting the allure of high office and wealth offered by Cao Cao with a resolute "returning the seal and gold". After his defeat, he embraced death but chose to "surrender to Han, not to Cao" to protect his elder brother's family, agreeing with Cao Cao that he would leave immediately once he learned of his brother's whereabouts, highlighting his spirit of loyalty. Cao Cao, torn between love and hate, praised him as a paragon of loyalty who "serves his lord without forgetting his

origin". Guan Yü demonstrated the decorum of a true gentleman by handing over a beautiful women awarded by Cao Cao to his sisters-in-law as maids.

Guan Yü's military exploits were legendary, ranging from "slaying Hua Xiong after warming the wine" to defeating Yan Liang and Wen Chou, "riding solo for a thousand miles" and conquering "five passes and six generals", to "flooding seven armies" and enduring bone-scraping treatment without anesthesia. His magnanimous release of Cao Cao at Huarong Path exemplified his deep commitment to repaying kindness. Over time, Guan Yü's image evolved through a trajectory of "from marquis to king, king to emperor, emperor to saint, and saint to deity". Daoism venerates him as "Guan, the Holy Emperor", also referred to as "Duke Guan", a title conferred by the emperor while he was held hostage by Cao Cao.

Temples and shrines dedicated to Guan Yü depict him with a majestic beard and piercing eyes, wielding the Green Dragon Crescent Blade in his left hand and holding the "Spring and Autumn Annals" in his right. He is often flanked by his loyal aides - Guan Ping, Zhou Cang, Wang Fu, and Liao Hua. Emperors across various dynasties revered Guan Yü as the epitome of loyalty, utilizing his image to promote values of loyalty and patriotic devotion. During the third year of Emperor Yongzheng's reign (1725) in the Qing dynasty, an edict was issued to designate temples of Holy Guan as martial temples and include him in the state rituals held in spring and autumn, elevating him to a status comparable to Confucius, the "Sage of Literature". Thus, Guan Yü has ascended to become a principal deity in national worship as the "Martial Saint". Commonly, people revered him for his righteousness, and interestingly, in recent decades, he has also been worshipped as a protector of wealth.

Zhuge Liang was an outstanding politician, military strategist, literatus, and inventor. However, the most credible historical record, "Records of the Three Kingdoms", does not mention his commanding roles in the Battle of Red Cliffs, nor feats like using straw boats to borrow arrows or borrowing the eastern wind. Moreover, his persistent campaigns from Qi Mountain and multiple excursions into the Central Plains were criticized by Sima Guang as "overconfident in his abilities, defying heaven, leading to his own defeat". Additionally, Zhuge Liang was known for his wisdom and was meticulous in handling affairs, great and small, which not only led to his premature death due to overwork but also resulted in a lack of competent generals and officials in Shu, contrasting sharply with the abundance of skilled warriors and strategists in rival Cao Wei.

The reasons Luo Guanzhong, in the "Romance of the Three Kingdoms", endowed Zhuge Liang with all wisdom and virtues, and why he is revered and worshipped in folk temples, are twofold: Firstly, his unwavering loyalty to the Liu regime, bearing the heavy responsibility of being entrusted with the care of an heir, even in the face of an incompetent emperor, he never harbored any ambitions of usurpation. Secondly, he was known for his integrity and effective governance, embodying the ideal of a capable and honest official. His famous maxim, "I will exert myself to the utmost, until my heart ceases to beat", has long been a motto for men and women of principle.

When discussing contributions to Chinese moral values in the Three Kingdoms period, Kong Rong of the Seven Scholars of Jian'an is notable. He was a twentieth-generation descendant of Confucius and demonstrated profound familial cultural depth in both literary grace and moral cultivation. His writings were ornate, at times sharp in tone, at times filled with whimsy, and at other times poignantly moving. The story of "Kong Rong

Sharing Pears" has become a classic in moral education for young children throughout China. (Figure 13-3)

Figure 13-3 Kong Rong Sharing Pears



Recorded in the "Book of Later Han: Biography of Kong Rong", at the age of four, when sharing pears with his brothers, Kong always chose the smallest one. When asked by adults why, he replied: "I am the youngest, it is proper for me to take the smallest." This greatly impressed his family. To celebrate International Children's Day on June 1st, the State Postal Bureau issued a special stamp featuring "Kong Rong Sharing Pears" on June 1, 2007. Liu Yiqing of the Southern Dynasties also used a dialogue between Kong Rong and his son in his "A New Account of the Tales of the World" to convey the famous saying, "No intact eggs remain under a collapsed nest". Arrested due to offenses against Cao Cao, Kong Rong pleaded for his own life to be taken to spare his children, who were playing in the courtyard at ages eight and nine. His sons calmly retorted, "How could there be intact eggs under a collapsed nest?" Like the story of Mencius's mother moving three times, the story of Kong Rong's family

underscores the importance of family learning and education in the moral development of children.

However, in a despotic society, when it comes to life-and-death power struggles, the tender familial ethics instantly become weak and ineffectual. Cao Cao, together with his legitimate eldest son from Empress Wuxuan Bian, Cao Pi, coveted the throne and schemed relentlessly to eliminate any brothers who could compete for power. Even after succeeding Cao Cao as the King of Wei and later proclaiming himself emperor, he still saw his talented and highly esteemed younger brother, Cao Zhi, as a potential threat, wishing to eliminate him sooner rather than later. To create a justifiable excuse for framing him, he summoned Cao Zhi, the Prince of Dong'a, to court and demanded he compose a poem within seven steps or face severe punishment. In his grief and helplessness, Cao Zhi spontaneously created the famous "Poem of the Seven Steps":

Boiling beans upon the stalks ignite,
Within the pot, the beans lament in plight.
Sprung from one root, their origin the same,
Why haste to scorch, in such a brutal game?

From the plotting of Prince Yang Guang against his elder brother Crown Prince Yang Yong during the Sui Dynasty, to Prince Li Shimin of the Tang Dynasty slaughtering his elder brother Crown Prince Li Jiancheng and younger brother Prince Li Yuanji at the Xuanwu Gate Incident, to the Ming Dynasty's Emperor Yingzong, Zhu Qizhen, killing his brother Emperor Jingtai, Zhu Qiyu, in the coup to restore himself to the throne, these tragedies of fratricidal strife for power have been repeated in various dynasties, and have become increasingly intense.

13.4 The Twin-Jin Dynasty

In 263 A.D., under the control of the Sima family, the Cao Wei regime eradicated Shu Han. By 266 A.D., Sima Yan, with the substantial support of aristocratic clans, usurped power from the Cao family of Wei, establishing the Jin dynasty with Luoyang as the capital and declaring himself Emperor Wu of Jin. In 280 A.D., Emperor Wu ordered his armies to cross the Yangtze River, annihilating the Sun Wu regime, thus ending the tripartite division that had persisted since the late Eastern Han Dynasty and successfully unifying the nation. During this period, the Jin dynasty experienced the War of the Eight Princes and the Disaster of Yongjia. Emperor Min of Jin, Sima Ye, moved the capital to Chang'an in 313 A.D., but surrendered in 317 A.D. after defeat by the Huns. This era is known as the Western Jin dynasty, which, as a unified Chinese state, lasted only 37 years. With the resurgence of nomadic tribes in the north, the central China inhabited and ruled by the Han nationality was frequently plundered until the central kingdom retreated to south of the Yantze River.

Sima Rui established a new capital in Jiankang (modern-day Nanjing), extending the Jin dynasty's rule until 420 A.D. Meanwhile, the northern part of Jin's territories was fragmented by south-bound invasions from ethnic minorities such as the Hun, Jie, Xianbei, Di, Qiang, Lushui Hu, Wuhuan, Ba Di, and Goguryeo. Historians refer to this period as the Eastern Jin dynasty.

After the unification of China by Cao Wei, the Sima family held onto power for three generations. Sima Yan, tearing away the veil of legitimate imperial authority, seized power and proclaimed himself emperor. This move did not cause significant turmoil within the court and was seen as a natural progression. He recognized the dual nature of the aristocratic

clans as the ruling class - they could uphold the imperial authority and social stability, but once they became too powerful, they posed a threat to the emperor. As a compromise, relying on the trust in blood relations, he appointed 27 kings from his own family, assigning them provinces as their domains. To defend against foreign invasions, he allowed these kings to develop military forces, serving as a safeguard for the imperial family.

Through military-to-civilian reforms, he encouraged land reclamation and farming, reduced tax and labor burdens, allowing the people to recuperate and thrive. This led to a period of prosperity known as the "Era of Great Peace". However, he then indulged in extravagance, gathering nearly ten thousand beauties for his harem. The noble families competed in wealth, and officials indulged in idle chatter, neglecting state affairs. The inherent flaws of the feudal system exacerbated various social conflicts under the facade of peace. In 290 A.D., the death of Sima Yan also marked the end of tight control over the country by the Sima family after his 9-year-old son, Sima Zhong, ascended the throne. His empress, Jia Nanfeng, stirred up trouble and wielded power, leading to bloody conflicts between the imperial in-laws and the Sima family.

Empress Jia, known for her ugly appearance and jealous nature, lacked the prestige and virtue to be compared with Empress Lü of the Han dynasty. Zhao Wang, the Crown Prince's tutor, first encouraged her to kill the Crown Prince Sima Yu, then used this as a pretext to launch a palace coup, declaring the emperor deposed through a forged edict. This triggered the well-known War of the Eight Princes. In 307 A.D., Sima Yue from the Eastern Sea emerged victorious, supporting Sima Chi as Emperor Huai of Jin. After years of warfare, as the Jin dynasty continued to weaken, the five barbarian tribes from beyond the frontier -

the Hun, Xianbei, Jie, Qiang, and Di - established their own states and continuously invaded the south, an era known as the "Disorder of the Five Barbarians".

Among them, the Han-Zhao regime established by the Southern Hun nobleman Liu Yuan was particularly aggressive. His son, Liu Cong, captured the Jin capital Luoyang in 311 A.D., during the reign of Emperor Huai, leading to what is known as the Disaster of Yongjia. In 313 A.D., Emperor Huai was killed, and Sima Ye declared himself Emperor Min of Jin in Chang'an. In 317 A.D., Liu Yao captured Chang'an and Emperor Min, marking the end of the Western Jin. Sima Rui then crossed the river to establish the Eastern Jin in Jiankang (now Nanjing). Later, sixteen kingdoms of varying sizes emerged in northern China, collectively known as the Sixteen Kingdoms. Fu Jian, leading the largest among them, the Former Qin, united these kingdoms, setting the stage for a north-south standoff with the Eastern Jin that had moved south.

The period following the Three Kingdoms saw regional powers acting independently, which spurred a multicultural development through conflicts and integrations. The Jin Dynasty generally embraced a laissez-faire policy as they did not have the time and power to implement tightened control, fostering a rich blend of Taoism, metaphysics, and Confucianism in its cultural landscape. This era saw a flourishing of literature, calligraphy, sculpture, and traditional Chinese medicine. Buddhism significantly integrated into Chinese intellectual life, impacting nearly every aspect of social existence. The expansion of Buddhist temples, encouraged by imperial support, impacted tax revenues and undermined national morale for military service, leading to several imperial evictions.

The dominance of Confucianism was challenged by native philosophies such as Mingjiao, Daoism, and Metaphysics, with the scholarly

class adopting nihilistic views. Buddhism, having spread from India, vigorously interacted with these philosophical trends. The northern minorities were influenced by Central Plains culture during their occupation. In such volatile times, influenced by diverse cultural interactions, affluent intellectuals turned to metaphysics, inspired by Liezi and Zhuangzi. They engaged in leisure, shunned current affairs, and sparked a movement of "pure conversation". Notable among them were the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove - Ruan Ji, Ji Kang, Xiang Xiu, Shan Tao, Liu Ling, Ruan Xian, and Wang Rong - whose disregard for conventional teachings led them to live eccentrically, often gathering in the bamboo forest of Shanyang County to enjoy wine, song, and the arts, achieving significant intellectual and artistic accomplishments. (Figure 13-4)

Figure 13-4 The Leisure Life of the Bamboo Grove



In this era, Jin dynasty's poetry, prose, and lyricism reached remarkable heights. Masterpieces such as Wang Xizhi's "Letter to Xie An" and "Preface to the Poems Collected from the Orchid Pavilion", Sun Dao's "Rhapsody on Mount Tiantai", and Tao Yuanming's "The Peach Blossom Spring" not only expressed the literati's frustration with the chaotic world

but also their lofty disdain for conformity. The era's art, particularly the calligraphy of Wang Xizhi and the paintings of Gu Kaizhi, achieved an expressive vibrancy and a completeness of spirit and form.

Due to the large-scale southward migration of the court, noble families, and literati, China's economic and cultural center shifted towards the Jiangnan area. This led to significant progress in land development, agriculture, handicrafts, and commerce in the region, with major innovations in metal casting, textiles, papermaking, ceramics, and shipbuilding.

13.5 The Southern and Northern Dynasties: Regime Confrontation and Ethnic Integration

Given the political standoff between the minority regimes in the north and the Han regime in the south, with the Yangtze River acting as a barrier, this period in history saw confrontations and occasional attacks between the north and the south, and must be narrated separately from both perspectives. Starting in 420 A.D., when Liu Yu usurped the Eastern Jin to establish the Song dynasty, the southern regimes (420-589 A.D.) went through four dynasties: Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen; starting from when the Xianbei leader Tuoba Gui founded the Northern Wei in 439 A.D., which unified Northern China by conquering the Northern Liang, the northern dynasties (439-581 A.D.) included the Northern Wei, Eastern Wei, Western Wei, Northern Qi, and Northern Zhou.

In the eyes of the Han people in the south, the northern tribes that invaded the Central Plains were seen as culturally barbaric despite their formidable military strength. Emperor Xiaowen of Northern Wei was acutely aware of this perception and thus strongly promoted comprehensive sinicization. He dismissed widespread opposition and moved the

capital from Pingcheng (modern Datong, Shanxi) to Luoyang, mandated that Xianbei nobles adopt Han surnames and attire, discontinue speaking their native languages, encourage intermarriages with Han families, and he placed a strong emphasis on education and respect for Confucian culture. In terms of governance, Emperor Xiaowen implemented the Equal-field system, permanently distributing abandoned farmland to farmers which revitalized the labor force; his fixed tax quota system also solidified the financial revenue. While the reform efforts of King Wuling of Zhao during the Warring States period to adopt "Hu clothing and archery" and the later Self-Strengthening Movement were temporary measures under foreign pressure, focusing only on technical aspects of "learning from the barbarians", Emperor Xiaowen's policies demonstrated foresight and wisdom. He abandoned the traditional raiding pursuits of northern nomadic tribes and notably, despite his dominant position, he recognized and adopted the strengths of the weaker party, willingly promoting extensive sinicization. Looking back in history, the Northern Wei was the first to break away from the vicious cycle of frequent raids and short-sighted governance, setting a precedent for nomadic expansion, and inaugurating a new era of integration between the Hu and Han peoples.

The regimes that emerged in the western and southwestern regions also continuously eroded the influence of the Southern Dynasties. Within society, on one hand, the aristocratic families remained extremely powerful. To preserve their hereditary privileges of holding high official positions, they heavily promoted the compilation of family genealogies, which ironically hastened their descendants into corruption. On the other hand, through temporary affiliations with these families, the imperial examinations, and military achievements, the social status of commoners and minor families rose amidst the turmoil. The socio-economic

conditions in the Yangtze region improved significantly under the influence of the southward migration of culture and technology, marked by prosperous eras like the Reign of Yuanjia and Yongming. However, the bloody infighting among the royal family never ceased, leading to frequent changes in emperors and dynasties, and a general decline in national power.

As a general rule, despite its various negative effects, turbulent times always provide fertile ground for intellectual freedom, much like how war can accelerate technological progress. During the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the cultural field saw the emergence of unique theoretical ideas such as practical governance and theories advocating the absence of a ruler. Literature, art, and technology also saw remarkable achievements. Metaphysics, Buddhism, and Daoism continued to flourish. The Western Regions' Khotan became a center of Buddhist culture and extensively spread its influence to the Central Plains through the Silk Road. Buddhism and monks were granted numerous privileges such as exemptions from taxes and labor, and they occupied vast tracts of land. The development of cave temples became a hallmark of Buddhist expansion during this period, with the magnificent Dunhuang Mogao Caves, Maijishan Grottoes, Yungang Grottoes, and Longmen Grottoes standing as world-renowned cultural treasures.

14

SUI AND TANG DYNASTIES: FROM UNIFICATION TO PROSPERITY

The Sui Dynasty (581-619 A.D.) unified China but its second emperor repeated the historical mistakes of grandiose military expansion and enslavement of people for massive infrastructure projects, reminiscent of the Qin Dynasty and Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. Despite its brief duration, the Sui Dynasty left behind two significant legacies. The first was the construction of the 2,000 km Canal connecting Beijing to Hangzhou. The second was the initiation of the imperial examination system, which revolutionized the selection of talent for the bureaucratic system. This system profoundly influenced the intellectual community and remained in place until its abolition in 1905 at the end of the Qing Dynasty.

The Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) ushered in a period of remarkable openness and prosperity, achieving long-term stability. Art and poetry reached historical heights during this era. The Tang's strategy of peacemaking through intercultural marriages with surrounding ethnic groups proved highly effective. The cultural influence of the Tang Dynasty is still evident in neighboring countries like Korea and Japan. Around the world, Chinatowns are often referred to as "Tangmen Street", reflecting this

lasting impact. Despite typical issues like court corruption and peasant uprisings, which are common in declining governments, the Tang Dynasty ultimately fell due to excessive decentralization of military power to local lords along the nation's borders. These lords eventually overthrew the last Tang emperor and fragmented China into a dozen small kingdoms.

14.1 Reunification under the Sui Dynasty

In 581 A.D., Yang Jian accepted the abdication from the young Emperor Jing of the Northern Zhou and established the Sui Dynasty, claiming the title of Emperor Wen. Initially, he feigned support by appointing Emperor Jing as the Duke of Jie State to honor the Northern Zhou, but soon he killed Emperor Jing along with the close royal family members of the Northern Zhou. After campaigns to the south and north to eliminate divisions and rebellions, Emperor Wen ended nearly 300 years of fragmentation that began with the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties, reestablishing a unified China. Emperor Wen reformed the administration and military systems, personally led by example in practicing frugality. He is one of the two Chinese emperors who sticked with one emperess and did not maintain a large harem (the other being Emperor Xiao of the Ming Dynasty). His implementation of the Equal-field System and household registration laws freed peasants from dependence on local strongmen, making them state-registered households, which provided a stable material basis for their livelihoods. The population doubled within five years, leading to a prosperous period known as the Kaihuang era.

As the capital of both the Sui and Tang dynasties, Chang'an City (then called Daxing City), which Emperor Wen ordered to be built, showcased the dynasty's strong economic and technological capabilities and quickly

became the political, economic, and cultural center of the Eastern world. Emperor Wen greatly promoted water transport; in just three months, he opened the Guangtong Canal, which extended over 300 miles from Chang'an to the Yellow River, laying the technical and mobilization groundwork for Emperor Yang of Sui to later construct the Grand Canal from Beijing to Hangzhou. Unfortunately, in his later years, Emperor Wen became obstinate and paranoid, displaying erratic behavior. For instance, while he initially promoted Confucianism, built schools, and encouraged education and propriety, his later life anxiety about death led him to publicly support Buddhism over Confucianism, abolish schools except for the limited-enrollment National Academy in the capital, and order the construction of over five thousand temples and pagodas. This shift resulted in harsh penalties and internal chaos, reflecting the typical pattern of lifelong centralized monarchies. Court intrigues inevitably led to greater conspiracies, and under the collusion of his second son Yang Guang and the minister Yang Su, Emperor Wen was overthrown in favor of a younger heir. In 604 A.D., Yang Guang staged a coup at the Renshou Palace, leading to the mysterious and swift death of Emperor Wen. Yang Guang then ascended the throne as Emperor Yang of Sui.

Emperor Yang of Sui has long been depicted as a disastrously inept tyrant - guilty of fratricide, debauchery, and extreme cruelty. His reign starkly contrasts with the subsequent Golden Age of the early Tang Dynasty. To be fair, he was not merely a second-generation emperor engrossed in pleasure without accomplishment. Upon ascending the throne, he displayed a vigor reminiscent of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty. During his reign, he achieved three major feats: first, he refined the imperial examination system initiated by his father by introducing the Jinshi examination; second, he vigorously developed infrastructure - expanding

roads, building the Great Wall, and constructing the cities of Luoyang and the Eastern Capital (modern-day Yangzhou), most notably completing the Grand Canal; third, he frequently engaged in military campaigns to expand the empire's territories and assert dominance.

However, his ambitions outweighed his abilities, and his desire for grandeur, combined with a life of extreme luxury, led to the exhaustion of the state's resources. In foreign relations, although he managed to intimidate the Western Turks, the Northern Khitans, and Northern Vietnam, and even welcomed envoys from Japan, his insistence on subjugating Goguryeo through three massive military campaigns disastrously cost millions of soldiers' lives. Despite his Han-like boldness, Emperor Yang lacked the strategic acumen of Emperor Wu of Han and did not have the fiscal prudence of the Wen and Jing eras. His reckless spending and disregard for the people ultimately sparked widespread rebellion among his generals and led to uprisings across the realm. In 618, during the coup at Jiangdu, he was strangled by his trusted minister Yuwen Huaji, who then installed Yang Hao as a puppet emperor and declared himself Prime Minister.

On his way back to the capital with his troops, Yuwen Huaji repeatedly encountered resistance from rebel forces, resulting in the scattering of his over 100,000-strong army to just 20,000. Ironically aware of his inevitable defeat, Yuwen Huaji lamented, "One must die in life, why not reign as emperor for a day?" He then poisoned the puppet emperor Yang Hao, usurped the throne in Wei County under the pretense of the Xu Dynasty, and declared the era name "Tianshou" while still appointing officials. The following year, he was captured and killed by Dou Jiande, the King of Xia. Those who had abruptly received ranks and titles under his short-lived regime likely felt a fleeting rush of triumph. The Sui Dynasty, which

the people had hoped would bring an end to centuries of turmoil, disintegrated in less than 40 years (581-619 A.D.). This once again confirmed an enduring truth: no matter how grand a ruler's political ambitions, if they come at the cost of the people's property and lives, depriving them of a sense of gain, he will inevitably be regarded as an enemy and fall from grace.

14.2 The Rise of Tang Dynasty

At the end of the Sui Dynasty, warlords rose up across the land. In 617 A.D., while Emperor Yang of Sui was trapped in Jiangdu, Li Yuan, the Duke of Tang, rose in revolt in Jinyang under the pretext of defending the Sui Dynasty. After capturing Chang'an, he enthroned Yang You as Emperor Gong of Sui and appointed himself as Prime Minister and Duke of Tang. In 618 A.D., following the death of Emperor Yang, Li Yuan accepted the abdication from Emperor Gong and proclaimed himself Emperor, establishing the Tang Dynasty (618-907 A.D.) and making Chang'an the capital. Yang You was demoted to Duke of Xie and placed in Chang'an, where he mysteriously died the following year. Having hastily ascended the throne, Li Yuan could not avoid campaigns east and west to eliminate fragmented powers and unify the realm. His son, Li Shimin, distinguished in battle, launched the Xuanwu Gate Incident, eliminating two brothers contending for the throne. Li Yuan, assessing the situation, painfully accepted reality and abdicated in favor of Li Shimin, who became Emperor Gaozu of Tang.

Compared to the rebellious troops of the Green Forest, the Li family from Longxi region (upper stream of the Yellow River, spanning across today's Gansu, Shannxi and Shanxi provinces) naturally had inherent

superiority. The founding Emperor, Li Yuan, had a distinguished lineage: his grandfather, Li Hu, was the Shangshu Zuo Pushe, equivalent to a Prime Minister, and ranked among the "Eight Pillars of Western Wei", holding the title of Duke of Longxi County and granted the surname Daye. His father, Li Bing, served as a Pillar Nation General in Northern Zhou, inheriting the title of Duke of Longxi County and later the Duke of Tang. Li Yuan himself inherited the title of Duke of Tang and was also a cousin of Emperor Yang of Sui.

The noble lineage provided sufficient legitimacy for the Li family to firmly hold the throne. However, insisting on being descendants of Laozi, the Li family aimed to doubly reinforce their esteemed ancestry, naturally leading to their reverence for Taoism. This also illustrates the dependency of religion on imperial power, which can be adjusted at will by the emperor. Interestingly, early Tang Dynasty took Taoism seriously, elevating it to the state religion, and used Taoist classics like the "Tao Te Ching", "Zhuangzi", "Wenzi", and "Liezi" as the standard texts for selecting scholars; Taoists were also highly sought after by nobility and royalty. The origins of the Li family and their surname have been a subject of intense debate among historians, with no consensus reached.

Nowadays, it seems that such inquiries and debates are quite trivial; in an era of great ethnic integration, intermarriage between different ethnic groups and changes in surnames are quite normal. However, at that time, the imperial historian Fu Yi, understanding the emperor's intent, submitted a proposal that promoted Taoism and suppressed Buddhism, naturally gaining the imperial family's favor. In contrast, the monk Faling opposed the claim that the Tang royal family were descendants of Laozi, advocating instead that they were descendants of the Tuoba clan, which angered Emperor Taizong, resulting in Faling's exile to Yizhou where he

died. It shows that in matters of imperial politics, one's stance always determines their fate, and even in the relatively enlightened Tang Dynasty, there were no exceptions.

The Tang Dynasty largely inherited and developed the culture, systems, and social characteristics of the Sui Dynasty. Emperor Taizong of Tang, Li Shimin, learning from the fall of the Sui Dynasty, deeply understood that "He who wins the people's hearts wins the world." During his 22-year reign, he consistently employed honest officials and humbly accepted advice. He pacified border threats and promoted ethnic integration, earning the title "Heavenly Khan" from neighboring nations; domestically, he enforced frugality, lightened taxes, encouraged agriculture and sericulture, and perfected the civil service exams, creating a period of political clarity and economic prosperity known as the "Reign of Zhenguan". Choosing excellent successors was one of Taizong's significant but often overlooked contributions. In his later years, he remained clear-headed, decisively removing his contending sons Li Chengqian and Prince Li Tai, and passed the throne to his ninth son, the gentle and kind Emperor Gaozong of Tang. Emperor Gaozong continued the legacy of the Zhenguan era, embracing advice, advocating frugality, opposing extravagance, avoiding wars, and stopping construction projects, thus establishing the "Yonghui Administration".

14.3 The Interaction between the Emperor and His Advisor

Li Shimin and Wei Zheng had a remarkable relationship that stands as a significant example of the dynamic between a ruler and his advisor in Chinese history. Wei Zheng was initially a member of a rival faction,

supporting Li Jiancheng, Li Shimin's elder brother. After Li Shimin defeated Li Jiancheng in the Xuanwu Gate Incident and ascended to the throne, instead of punishing Wei Zheng, he recognized his talents and honesty and recruited him as a chief advisor.

Wei Zheng is best remembered for his role as a straightforward and incorruptible official who was not afraid to criticize the emperor directly. He played a crucial role in the implementation of Taizong's policies by providing candid advice that often pointed out the flaws in Li Shimin's plans or decisions. This relationship was characterized by respect and utility. Li Shimin valued Wei Zheng's integrity and insight, which helped him to avoid echo chambers that could arise in imperial courts.

One of the most famous anecdotes illustrating their interaction involves Wei Zheng's opposition to Li Shimin's planned expedition against the Goguryeo kingdom. Wei Zheng boldly criticized the plan, predicting its failure and warning against the potential loss of lives and resources. Initially angry, Li Shimin eventually recognized the wisdom in Wei Zheng's counsel and aborted the campaign, a decision that likely spared the Tang Dynasty considerable strife and difficulty.

This relationship highlights the importance of dissent in governance and reflects the Confucian ideal that a wise ruler listens to and values honest, even if harsh, advice. Wei Zheng's critiques and suggestions were often compiled in the "Wei Zheng's Ten Thoughts on Governance", a document that Li Shimin requested from him to serve as a guide for future rulers on governance and moral conduct.

Wei Zheng gathered and presented ten recommendations to Emperor Taizong for wise and ethical governance, focusing on moral integrity, pragmatic administration, and the welfare of the people, all of which were

aimed at strengthening the dynasty and ensuring its long-term stability. It can serve as a boilerplate for all rulers for sound governance.

1. Appointing the Right Officials: Select officials based on their abilities and moral character, not merely their connections or background.
2. Listening to Honest Advice: Value accepting and encouraging straightforward and sincere advice from subordinates, even if it is critical.
3. Avoiding Flattery: Warn about the dangers of flattery and sycophancy, which can mislead rulers and lead to poor decision-making.
4. Maintaining Humility: Maintain humility, be open to self-reflection, and recognize one's own faults, which can strengthen rule.
5. Ensuring Justice in Punishments: Ensure that punishments and rewards are justly and fairly administered to maintain order and respect for the law.
6. Reducing Taxes and Corvée: Reduce burdensome taxes and forced labor to avoid overburdening the people, which fosters public support and stability.
7. Caring for the People's Welfare: Prioritize the basic needs and happiness of the populace.
8. Promoting Education: Promote educational policies to lead to a more enlightened and capable administration.
9. Preventing Corruption: Vigorously combat corruption within the government to maintain integrity and trustworthiness.
10. Practicing Frugality: Practice frugality to set a moral example for the empire and avoid the depletion of state resources.

In 643 A.D., the candid and daring Wei Zheng passed away. Emperor Taizong of Tang was deeply saddened and, with tears in his eyes, mourned by saying:

"Just as a bronze mirror can be used to straighten one's clothes and hat; history can be used as a mirror to understand the rise and fall of dynasties; a person can serve as a mirror to clarify right and wrong. With Wei Zheng's death, I have lost such a mirror!"

——Zhenguan Zhengyao, Volume 2, On Employing the Worthy

Wei Zheng often spoke with painful honesty, touching the deeper thoughts of Emperor Taizong. Wei Zheng's bold directness and Emperor Taizong's readiness to accept criticism complemented each other, becoming a model of the monarch-minister relationship in feudal society and leaving a valuable lesson for future generations.

14.4 Magnificance of the Prime Tang Dynasty

From 618 to 907 A.D., the Tang Dynasty illuminated Chinese history as one of its most glorious eras, distinguished by its remarkable achievements in culture, economics, and politics. Militarily, it extended its reach into Mongolia, Central Asia, and Korea, establishing a vast empire that facilitated cultural exchanges and diplomatic relations with regions as diverse as Japan, Korea, the Persian Empire, and various Central Asian states. This period is celebrated for its monumental contributions to the arts, literature, and the broad cultural development of China, profoundly influencing not just the region but neighboring countries as well.

The Dynasty significantly refined its political system from the meritocratic foundations laid by the Sui Dynasty. The expansion of the civil service examination system allowed for the selection of officials based on their knowledge and abilities, rather than familial connections, fostering an effective and less corrupt bureaucracy. This system, noted for its sophistication and efficacy, is regarded as a model of governance in Chinese history. It minimized corruption and promoted fairness, enabling individuals from diverse social backgrounds to serve in government.

The Tang government was structured into three main branches: the central government, local administrations, and the censorate. At the top, the emperor wielded absolute power but was advised by a council known as the "Three Departments and Six Ministries", which oversaw civil service, finance, rites, military, justice, and public works. Local governance extended down to provinces, prefectures, and counties, each staffed with officials who implemented central policies across the empire.

Additionally, the censorate functioned as an oversight body, monitoring government officials at all levels to check corruption and ensure adherence to the law. This robust and relatively transparent administrative framework allowed the Tang Dynasty to effectively control a vast and diverse empire, underpinning its economic prosperity and cultural achievements.

The Tang era experienced a period of significant economic and technological development that contributed to its status as one of the most prosperous empires of the medieval world. The adoption of innovative farming techniques and the widespread use of the heavy plow substantially improved yields and agricultural efficiency. Water-powered mills and irrigation systems were also developed, enhancing food production and supporting larger populations. Advancements in metallurgy and

artwork boosted the production and value of silk and porcelain among other things, which became highly prized both domestically and internationally.

Commerce flourished with the Silk Road reaching its zenith as a major conduit for international trade. Merchants traded silk, tea, spices, and ceramics, connecting China with distant markets across Asia, the Middle East, and even parts of Europe. This trade not only brought wealth into the empire but also facilitated cultural exchanges and influenced global economic patterns. Moreover, its approach to monetary policy was forward-thinking, marked by the introduction of paper money. This innovation helped to stimulate commerce and manage the large-scale economy more efficiently, laying foundational aspects for modern economic systems.

The Dynasty marked a cultural zenith in Chinese history, with profound advancements in literature, art, and science. Poets like Li Bai and Du Fu achieved legendary status, their works enduring as cherished treasures. This era also saw innovations in the visual arts, particularly noted for the development of Tang sancai ceramics, a type of tricolored glazed pottery.

Literature during this period reached unprecedented heights, known for its refined parallel prose and structured regulated poetry. The era's literary brilliance was epitomized by figures such as the "Four Greats of the Early Tang" (Wang Bo, Yang Jiong, Lu Zhaolin, Luo Binwang) and later luminaries like Chen Ziang, Cen Shen, and Wang Wei. The period also saw contributions from Li Shangyin and Du Mu during its later stages, all of whom enriched the Chinese literary canon with works that combined elegant structure with rich, varied content and expansive poetic imagery. Compared to the styles of the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern

Dynasties, Tang literature, while maintaining strict forms and rhythmic beauty, evolved to include less ornate rhetoric, focusing more on depth and diversity of meaning. Additionally, the Tang Dynasty heralded the invention of woodblock printing, a revolutionary development that greatly enhanced the spread and accessibility of knowledge, further enriching the cultural fabric of the period.

International exchange reached unprecedented levels, cementing China's status as a cosmopolitan empire. The Silk Road, both overland and maritime, thrived as a conduit for not only goods like silk, spices, and ceramics but also for cultural and intellectual exchange. Chang'an, the capital, became a global hub, attracting scholars, merchants, and diplomats from across Asia, the Middle East, and even farther afield. This period witnessed the introduction of Islam, Nestorian Christianity, and Zoroastrianism into China, reflecting the dynasty's openness to foreign cultures and religions. Moreover, Chinese Buddhist monks, including the famous Xuanzang, traveled to India to retrieve sacred texts, further enriching China's religious and philosophical landscape. These interactions facilitated the exchange of ideas, technology, and artistic styles, profoundly influencing Tang art, literature, and statecraft, and leaving a lasting legacy on the broader Silk Road culture.

Japan sent envoys in dozens of batches to China, a practice known as Kentōshi. These missions, which occurred primarily during the 7th to 9th centuries during the Tang Dynasty, were pivotal in transmitting Tang cultural, technological, and political innovations to Japan. The envoys, consisting of scholars, monks, and students, absorbed various aspects of Tang advancements, including Chinese literature, Buddhist practices, administrative techniques, and artistic styles. This deep cultural exchange significantly shaped the development of Japan's Nara and Heian periods,

leading to profound influences in Japanese governance, religion, art, and societal norms, effectively marking a period of extensive Sinicization in Japanese history.

The enduring magnificence and prosperity of the Tang Dynasty have left an indelible mark on China and the world, fostering a legacy of cultural richness that remains a subject of admiration and study to this day. Despite these significant achievements, the Tang Dynasty ultimately succumbed to internal strife, corruption, and rebellion, with the An Lushan Rebellion marking a notable period of decline. Nevertheless, the legacy of the Tang Dynasty's golden age continued to profoundly influence Chinese arts, culture, and governance long after its fall.

14.5 The Tumultuous Tides of Buddhism: Embraced and Spurned

Buddhism, having been introduced into China during the late Western Han period, was widely spread during the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern Dynasties. The Indian monk Kumarajiva, with the support of the then Prince Yao Xing of the small Later Qin kingdom (384 - 417 A.D., paralleled the Jin Dynasty), formed a translation team of over two thousand people in Chang'an, translating 74 Buddhist scriptures totaling 384 volumes. He is revered as the first patriarch of the Chan (Zen) school in Chinese Buddhism. During this time, it became fashionable among scholars to discuss Buddhist teachings, and an increasing number of the impoverished joined the monastic community, leading to the widespread construction of temples and pagodas across the country.

Emperor Wu of Liang Kingdom (502 - 557 A.D.), a descendant of Xiao He, the prime minister of the Western Han, was intelligent and well-

learned from a young age. During the Southern Qi period, he held the post of Governor of Yong Province and achieved multiple military successes, later founding the Southern Liang through a peaceful transition of power. During his 48-year reign, he was diligent, encouraged open speech, and practiced frugality. However, in his later years, he became excessively indulged in Buddhism, deeply engrossed in its doctrines to the extent of renouncing worldly life multiple times, leading the court to spend substantial sums to return him from monastic life. He found theoretical justification in the "Mahaparinirvana Sutra" for monks to adopt a vegetarian diet, setting a precedent that became a tradition in Chinese-transmitted Buddhism. He abstained from meat and female company, demanding the entire country to follow suit, ultimately leading to neglect of state affairs and the rise of corrupt officials. This culminated in his death from starvation during the rebellion led by Hou Jing. Therefore, the periodic suppression of Buddhism had its objective reasons, but religious policy never quite found a delicate balance between leniency and strict prohibition.

The Tang Dynasty, asserting its descent from Laozi, emphasized its noble lineage and thus favored Taoism over other religions. Emperor Gaozu, Li Yuan, once issued a decree to abolish Buddhism, despite his wife, Empress Dugu, a devout Buddhist from a prestigious family. Emperor Taizong continued his father's policies, aiming to consolidate imperial rule through the indigenous ideologies of Confucianism and Taoism. Initially, he was ideologically opposed to Buddhism, praising the Grand Historian Fu Yi's disdain for Buddhism with the words: "Buddhism is but charlatanry from the barbarians, dazzling their lands. The misguided and deviant people of China take the mysterious talks of Zhuangzi and Laozi to dress it up in illusory terms and seduce the simple and vulgar. It misleads the people and harms the state. It is not that I am ignorant, but

I simply despise its teachings." In the second year of his reign, he warned his ministers, citing the example of Emperor Wu of Liang and his sons who were devoted to Buddhism, resulting in the destruction of their state and family.

Therefore, Taizong strictly controlled Buddhist temples and monasteries and tightly regulated the monks. However, as an enlightened ruler, he maintained a balance by suppressing without abolishing Buddhism. He gradually recognized Buddhism's role in stabilizing society and admired the thoughts and cultivation of several highly virtuous monks, thus stating, with no shortage of compliment for a leading Buddhist monk, "The Li family used to rule the country with Taoism, but now Buddhism opens another gate for us." Both Emperor Taizong and his successor, Emperor Gaozong, respected and honored the Buddhist monk Xuanzang, supporting his journey to the Buddhist heartlands in India and his efforts in translating Buddhist scriptures.

The eminent monk Xuanzang journeyed to India to seek authentic Buddhist scriptures in order to clarify the diverse and conflicting interpretations among various Buddhist sects. Xuanzang spent 17 years traveling across India, studying with various teachers, and engaging in debates with local scholars. His profound knowledge and insights made him famous throughout the Brahmanic world. Upon his return, he was grandly received by Emperor Taizong of Tang. Although Emperor Taizong admired the governance of Yao and Shun, and revered the indigenous philosophies of Taoism and Confucianism in opposition to Buddhism, he appreciated elegant discourse and faith-based integrity of some leading monks. He especially valued Xuanzang's firsthand knowledge of the customs and cultures brought back from the Western Regions. Both Taizong and his successor, Emperor Gaozong, repeatedly encouraged Xuanzang to

renounce monastic life and take a government post to help implement strategies in the Western Regions, but Xuanzang steadfastly refused, dedicated to promoting Buddhism.

Emperor Taizong, as a rare enlightened emperor, supported Xuanzang in establishing a translation institute in Chang'an, where he led the translation of voluminous and significant Buddhist texts. Xuanzang also supervised the construction of the Great Wild Goose Pagoda in Chang'an, which served as a repository for Buddhist scriptures and treasures. During the translation process, a significant number of contemporary Taoist terms were incorporated, and Chinese philosophical ideas were referenced, paving the way for the localization of Buddhism.

Xuanzang further orally transmitted his observations from his travels through various countries, which his disciples compiled into the twelve-volume "Great Tang Records on the Western Regions". This work has been an essential resource for studying the ancient history, religious history, and international relations of Central and South Asia. Additionally, at the imperial behest, Xuanzang translated classical Chinese texts, including the "Tao Te Ching", into Sanskrit to spread them in India. In Chinese history, Xuanzang stands as an exemplary figure in cultural exchange between China and the world. His patriotic spirit and significant contributions to Buddhism have led Lu Xun to praise him as "the backbone of the Chinese nation" and a messenger of world peace.

As international interactions deepened during the prosperous Tang period, a convergence of various religions occurred, with Islam, Nestorian Christianity, and Zoroastrianism being introduced into China. However, from the Northern and Southern Dynasties through to the late Tang Dynasty, Buddhism experienced a dramatic rise and fall, influenced by the favor of the imperial authority. This began with emperors like Taiwu of

Northern Wei, Wu of Northern Zhou, and Wuzong of Tang, who implemented harsh policies against Buddhism. Only the Chan (Zen) school of Mahayana Buddhism, introduced to China by Bodhidharma, gradually flourished in the south due to its principle of "no established doctrines", which facilitated personal cultivation and aligned well with local folk beliefs.

The sinicized Chan school profoundly impacted Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asian countries. This influence was due primarily to three factors: the Tang Dynasty's predominant adherence to Taoism, lessons learned from previous dynasties, and the monks' significant holdings of tax-exempt farmland and copper utensils. Local magnates exploited these policy loopholes by affiliating with monasteries, and many individuals became monks to evade corvée labor, significantly reducing the state's revenue and diminishing the populace's willingness to engage in military campaigns. Later, the inherently fierce Mongol troops, once dominators of the Eurasian continent, withdrew from the historical stage as their acceptance of Buddhism led them to become more temperate, losing their interest in conquest and abhorring slaughter.

14.6 The Collapse of Tang Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty, lasting 289 years from 618 to 907 A.D., experienced considerable fluctuations in fortune. This span included a 15-year interlude when Wu Zetian, China's first female emperor, renamed the state to Zhou from 690 to 705 A.D. Despite this, historians consider her reign as part of the continuous rule of the Li Tang Dynasty, which saw a total of 21 emperors.

The early Tang period was marked by prosperity during the reigns of Emperor Taizong (Li Shimin) with his "Reign of Zhenguan" and Emperor Gaozong with his "Reign of Yonghui". The zenith of the Tang was symbolized by Emperor Xuanzong (Li Longji)'s "Kaiyuan Era". However, the An Lushan Rebellion in the mid-8th century triggered the dynasty's gradual decline. The rebellion severely weakened the central government and led to the loss of control over regional military governors or warlords. These warlords, granted considerable autonomy to fight off the rebellion, continued to grow in power and influence, undermining central authority.

The late Tang period was rife with corruption and inefficacy, exacerbated by powerful eunuchs such as Yang Guozhong and Gao Lishi, favored by Emperor Xuanzong. The emperors, often too young, naive, or senile, let the palace and eunuchs disrupt governance. Extravagant court life and fiscal difficulties led to heavy taxation, burdening the populace and sparking widespread rebellions. The Huang Chao Rebellion, which occurred from 874 to 884 A.D., was a pivotal and devastating peasant revolt during the late Tang Dynasty. Led by Huang Chao, a salt trader who had previously failed the imperial examinations, the rebellion was fueled by widespread economic distress, heavy taxation, and corruption within the bureaucracy. As discontent grew among the peasantry, Huang Chao amassed a large following and led his forces across several provinces, capturing cities and gaining significant control over large regions of China.

The rebellion reached its peak when Huang Chao captured the Tang capital, Chang'an, in 880 A.D., declaring himself emperor of a new regime. However, his rule was short-lived as Tang loyalists, with the help of regional warlords, eventually recaptured Chang'an in 883 A.D. The rebellion was suppressed the following year, but it left the Tang

Dynasty severely weakened, with diminished control over the provinces and unable to fully recover. The widespread destruction and chaos wrought by the Huang Chao Rebellion accelerated the decline of the Tang Dynasty, setting the stage for its eventual fall and the subsequent period of fragmentation known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms.

By the late 9th century, the Tang Dynasty could no longer manage the escalating crises. External threats exploited these internal weaknesses, forcing the government to deploy troops on both fronts - to suppress internal uprisings and fend off invasions, worsening the people's suffering. Unable to recover from these successive blows, the dynasty met its end when Zhu Wen, a former rebel leader turned military governor, deposed the last Tang emperor in 907 A.D., establishing his own Later Liang and initiating the period of disunity known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. This marked the fragmentation of China into various short-lived states each ruled by different warlords, signaling the complete collapse of the Tang Dynasty.

14.7 Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms

The Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period was a tumultuous era in Chinese history that spanned from 907 to 960 A.D., following the collapse of the Tang Dynasty. This period was characterized by political fragmentation and continuous warfare among regional warlords. The name of the period derives from the five dynasties that successively claimed the mandate of the imperial rule in the north - Later Liang, Later Tang, Later Jin, Later Han, and Later Zhou - and the ten more stable kingdoms that existed concurrently in the south.

The northern dynasties were generally short-lived and plagued by constant military coups and assassinations as warlords vied for power. In contrast, the southern kingdoms, including Wu, Southern Tang, Former Shu, Later Shu, Jingnan, Wuyue, Min, Chu, Southern Han, and Northern Han, experienced relatively more stability and cultural flourishing. These kingdoms managed to preserve many aspects of Tang administration and culture, which eventually facilitated the cultural and administrative reunifications under the succeeding Song Dynasty.

The Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period was marked by significant military and political upheaval but also witnessed considerable cultural advancements, including developments in painting, literature, and the continuation of the civil service examination system. The era laid important groundwork for the political consolidation and cultural renaissance of the Song Dynasty, which followed and brought about significant advancements in technology, philosophy, and arts.

Zhu Wen initially joined the peasant rebellion led by Wang Xianzhi and Huang Chao, later defecting to the Tang forces. For his role in suppressing Huang Chao's forces, Emperor Xizong of Tang awarded him the name "Quanzhong" and promoted him to the military governor of Xuanwu, later further elevating him to King of Liang. Centered in Henan, Zhu Wen gradually became the most powerful warlord at the end of the Tang Dynasty. After seizing control of the Central Plains, Zhu Wen forced Emperor Zhaozong of Tang to relocate to Luoyang and soon killed him along with loyalists to the Tang royal family. He then installed Zhaozong's 13-year-old son, Li Zhu, as Emperor Aidi of Tang.

In 907, Zhu Wen deposed Aidi through abdication, declared himself emperor, established the Later Liang, and renamed the era as Kaiping, marking the start of the "Later Liang".

From the establishment of Later Liang, the Central Plains region (mainly including North China and upper-middle reaches of the Yellow River) witnessed the most powerful forces, sequentially experiencing the rule of Later Liang, Later Tang, Later Jin, Later Han, and Later Zhou, with Kaifeng or Luoyang as their capitals. Regions like Huainan, both Zhejiangs, Hunan, Lingnan, and Jiannan saw local warlords establishing their own states, occasionally engaging in opportunistic warfare to seize territories; Vietnam eventually gained independence from China. Six years after declaring himself emperor, Zhu Wen was assassinated by his son Zhu Yougui in a succession dispute. Another son, Zhu Youzhen, avenged his father by forcing Zhu Yougui to commit suicide and then ascended the throne in Kaifeng as the last emperor of Later Liang. Loyal to the Tang dynasty, the military governor of Hedong and Prince of Jin, Li Keyong, and his son Li Cunxu, who eventually succeeded, continued to contest Zhu Wen's forces. Li Cunxu conquered Later Liang in 923, establishing Later Tang as Emperor Zhuangzong. Zhuangzong, who neglected state affairs in favor of favoritism towards entertainers and eunuchs, was assassinated two years later. Li Keyong's adopted son, Li Siyuan, succeeded as Mingzong. After Mingzong's death in 933, his adopted son Li Congke ascended as Min Emperor but was overthrown by another of Mingzong's adopted sons, Li Congke, who declared himself the last emperor.

The reason for detailing the frequent changes of emperors at the beginning of the Five Dynasties is to illustrate that the fragmented forces in China could not be united through treaties to achieve peace. Warlords and grassroots heroes constantly battled for territorial control, relentlessly pursuing dominance to unify the entire country under one ruler, at any cost. This chaos shattered the established social order, from the rural

fields to the royal courts, with those dissatisfied with the status quo stirring unrest, striving for a day to rise and fight until only one victor remained. In these turbulent times, the truly pitiful were the ordinary people who lived obediently, yet were helplessly exploited.

This period, like the Southern and Northern Dynasties, was similarly tumultuous with frequent warfare, but the aristocratic clans had largely disappeared. The rulers of the Central Plains and areas north of the Yellow River were mostly the Shatuo and Khitan tribes, once ennobled during the Tang dynasty. The cultural atmosphere was heavily martial, with intellectuals generally withdrawing from public life, and a significant portion of Confucian scholars and the populace turning towards Buddhism and Taoism for solace.

Historically, it is observed that emperors who were ambitious in expanding their territories mostly adopted Legalist ideas, those skilled in stabilizing social order favored Confucianism, and those lacking progressive ambition often supported Taoist and Buddhist philosophies. In the late Tang Dynasty on rapid decline, Pi Rixiu continued the "Qi" monism that originated with Wang Chong, viewing Qi as the fundamental essence of the universe and all things within it. He rejected superstitions such as physiognomy and numerology and did not believe in the existence of "Heaven", advocating atheism. This also indicates that Chinese epistemology had not made significant progress since the theory of the Five Elements hundreds of years earlier, and it directed intellectuals toward inner cultivation rather than scientific inquiry. Additionally, he held

people-centered ideas, valuing the lives of the common people and criticizing the Tang court for its political corruption and incompetence.[55]

[55] Lv Simian. "History of Chinese Civilization: The Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties". Chapter 12: "The Diversification and Convergence of Scholarly Thought". Pages 855-914.

15

THE SONG DYNASTY: FROM PROSPERITY TO DOWNFALL

The Song Dynasty, which lasted from 960 to 1279 A.D., was a period of significant cultural, economic, and technological advancement in China. Founded by Emperor Taizu after unifying the country following the tumultuous Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period, the Song Dynasty is often divided into two periods: the Northern Song (960-1127) and the Southern Song (1127-1279).

The Northern Song saw the establishment of a strong central government with a sophisticated bureaucracy largely based on meritocratic examinations, which were refined and expanded during this time. The capital was initially established at Bianjing (modern-day Kaifeng). During this period, China saw significant urbanization, improvements in trade, and advances in technology such as the invention of gunpowder, the magnetic compass, and printing techniques, which greatly enhanced cultural life and the economy.

However, the Northern Song was eventually weakened by military pressures from the Jurchen-led Jin Dynasty, leading to the fall of Bianjing and the retreat of the Song government to the south, where they

established the Southern Song with its capital at Lin'an (modern-day Hangzhou). Despite its reduced territory, the Southern Song continued to flourish culturally and economically, becoming famous for its arts, especially poetry and painting, and further advancements in commerce and technology.

The Song Dynasty ultimately fell to the Mongol invasions under Kublai Khan, who established the Yuan Dynasty. However, the Song period remains renowned for its significant contributions to Chinese culture, technology, and government administration, laying much of the groundwork for modern Chinese civilization.

15.1 The Three Miracles of Peaceful Settlement

The Later Zhou Dynasty (951-960) is marked by the reign of Emperor Chai Rong, acclaimed as the foremost wise ruler among the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms.[56] He harbored grand ambitions, vowing to "expand the realm in ten years, nurture the populace for another ten, and achieve great peace in yet another decade." Building on the foundation laid by his adoptive father, Guo Wei, the founder of Later Zhou, Chai Rong continued to bolster the people's welfare while expanding his dynasty's territory through campaigns in the north and south. Tragically, he died at the age of 38.

The Song Dynasty is renowned for its peaceful resolution of three pivotal events: the usurpation of power, the disbandment of comrades-in-arms after securing the throne, and the Chanyuan Treaty with the Hunnic

[56] Zhu Shaya Zhang, "The Era of Conquering Dynasties" (Chapter 2: The Age of Division): 1998, pages 49-52.

tribes. These solutions are exceptional in the dramatic transformations throughout Chinese history.

In 960, Zhao Kuangyin, the commander of the imperial guards at Chengqiao, a suburb of Bian Liang (now Kaifeng, Henan Province), the capital of the Later Zhou Dynasty, was proclaimed Emperor by his troops. His brother, the deputy commander, along with a group of military officers, draped him in a yellow robe prepared in advance, symbolizing his new status as the "heavenly son". Zhao immediately issued explicit orders: "His Majesty and the Empress Dowager must be fully respected. No court official shall be bullied, and no one may plunder the capital's treasury. Those who obey will be richly rewarded; those who defy will be executed!" He led his troops back to the capital, enforcing strict military discipline and ensuring there was no looting or violence, thus maintaining normalcy in the markets upon their arrival.

This event, known as the "Chenqiao Mutiny", was remarkable for its peaceful nature, as Zhao persuaded the existing emperor of Later Zhou to abdicate without significant violence. Ascending the throne as Emperor Taizu of Song, Zhao initiated reforms to centralize power and diminish the military autonomy of regional warlords, which had destabilized previous dynasties. This strategic and non-violent transition founded the Song Dynasty, marking a nearly bloodless change in power.

Following the mutiny, Zhao hosted a banquet for his military commanders, offering them a choice to either relinquish their military commands for titles and lands or face the consequences of ongoing power struggles. Most generals accepted, transitioning from military leaders to a civilian aristocracy and centralizing authority under the emperor. This event, known as the "Cup of Wine Dismissal of Military Power",

neutralized potential threats from his own generals, preventing future coups and stabilizing the dynasty.

This approach effectively avoided the root causes of warlordism and the turmoil of constant power struggles, a recurring issue in the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period. Moreover, it circumvented the traditional curse of purging loyalists once stability was achieved - a practice likened to "cooking the hunting dog once the hare is caught", in a classic Chinese idiom. Zhao's actions are celebrated as a major innovation in Chinese history for stabilizing a founding regime through peaceful means.

In the decade that followed, he conquered the myriad regional powers, thereby reunifying China and ending the period of the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms. This ushered in over 300 years of rule by the Song Dynasty under the Zhao family (960-1279), which generally adhered to a basic national policy of prioritizing civil affairs over military power and emphasizing peaceful and cultural development.

In terms of foreign relations, the Song Dynasty's external threats primarily came from the northern Hunnic tribes, which successively rose to power as the Liao and Jin states. After 25 years of warfare, in early 1005, Emperor Zhenzong of Song, Zhao Heng, concluded the Chanyuan Treaty with the Liao state. The two sides agreed on the Bai River as the border, pledging non-aggression and maintaining cordial exchanges. The Song Dynasty presented the Liao with an annual tribute of 100,000 taels of silver and 200,000 bolts of silk.

Although this treaty seemed humiliating and was opposed by many pro-war factions, as well as later criticized by nationalists as an act of cowardly surrender, its positive implications are undeniable. Considering that it secured over a century of peace, avoided countless casualties, and saved considerable military expenses, the treaty was significantly

beneficial. Between relocating the capital southward to avoid disaster and engaging in prolonged battles for dominance, Emperor Zhenzong chose to negotiate and establish the alliance, a decision of considerable political courage. Instead of establishing heavily guarded military boundaries, both parties agreed to set up border markets to foster mutual trade, a profound and lasting innovation of the Chanyuan Treaty. Two points are worth considering here:

1) Without the considerable war expenditures that led to a balance of power, the Liao would not likely have settled peacefully. Therefore, diminishing the aggressor's momentum was a necessary precondition for negotiation. 2) A nation's prosperity inevitably attracts the envy of poorer neighboring countries, presenting several strategic choices.

One is to adopt passive defense measures, such as building fortifications and guarding borders. However, even if a nation is militarily strong enough to prevent invasions, it cannot completely stop desperate immigrants from entering illegally. For example, during Trump's presidency, his highly praised construction of a wall along the US-Mexico border to prevent South American immigrants from entering the US proved to be counterproductive. A second strategy is to launch massive military campaigns to eliminate or expel threats, which, regardless of morality, are resource-intensive. A third option involves military conquest followed by supporting puppet governments or colonization and cultural assimilation, which can more permanently eliminate threats but require comprehensive planning and systematic implementation. This approach risks severe ethnic conflicts and potential independence movements if mismanaged. The fourth option is to offer aid, but this only temporarily alleviates problems and will lead to recurring issues once resources run out, further increasing dependency on external support. The fifth option, creating

kinship ties through alliances or marriages, is unreliable under significant financial incentives. The sixth strategy involves constructive measures, developing aid to foster self-sufficiency and facilitating civilian trade to seek mutual prosperity, thus fundamentally eliminating the motives for intrusion due to developmental disparities.

The Chinese dynasties and the northern nomadic tribes shared a long border, and their confrontations and wars span nearly the entire history of China. For most of that time, the Chinese strategy involved using the Great Wall as a barrier and deploying massive troops for defense, which not only entailed significant national resource expenditure but also could not ensure complete security everywhere. The nomadic tribes' seasonal production methods and their lack of long-term planning, combined with their unruly nature and quick actions, made raiding a part of their routine life. Although historical dynasties exhausted nearly all these strategic measures, what was consistently lacking was a bilateral, constructive plan based on equality and empathy. The Chanyuan Treaty, with its spirit of fraternity, annual tributes, and mutual market exchanges, greatly alleviated objective bilateral conflicts, and the Song Dynasty gradually moved towards a well-governed era.

15.2 The Thrive of Neo-Confucianism

The Song Dynasty enjoyed a long period of governance, characterized by enlightened politics and social stability, with a basic national policy of emphasizing civil affairs over military power. Confucianism ascended to national faith emphasizing on the harmony between earthly and heavenly worlds. As a result, Confucianism saw a significant revival, leading to the formation of a complete philosophical system known as Neo-

Confucianism or Li Xue (School of Principle). This school attracted a gathering of great scholars, starting with the Northern Song's Zhou Dunyi, Shao Yong, Zhang Zai, Cheng Hao, and Cheng Yi, followed by the Southern Song's Yang Shi, Zhu Xi, Chai Zhongxing, Lu Jiuyuan, and Lin Xiyi. It was founded by the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao and Cheng Yi), and brought to culmination by Zhu Xi, whose teachings, along with those of the Cheng brothers, are collectively referred to as Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism. As a form of moral theology, Neo-Confucianism is concerned with the philosophical inquiry into "what makes a person truly human", tracing its ideas back to the heart-mind Confucianism of Zisi and Mencius, thus also known as New Confucianism. It is a typical form of idealism, attempting to explain the relationship between individual psychological phenomena and natural cosmic occurrences, and linking the two to guide the improvement of social phenomena.

Mainstream Chinese philosophers, holding a humanistic worldview, rarely delve into natural sciences to validate social sciences such as psychology and sociology; instead, they focus on individual moral cultivation and social order. Consequently, no matter how rigorous their reasoning, once their foundational assumptions are challenged by the truths of natural science, their methodologies and conclusions risk being undermined, leading them to remain superficially engaged in philosophical dialectics and hollow moral preaching. Neo-Confucianism advocates that human nature and heart should align with heavenly principles, particularly emphasizing human subjectivity and self-awareness. In fact, since the Han Dynasty, when Dong Zhongshu articulated the "cosmic resonance between heaven and humanity" and promoted the "Three Bonds and Five Constants", leading to the dismissal of all non-Confucian schools, the diversity of thought seen during the Pre-Qin era did not return. Efforts in

the intellectual field have since been aimed at combining the social conditions of the time with Pre-Qin philosophy, nurturing or grafting new branches on the trunk of early philosophy. Confucianism has always been evolving, yet its practice has gradually strayed from the path of Confucius and Mencius during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods. Subsequent orthodox Confucianism has taken it upon itself to maintain social and political harmony, eschewing a mix of Yin-Yang, Five Elements, divination, Buddhist thought, and other eclectic ideas. Using traditional dialectics, it emphasizes individual moral cultivation and actively develops political and social ideas based on familial and hierarchical principles, interweaving divine, royal, paternal, and marital authorities into a versatile moral theology system.

"Unity in Divergence" is a core proposition of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, typifying a form of monistic idealism. The concept of "unity" suggests that all phenomena in the universe and human society can be traced back to one underlying principle, while "divergence" refers to the myriad specific manifestations presented by the subjects that carry this principle. "Principle" or "Heavenly Principle" is the essence, origin, and operational law of all things, which, in society, is manifested as ethical and moral relationships among people. Most Neo-Confucian scholars contrast human desires with Heavenly Principles. To avoid absurdity in common reasoning and make their arguments coherent, they define "human desires" as desires that exceed the necessities for maintaining individual life. They elevate the "Three Bonds and Five Constants" to the level of fundamental societal operations, thereby creating a set of norms that constrain individual behavior, judge, and ensure adherence to these Heavenly Principles.

Following this logic, the moral stance of "preserving Heavenly Principles and eliminating human desires" becomes viable. A minority of Neo-Confucian scholars, more insightful, focus on the unity of human desires and Heavenly Principles. Starting from a stance against personal desires, they believe that the expansion of selfish desires contravenes the nature endowed by Heavenly Principles. Therefore, on the basis of understanding these principles, they advocate for self-restraint and cultivation to return to one's true nature, ultimately reaching a state of utmost benevolence and righteousness. This shows that despite the philosophical community's praise of its system's perfection, Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism fundamentally elaborates on the "Way of the Great Learning" from Confucianism, providing detailed interpretations of the "Three Guidelines and Eight Items" introduced in the "Great Learning". Its innovations are largely reflected in its development of Chan (Zen) Buddhism, a feature not present in the Pre-Qin philosophers. The so-called "Three Guidelines" are to illuminate virtue, love the people, and aim at the ultimate good; the "Eight Items" are rectifying the heart, sincerity, investigating things, achieving knowledge, cultivating the self, ordering the family, governing the state, and pacifying the world. Zhu Xi extracted the "Great Learning" chapter from Confucius and his disciples' "Book of Rites", compiled it with the "Analects", "Mencius", and "Doctrine of the Mean" into the "Four Books", and provided detailed commentaries on these texts, elevating the "Great Learning" as the foremost of the "Four Books", thereby earning the title of a great Confucian scholar of the Song Dynasty. Additionally, he highly revered Mencius's advocacy for familial intimacy, righteousness between ruler and minister, distinction between husband and wife, order between the old and the young, and trust among friends. The subsequent concept of "Four Dimensions and Eight Virtues" also

follows from the "Three Guidelines and Eight Items", where "Four Dimensions" originate from the "Book of Guanzi" consisting of ritual, righteousness, integrity, and shame, and "Eight Virtues" summarized by Sun Yat-sen as loyalty, filial piety, benevolence, love, trust, righteousness, harmony, and peace.

The "Three Bonds and Five Constants" represent the crowning achievement of Confucianism in practical governance, forming the basis of Confucian ethical norms and exerting a profound influence on Chinese culture, especially on moral concepts, particularly prevalent during the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties. The origins trace back to Confucius's principles of "ruler as ruler, minister as minister, father as father, son as son". The concept was initially proposed by Ma Rong, a Han Dynasty scholar dedicated to the study of Confucianism.[57] Its explicit content and norms were definitively shaped in the work "Luxuriant Dew of the Spring and Autumn Annals" by Dong Zhongshu of the Western Han. The "Three Bonds" refer to the moral relationships of "the ruler as the guide of the minister, the father as the guide of the son, the husband as the guide of the wife," delineating the hierarchical relationships between ruler, father, husband and minister, son, wife; the "Five Constants" as behavioral norms are "benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity", emphasizing individual character and moral cultivation.

What are the Three Bonds? They refer to the ruler and minister, father and son, husband and wife. The Six Relations include paternal uncles,

[57] (Wei Dynasty) He Yan, (Song) Xing Bing: "Commentaries and Subcommentaries on the Analects", edited and annotated by (Qing) Ruan Yuan in the "Thirteen Classics Commentaries and Subcommentaries", Zhonghua Book Company, 1980, page 2463.

brothers, clan members, maternal uncles, elders, and friends. Therefore, the "Hanwen Jia" states: "The ruler is the bond for the minister, the father for the son, the husband for the wife." It also says: "Respect paternal uncles and brothers, let the Way of the Six Relations be practiced; maternal uncles have righteousness, clan members have order, siblings have affection, elders have respect, friends have old bonds."

What are bonds and orders? A bond is like a net; an order is like a rule. The greater are the bonds, the lesser are the orders. They serve to align and organize human relationships. Everyone possesses the nature of the Five Constants and has a heart capable of love, thus bonds and orders transform society, like a net structured with bonds and orders throughout. The Book of Poetry says: "Diligent was King Wen, organizing all under heaven with his bonds and orders."

——Ban Gu, "Gerneral Discourse of White Tiger Hall"
(Eastern Han Dynasty)

Modern educator Cai Yuanpei endorsed the fundamental concepts of the Three Bonds and Five Constants but emphasized the equality and reciprocity of rights and duties between subjects:

The term "bond" refers to the rope, in contrast to the meshes in a net. The Three Bonds are integral to governance. If a state has a sovereign, then the sovereign acts as the bond and the ministers as the meshes; if a household has a head, then the husband/father is the bond, and the wife/children are the meshes. This framework is designed to unify authority within various affairs and is distinct from the practices of mutual interaction, which are governed by the Five Relationships.

Therefore, if the ruler is benevolent, the minister should be loyal, but this does not mean the minister must remain loyal if the ruler is unkind. If the father is affectionate, the child should be filial, but this does not justify the father being unaffectionate while expecting filial piety. If the husband is just, the wife should be compliant, but this does not entitle the husband to be unjust while expecting compliance. Yanzi stated, "If the sovereign must die for the state, then let him die." Confucius advised, "Accept lighter punishments, flee from severe ones." Contrary to the common belief that a ruler or father can demand the death of a minister or son, who must then comply, such expectations not only violate the Five Relationships but also undermine the Three Bonds.[58]

15.3 An Era of Prosperity

The Song Dynasty, reigning from 960 to 1279 A.D., is celebrated for its profound impacts on Chinese civilization through remarkable advancements in technology, culture, economics, and governance. Technologically, this period saw the invention of gunpowder, the magnetic compass, and movable type printing, which revolutionized military strategies, enhanced maritime navigation, and improved knowledge dissemination, respectively. The introduction of paper money, known as "Jiaozi", facilitated trade across vast distances and enhanced wealth accumulation.

In terms of governance, the entire dynasty embraced liberalism accentuated with demilitarization. It implemented a highly structured bureaucracy based primarily on merit, demonstrated by the refined imperial examination system. This system allowed for the selection and promotion

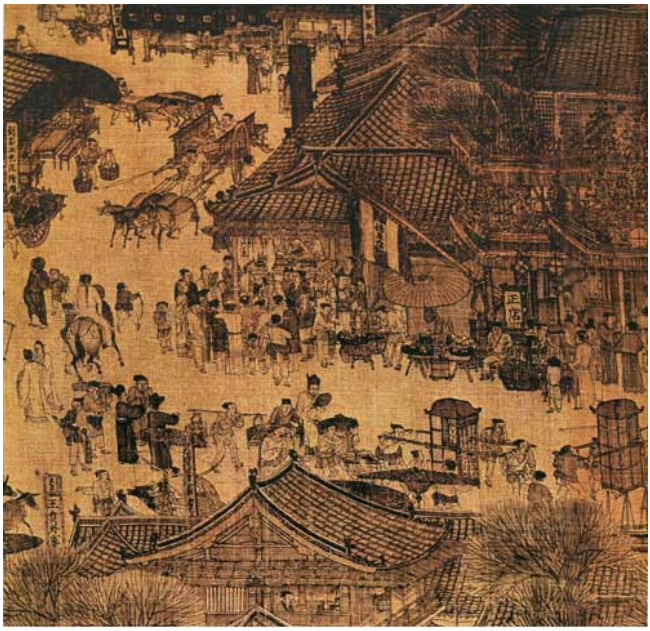
[58] Cai Yuanpei: "Biographical Sketch": "Records of Mr. Cai Jie Min's Words and Deeds", Shanghai Zhonghua Book Company, 1920, pages 6-7.

of officials based on intellectual capabilities rather than aristocratic birth, helping to stabilize and strengthen the administration of the empire. Compared to other dynasties, the Song experienced fewer palace intrigues and struggles among warlords.

Several emperors of the Song Dynasty distinguished themselves with significant accomplishments. Emperor Zhenzong, for instance, governed with diligence, inaugurating the "Peaceful Era of Xianping" in the Northern Song. He heeded the advice of Prime Minister Kou Zhun to personally lead a combat against the Liao invaders in the northeast. From a position of strength, he negotiated the Chanyuan Treaty with the Liao, establishing a lasting peace for both realms. Emperor Renzong enlisted esteemed ministers such as Fan Zhongyan, Lü Yijian, Fu Bi, Bao Zheng, and Han Qi to enact the Qingli Reforms, and he deployed the formidable general Di Qing to suppress the insurgencies of the southern barbarians and confrontations with the Western Xia, elevating the economy and society to unprecedented heights. Emperor Yingzong tasked Sima Guang with supervising the compilation of the "Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance", a monumental historical work arranged in chronological order, which took 19 years to complete and encompassed 294 volumes.

Culturally, the Song Dynasty was a golden age for Chinese arts and literature. The period saw new heights in poetry with poets like Su Shi and Li Qingzhao, celebrated for their emotional depth and artistic elegance. Innovations in painting and calligraphy, particularly in landscape and portrait works, were highly valued for their philosophical and aesthetic qualities. The famous painting "Along the River During the Qingming Festival" by Zhang Zeduan vividly depicted the thriving cultural landscape along the Bian River in the capital, Dongjing (Kaifeng).

Figure 15-1 A Portion of Along the River During the Memorial Festival



The handicraft and commercial industries of the Song Dynasty were extremely advanced, and it also saw the emergence of the world's earliest paper money, known as "Jiaozi". This naturally coincided with the flourishing of cities. The large painting "Along the River During the Memorial Festival" by the Northern Song painter Zhang Zeduan exquisitely depicted the beautiful natural scenery and the thriving cultural scenes along the banks of the Bian River in the capital Dongjing (Kaifeng). (Figure 15-1) Beyond the advanced textile and dyeing industries, porcelain kilns, both government and privately operated, were widespread across the country, where exquisite skills in firing and glazing were perfectly combined with fine art craftsmanship. The popular trends in calligraphy and painting also drove the paper-making industry towards perfection. It goes

without saying that the Song Dynasty's goods were marketed to 58 overseas countries via both land and maritime routes. "Foreign markets" were established at major ports, specializing in foreign goods. The government enacted the first foreign trade law in Chinese history - the "Guangzhou Maritime Customs Law".

Given the advanced level of technological and commercial development, Joseph Needham - the British scholar who is known for his work on the History of Chinese Science and Technology - accredited the Song Dynasty was nearly ripe for industrial revolution that China narrowly missed. The reasons why China missed the opportunity for the Industrial Revolution, forming the basis of the widely debated "Needham's Puzzle", remains a topic for further exploration.

15.4 Dramatic Reforms

By the time Emperor Shenzong ascended the throne in 1067, the Song Dynasty faced severe financial strain due to its expansive and costly bureaucracy, alongside continuous military expenditures to repel invasions. The agrarian-based economy was under significant pressure as the tax burden on peasants intensified. Additionally, the state's reliance on conscripted labor for public works worsened the plight of the common people. Moreover, the bureaucratic elite, often more engrossed in literary pursuits than practical governance, managed the state ineffectively.

Recognizing these challenges, Wang Anshi's acute judgment and his proposals for benefiting the country and rectifying malpractices gained considerable appreciation by the emperor. He was appointed Assistant Counselor and subsequently Chancellor, entrusted with vigorously implementing a series of bold and far-reaching governmental reforms.

These reforms were in response to a host of financial and social challenges, including military threats from northern nomadic tribes, pervasive bureaucratic corruption, and a heavy financial burden on the peasantry that threatened agricultural productivity. His reforms aimed at reversing the entrenched poverty and weakness, with the ultimate goals of enriching the country and strengthening the military. This vigorous social reform movement is historically known as the "Xining Reforms", although it is more popularly referred to as "Wang Anshi's Reforms".

The reforms initiated during the tenure of Chancellor Wang Anshi, aimed at addressing the financial and social challenges of the Song Dynasty, included several key measures:

1. Green Sprouts Policy: Introduced government loans to farmers for buying seeds and equipment, aiming to reduce the burden of usury and increase agricultural productivity.
2. Militia System: Established local militias to reduce the financial and logistical burden of maintaining a large standing army. This system was intended to make local communities more self-reliant in terms of defense.
3. Legal Reforms: Streamlined legal procedures and clarified laws to reduce corruption and ensure quicker, fairer judicial processes.
4. Educational Reforms: Revised the civil service examination system to emphasize practical skills and knowledge relevant to governance, rather than focusing predominantly on Confucian classics.
5. Bureaucratic Oversight: Implemented stricter supervision of government officials, including performance evaluations and more direct control over their appointments and dismissals, to curb corruption and enhance administrative efficiency.

Wang Anshi's reform measures were comprehensive and rapid, spanning politics, economics, the military, and the imperial examinations. To guide and supervise the implementation of these new laws, a special institution - the Regulation Commission of the Three Departments - was established. Within just fifteen years, a torrent of new policies such as the Equal Field System, Green Sprouts Policy, Uniform Land Tax, Market Regulation, Labor Service Exemption, Recruitment System, Community Militia, Military Commissioning, Horse Supply Law, and the Revised Civil Examination were rolled out. The core aim of these reforms was to boost state fiscal revenues through supply-side improvements.

These measures were part of a broader initiative aimed at strengthening the state economically and militarily, while also attempting to create a more equitable society by alleviating the pressures on the lower classes. Despite their potential, these measures, due to the nature of Wang's intentions, quickly increased government revenue but failed to improve the living conditions of the general populace; instead, their burdens grew even heavier. This misalignment of outcomes led to fierce resistance from the conservative scholar-official class, who saw the reforms as an infringement on their traditional privileges and a deviation from Confucian norms. This opposition, coupled with Wang Anshi's haste for success and improper personnel appointments, brought about significant challenges. He faced fierce opposition led by the conservative faction headed by Sima Guang, necessitating difficult decisions by the emperor to balance various forces.

Ultimately, Wang Anshi's loyalty and talent could not stave off the controversies surrounding his reforms. Amidst a whirlpool of factional conflicts between the new and old parties, he resigned from office and soon after fell into depression and passed away. His bold and ambitious

reforms, as grand as they were, flashed briefly before being submerged in the river of history. However, the debates his reforms initiated regarding the role of the state, economic policy, and governance continued to influence Chinese thinking and policy for centuries, underscoring the lasting impact of his efforts despite their apparent failure during his lifetime.

15.5 The Decline of the Song Dynasty

The Song Dynasty adopted a military strategy that prioritized defense over offense, concentrating on internal stability while projecting an appearance of weakness externally. Although the internal political scene was relatively free from factionalism, disturbances from the imperial harem, and social upheaval, the dynasty continually faced significant threats from nomadic tribes north of the Great Wall, despite a century-long truce. Ultimately, this led to a scenario where a civilizationally advanced society was overtaken by these so-called barbarians.

Regrettably, later emperors lacked a sense of crisis, becoming engrossed in arts and leisure, leading to a loss of ambition and indulgence in pleasure. Following the Khitan Liao Dynasty, the Song Dynasty's final years coincided with the rise of the Jurchen Jin Dynasty in the northeast, which repeatedly invaded the Central Plains. They captured Emperors Huizong and Qinzong, an event historically known as the "Humiliation of Jingkang". Under Emperor Gaozong, the Southern Song court was forced to retreat southwards, officially on an inspection tour but effectively fleeing in exile, moving the court temporarily to cities like Nanjing, Yangzhou, and Suzhou. Fortunately, national heroes like Yue Fei and Han Shizhong led military efforts to resist the Jin, allowing the Southern Song

court to maintain a precarious existence in Lin'an, Hangzhou. However, the penchant for indulgence among the court remained unchecked.

In addition to prioritizing civil affairs over military, the decline of the Song Dynasty was also linked to its widespread implementation of the hereditary privilege system, which extended official titles and privileges not just to descendants but also to non-relative associates. This system stifled social vitality, leading to an unchecked expansion of the bureaucratic and noble classes into a massive conservative force. These elites colluded with local strongmen to exploit the populace and annex land. To prevent the dispossessed peasants, who had lost their land and homes, from causing trouble locally, the government opened paths for them to seek amnesty or join the army. For those driven to despair, the opportunity to serve the court was attractive within the traditional value system. However, this led to a situation where, as noted by the scholar Zhang Zai, "the cost of maintaining the army accounted for seven or eight tenths of the empire's resources."

After the Baoyuan period (1038 - 1040 under the reign of Emperor Renzong, Zhao Zhen), the recruitment of soldiers expanded, the imperial clan proliferated, and the number of officials increased annually. Thus, expenditures inevitably had to be compromised. During Emperor Renzong's time, as the era of peace prolonged, powerful officials and wealthy families occupied unlimited fields. They engaged in annexation and fraud, turning these practices into customs, and heavy prohibitions could not stop them. Now, the number of thieves and robbers increases year by year, and the occurrences of arson are likewise more frequent each year. How can we not worry about the disasters and troubles throughout the land?

——From "The Complete Works of Ouyang Wenzhong"

The Song Dynasty indeed had a substantial number of military personnel, but due to prolonged peace, their combat capability had significantly deteriorated. Furthermore, since the time of Emperor Taizu, the implementation of the "rotation system" required military commanders to be frequently rotated and to regularly return to the capital. This effectively prevented military leaders from gaining undue power, ensuring that "generals could not monopolize their troops, and soldiers would not become arrogant and degenerate," to avoid repeating the scenario of seizing the throne as had happened before. However, this undoubtedly weakened the cohesion and coordinated combat capabilities of the troops.

As the Southern Song Dynasty waned under the weight of external threats and internal decay, its final years were marked by desperate struggles and poignant ends. With its capital in Lin'an, now known as Hangzhou, it had been a beacon of cultural and economic prosperity, a dynasty that had risen from the ashes of the Northern Song's demise. Yet, despite its achievements in arts and administration, it was plagued by military vulnerabilities and strategic missteps.

Its troubles began in earnest with the Mongol rise under Genghis Khan and intensified under his successor, Kublai Khan, who envisioned an empire that stretched across the breadth of China. Initially, the Song rulers made a fateful decision to ally with the Mongols to defeat their mutual foe, the Jin Dynasty. This alliance proved catastrophic once the Jin were vanquished in 1234, as the Mongols turned their seasoned armies southward against their former allies.

The Mongol campaign against the Southern Song was relentless and marked by numerous battles that showcased the Mongols' superior military tactics, including their use of gunpowder and sophisticated siege technologies. The Song, for their part, were hobbled by internal strife and

corruption, along with a military leadership that often proved inadequate in the face of the Mongol onslaught. A pivotal moment came with the fall of Xiangyang in 1273, a stronghold that had withstood the Mongols for years. Its loss was a devastating blow, opening the floodgates to the rich heartlands of the Yangtze River basin. The Mongols surged forward, toppling city after city with alarming speed. The end came at the Battle of Yamen in 1279, where the last remnants of the Song military, led by the loyalist general Zhang Shijie, made a final, desperate stand. It was a brutal naval confrontation, one that saw fierce combat and heartbreaking valor. But the might of the Mongol fleet was overwhelming, and the battle concluded with a decisive Mongol victory. In the chaos, the last emperor of the Song, the young Emperor Bing, met a tragic fate, drowning in the sea to escape capture, thus sealing the end of the dynasty.

The aftermath of the Song's collapse was a transformation of the Chinese state under Mongol rule. The Yuan Dynasty, established by Kublai Khan, restructured the governance of China, introducing a system that placed non-Chinese officials in significant positions, fundamentally altering the administrative traditions of the Chinese dynasties. In the years that followed, the legacy of the Song Dynasty - its profound contributions to Chinese culture, technology, and intellectual life - continued to echo through history, influencing subsequent generations. Yet, the dramatic and somber fall of the Southern Song served as a poignant reminder of the impermanence of empires and the relentless tide of history that can sweep them away.

16

TRANSITION FROM YUAN EMPIRE TO MING DYNASTY

During the Southern Song period, the Mongol tribes that had arisen in the north had long occupied half of the Central Plains inhabited by the Han Chinese and continuously invaded the south. After annihilating the Southern Song dynasty, they achieved the unification and control of China. However, their focus solely on conquest and lack of knowledge in state governance meant they failed to win the hearts of the Han people. Under the rule of the Yuan dynasty, ethnic conflicts intensified, and internal struggles for power and profit among the nobility, along with rampant corruption, ultimately led to widespread resistance. Zhu Yuanzhang led a major uprising that eventually drove the Yuan back to the north and restored Han Chinese rule with the establishment of the Ming dynasty.

The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), under the rule of the Zhu family, saw 12 generations in power. Like most new regimes, the imperial court reduced tax burdens on the people and eased political tensions. The court also implemented a rigorous anti-corruption campaign, which gained popular support. Three outstanding achievements were attained during the Ming era: 1) Seven major maritime expeditions that reached as far as the

coast of Africa, consolidating the Indo-Pacific maritime routes - a century before Columbus discovered America. These voyages showcased the unrivaled navigational power of the empire and paralleled the Silk Road on land. The current Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) largely aims to retrace these maritime paths. 2) The establishment and development of Beijing as the magnificent capital, shaping the city's appearance as seen today. 3) The compilation of the 60-volume Yong-le encyclopedia. Despite these accomplishments, the dynasty was plagued by court rivalries and political prosecutions throughout its reign.

16.1 The Dominance of the Mongol Empire over Eurasia

In 1206, Genghis Khan unified the various Mongol tribes and established the Great Mongol State, successively conquering the Western Liao, Western Xia, Khwarazmian, and Jin dynasties. In 1271, Kublai Khan declared himself emperor and officially changed the state title from "Great Mongol State" to "Great Yuan", drawing from the phrase "Great indeed is the Exalted Yuan" in the I Ching, thereby becoming Emperor Shizu of Yuan. The following year, he relocated the royal court from Karakorum on the Mongolian Plateau to Dadu, present-day Beijing, and in 1279 completely eliminated the Southern Song exile regime at the Battle of Yamen. The Prime Minister Lu Xiufu, carrying the imperial jade seal and supporting the 8-year-old last Song Emperor Zhao Bing, heroically leapt into the sea, followed by a hundred thousand troops and civilians who drowned in a mass act of loyalty.

Although this was a conquest of civilization by barbarians, it greatly expanded the territorial map of China. (Figure 16-1) The Yuan dynasty is described in its history as surpassing even the peak periods of the Han,

Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties in its vast reach, stretching from the eastern borders of Liao to the western deserts, north beyond the Yin Mountains and south across the sea. With the transition from feudal states to a system of provinces and counties, the Yuan dynasty's expanse was unparalleled. Some historians do not recognize the Yuan dynasty as a phase of the Chinese civilization because, although its territory covered a vast area of Eurasia, in many places it was merely a conqueror and did not achieve long-term effective rule, and it did not make significant contributions to the enrichment of Chinese civilization.

Figure 16-1 Map of the Yuan Empire



Like any other normadic tribles thriving on horsebacks, the Yuan Dynasty indulged in territorial expansion through military conquest but

was incapable of governance. After unifying China, Kublai Khan did resist the pressure from the majority of Mongol nobles and restored the bureaucratic system of the Song Dynasty. He employed Han Chinese strategists and Confucian scholars such as Liu Bingzhong, Xu Heng, Yao Shu, Hao Jing, and Zhang Wenqian to participate in the new administration, and adopted Han Chinese institutional frameworks and Confucian culture to establish the Imperial Ancestral Temple. To exploit the riches of the Yangtze River Delta, the Yuan dynasty repaired and expanded the Grand Canal. Despite these efforts, the warlike nature of the Mongol dynasty, characterized by cavalry and curved swords, remained unchanged. Continuous wars were fought against the Khanates of Ogedei and Chagatai; rather than governing the vast territories effectively, envoys were sent to demand tributes from neighboring nations. After being rebuffed, Kublai Khan promptly waged wars against Japan, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Java. These wars were costly and fruitless.

Internally, the Yuan court was divided between the Confucian faction led by Crown Prince Zhenjin, who advocated for ending wars to save money, and the financial faction led by Ahagma, who emphasized plundering and extortion to raise funds. Kublai adopted the latter's approach, which exacerbated ethnic tensions and worsened diplomatic relations.

After the early death of Crown Prince Zhenjin, his third son succeeded him as Emperor Chengzong. Chengzong immediately halted foreign wars, reduced taxes on the Yangtze River Delta, reformed the administration with the "Comprehensive Statutes of Institutional Reform", and restricted the power of the imperial princes, significantly easing internal and external conflicts. In 1311, Emperor Renzong, who was well-versed in Han culture, succeeded Emperor Wuzong and revived the civil service examination system, which had been suspended for 75 years. He made Zhu

Xi's commentaries on the "Four Books and Five Classics" compulsory study for the examinations, establishing Neo-Confucianism as the official state doctrine.

Emperor Yingzong followed the advice of the Grand Scholar Wang Yue, continuing ancestral policies with restraint in military actions against the Goryeo Kingdom and implementing the "Zhi-Zhi Reform" aimed at reducing redundant staff and lightening tax burdens, which significantly improved the national situation. However, in 1323, Yingzong was assassinated at the age of 21 in the Incident at Nanpo, just three years after his ascension. The direct cause was his father, Emperor Renzong, breaking the oath of succession agreed with Emperor Wuzong, which was to pass the throne between uncles and nephews. He relocated Wuzong's eldest son to Yunnan and instead appointed his own son as Crown Prince and successor. The underlying reason was that his reforms had threatened the vested interests of the conservative Mongol nobility.

After this, the Yuan dynasty was plagued by frequent internal strife. Zhenjin's eldest grandson, Yesun Temur, marched south from Karakorum, killed the traitors who assassinated Emperor Yingzong, and ascended the throne as Emperor Taiding. In 1328, after the death of Taiding, the throne was passed to his son, Arigaba, who became Emperor Tianshun. That same year, Tugh Temür invaded Dadu and declared himself Emperor Wenzong; his older brother Rinchinbal soon declared himself Emperor Mingzong in Karakorum. Emperor Wenzong, pretending to cede the throne to his brother, poisoned Emperor Mingzong during a meeting and reclaimed the throne. During his four-year reign, Wenzong promoted cultural and Confucian values, established the Kuizhang Pavilion for Confucian scholars to compile the "Great Canon for Governing the World, but

his rule was marred by Yan Temür's arrogant monopolization of power, leading to the dynasty's further decline.

Emperor Huizong, who ascended the throne in 1333 as the eleventh emperor of the Yuan dynasty, had the longest reign, lasting 37 years. By then, the Yuan dynasty was beyond redemption, with internal governance dominated by the powerful chancellor Bayan and external threats from widespread peasant uprisings. After maneuvering to remove Bayan, Huizong took measures such as reforming the corrupt bureaucracy, recruiting talented officials, reducing the salt tax, and ordering the compilation of the histories of the Liao, Jin, and Song dynasties. However, later in his reign, he indulged in luxury and could not escape the fate of a last emperor.

The transition between the Yuan and Ming dynasties in the 14th century was a tumultuous period in Chinese history, marked by severe internal strife and the gradual decline of the Yuan dynasty. Governed by the Mongols, the Yuan dynasty faced numerous challenges, including widespread corruption, administrative inefficiency, and oppressive taxation, further exacerbated by natural disasters. These factors strained the empire significantly and fueled discontent among the Han Chinese population, who suffered under harsh policies that favored the Mongols.

This discontent sparked numerous rebellions throughout China. In 1325, Zhao Chou and Guo Pusa led a rebellion in Henan. The following year, Han Shantong and Liu Futong initiated the White Lotus uprising in Yingzhou, Anhui, which was later joined by Guo Zixing. By 1351, Xu Shouhui utilized the White Lotus movement to start another rebellion in Hubei, establishing the Tianwan regime. However, he was soon killed by Chen Youliang, who then declared himself the Emperor of the Great Han.

In 1353, Zhang Shicheng raised troops in the provinces of Jiangsu and Zhejiang, declaring himself King Cheng and founding the Zhou state.

Amidst these escalating ethnic and class conflicts, along with ongoing power struggles within the Mongol ruling class, a peasant leader named Zhu Yuanzhang emerged as a key figure. Zhu first succeeded Guo Zixing, clearing regional powers in the Yangtze River Delta. His adeptness at capitalizing on the widespread unrest allowed him to gradually build a formidable military base. In 1367, Zhu raised the banner of "expelling the barbarians and restoring China", and launched a northern expedition. He achieved significant victories against the Yuan rulers and ultimately captured their capital, Dadu (modern-day Beijing), in 1368. Following this decisive victory, Zhu Yuanzhang declared himself emperor of China, establishing the Ming dynasty with the reign name Hongwu.

Zhu's ascendancy marked the end of Mongol rule in China and initiated a period of Han Chinese governance and cultural flourishing. However, the remnants of the Yuan dynasty continued to resist under successive emperors like Wuzong and Tianyuan. Emperor Huizong, another Yuan ruler, fled north to the desert and died in Yingchang, Inner Mongolia, in 1370. Despite continued resistance from Yuan successors, they could not avert the dynasty's downfall under the forceful military assaults of the Ming, thus completing the transition and marking the rise of the Ming dynasty as a major power in East Asia.

16.2 Heavy-handed Anti-corruption

In the early years of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), the founder, Emperor Taizu, Zhu Yuanzhang, adopted economic policies of light taxation and corvée labor, promoted the repair of water conservancies,

and encouraged the restoration of agricultural production. Politically, he demanded that officials be diligent and frugal, and he harshly punished corrupt officials. Internationally, he continued campaigns to the north and south to eliminate regional warlord threats, creating the prosperous and stable era known as the "Hongwu Reign".

Zhu, coming from a humble background, was deeply aware of the common people's suffering and despised corrupt officials intensely. Even after becoming emperor, he maintained a disdainful attitude toward officials, paying them very low salaries and requiring them to work almost continuously, with only three days of rest allowed each year and sick leave subject to multiple layers of approval and verification. He was diligent in government affairs, emphasizing strict laws for governing the country and believed he could control the integrity of the entire bureaucratic system through his own efforts. Thus, he established various systems of oversight and inspection, including a secret police force, and placed a "Complaint Drum" outside the Meridian Gate to encourage the public to report injustices, showing no mercy in executing corrupt officials.

He repeatedly warned his officials, "I teach first and punish second; I do not punish without teaching first. If you do not listen and insist on being corrupt, there is only death." He spent two years compiling "The Great Pronouncements", a book that collected extensive regulations against corruption and bribery, and demanded its widespread dissemination. In the 25th year of Hongwu, he also compiled "A Brief Record of Warnings Against Greed", which was distributed nationwide to caution officials at all levels. The Ming Dynasty explicitly classified official corruption as theft, with those found guilty of stealing sixty taels or more sentenced to death, often employing severe tortures such as tendon

extraction, finger cutting, kneecapping, arm amputation, and even the extreme punishment of "flaying and stuffing with lime", where corrupt officials sentenced to death were flayed alive at the "Skin Yard Temple", and their skins stuffed with straw and lime to make "corrupt skin bags" that were hung beside the official seats they once occupied, serving as a dire warning to other officials. The organization and intensity of these measures were unprecedented in history.

Scholars estimate that during Zhu Yuanzhang's 31-year reign, approximately 100,000 to 150,000 corrupt officials were executed, making him the emperor who executed the most corrupt officials in over two thousand years of China's feudal society. Although his efforts achieved "temporary results", they ultimately did not succeed in completely eradicating corruption. His own lament reflects the perplexity he carried to his grave: "Since my accession, I have appointed officials in accordance with ancient laws, spreading them across the country. How could it be that those promoted were loyal and honest at the time of their appointment, but after serving for a while, they all became corrupt and greedy? I thus governed with enlightenment and strict penalties, but still, the officials, both internal and external, found it difficult to maintain their duties, and few ended well while many were executed with their families." This means that he appointed officials across the country in imitation of the ancient sages, each initially loyal and honest, yet why did the majority, over time, disregard the laws and benevolence I established, becoming corrupt and ultimately executed? As a representative of autocratic monarchs, Zhu Yuanzhang could not and refused to recognize that autocracy and corruption are inseparably linked; autocracy inevitably breeds corruption, and corruption relies on autocracy. Autocrats prefer to tolerate or even condone corruption rather than relinquish their unilateral free will. The so-called

"severe punishment to deter greed" is merely a political means to temporarily maintain autocracy. Autocratic dynasties have historically been unable to escape the cycle from the rise of a dynasty to its eventual decline, as expressed by Wang Anshi in his lament: "Alas! The principle of rise and fall has been so since ancient times". (Song Dynasty, Wang Anshi's "Memorial to Ouyang Wenzhong")

To explain the persistent historical challenge of corruption that Zhu Yuanzhang faced during his anti-corruption efforts, Professor Yang Xingpei cited a conversation from the Northern and Southern Dynasties period between Yuwen Tai, who was the prime minister overseeing the administration of the Western Wei dynasty, and his strategist Su Chuo. This dialogue is referred to as Su Chuo's Law - using greed to counter greed, in order to control the disloyalty and divergent ambitions of officials.[59]

Yuwen asked, "On what does a state stand?" Su answered, "On its officials."

Yuwen asked, "How should one employ officials?" Su Chuo answered, "Use greedy officials to counteract greed."

Yuwen asked, "How can greedy officials be used?" Su answered, "If you want others to risk their lives for you, you must offer them benefits. Since you don't have enough money to give them, grant them power instead. Let them use their power to exploit the people, and they can enrich themselves, right?"

Yuwen asked, "Greedy officials gain benefits through the power I give them; what benefits do they bring me?" Su answered, "The benefits they

[59] Yang Xingpei, "The Tragedy of Zhu Yuanzhang and Su Chuo's Law", http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2011-08-26/012223052163.shtml

gain are because of the power you gave, so they must uphold your power to protect their own interests. Doesn't that stabilize your rule?"

Yuwen asked, "Since we use greedy officials, why must we also counteract greed?" Su answered, "That is the essence of governance." Yuwen Tai asked, "Where lies the mystery?" Su Chuo answered, "There are two benefits: First, if there is no official who is not greedy, don't fear their greed, fear their different intentions. Thus, under the guise of combating greed, eliminate those with divergent loyalties and keep the compliant greedy ones. This not only eliminates opposition and consolidates your power but also garners public support. Second, as long as officials are greedy, you have leverage over them. If they dare to have different intentions, they are seeking their own death, thus they must share your heart and mind."

Yuwen asked, "What if employing greedy officials provokes public resentment?" Su replied, "Raise the banner of anti-corruption wide and make declarations, letting everyone know that the king cares for the realm and especially hates corrupt officials."

Yuwen asked, "What if resentment towards corrupt officials becomes too great?" Su said, "Killing them is an option. Confiscate their property, seize their wealth; thus, public resentment will subside, praise will arise, and you can also collect their wealth. Why not do it? In summary: Use corrupt officials to secure their loyalty, discard them to suppress opposition, execute the greatly corrupt to appease public anger, and seize their wealth to fill the royal coffers."

A conversation between the ruler and his minister truly made Yuwen Tai nod repeatedly in agreement, clap his hands often, and believe that he had obtained the eternal techniques of the emperors.

16.3 Autocratic Governance by Terror

The Ming Dynasty, ruled by the Zhu family, lasted 276 years with 16 emperors in succession. Most of them were characterized by a love of power and a suspicious nature, governing harshly with little grace. The few who were naturally more lenient tended to have short lives, such as Crown Prince Zhu Biao, and Emperors Xiaozong Zhu Youcheng, Renzong Zhu Gaochi, and Xuanzong Zhu Zhanji. The root cause of this can be traced back to the extreme authoritarianism of Emperor Taizu, Zhu Yuanzhang, who laid the seeds of terror with his policy of "severe penalties under strict laws". He abolished the traditional Prime Minister system, centralizing imperial power and direct control over the administration by leading the six ministries himself; to eliminate the threat of coups, he used fabricated charges to execute meritorious officials, fully demonstrating the cruelty of an autocrat. In just the case of Hu Weiyong, who abused his power and bent the law, over 30,000 people were implicated. The highly esteemed founding hero Li Shanchang, along with his entire family of more than seventy members, was executed. The illustrious general Lan Yu, proud of his military achievements, was killed for alleged treason, flayed, and his example was displayed across the country, resulting in the death of over 15,000 people involved. Additionally, Zhu Yuanzhang strongly promoted the virtue of widow chastity, initiating a trend of "martyrdom in fidelity" and revived the imperial concubine burial system that had disappeared since the early Han Dynasty. This system continued for over a hundred years until it was abolished during the Tianshun reign of Emperor Yingzong of Ming.

From the Eastern Han to the late Tang dynasties, the chaos caused by eunuchs was not uncommon. The decline of the Ming Dynasty was

exacerbated by the rampant influence of the eunuch faction. Learning from the lessons of previous dynasties, Emperor Taizu originally decreed that palace servants were not allowed to study, interact with the outer court, or even intervene in state affairs, as evidenced by a stele at the palace gate warning: "Inner servants must not interfere in political affairs." However, Emperor Chengzu, who came to power with the support of palace eunuchs who acted as his informants, regarded them as confidants and greatly elevated their status once he ascended the throne. He allowed the Imperial Household to operate a school, selected Hanlin officials to teach there, set up a command for the capital's garrison with eunuchs as military inspectors, and established the Eastern Depot, led by eunuchs, to spy on foreign affairs.

Eunuchs, being slaves dependent on the emperor, naturally behaved submissively and obsequiously toward him. It must be acknowledged that those who dared to decisively make themselves eunuchs to enter the palace and pursue glory inherently possessed extraordinary courage and ambition. Those who stood out and won the emperor's favor inevitably mastered the art of pleasing their master. Wei Zhongxian, originally a local ruffian from Cangzhou, Hebei, castrated himself because he could not repay his gambling debts. Upon entering the palace, he changed his name to Li Jinzhong, and after gaining favor, he reverted to his original name, revealing his meticulous scheming. During the reign of Emperor Xizong, this illiterate eunuch rose rapidly by literally stepping over the bodies of his benefactors, eventually being promoted to the position of Supervisor of Imperial Attendants, and hailed as "Nine Thousand Nine Hundred Years Old", to the extent that the court and the public knew only of Zhongxian and not of the emperor.

In most dynasties, eunuchs were not granted political status and were explicitly prohibited from intervening in political affairs. However, due to their daily proximity to the emperor and the inner court, they had special access to the centers of power. Additionally, their unique status as individuals without heirs made them perceived as lacking the ambition for usurpation or dynasty continuation. Thus, those eunuchs who were astute often found ways to navigate both sides of the political spectrum, becoming well-informed insiders within and outside the imperial court. Officials used them as lobbyists to infiltrate opinions into the power center, while emperors employed them as tools to restrain civil and military officials. Some young or indolent emperors even used them as de facto agents, thereby sowing the seeds for eunuchs to form factions, wield power, or even dominate government affairs, a curse that autocratic regimes could not escape. In the Ming Dynasty, figures such as Wang Zhen, Wang Zhi, Liu Jin, and Wei Zhongxian became notorious villains causing disaster to the nation. More ironically, Wang Zhen not only destroyed the stele established by Emperor Taizu that forbade inner court servants from interfering in political matters, but Emperor Yingzong actually erected a monument praising this eunuch who led to national humiliation, showing to what extent they had forgotten their predecessors. This monument, known as "Emperor Yingzong's Edict Monument to Wang Zhen", is still preserved today in Zhihua Temple located in Lumicang Hutong, Dongcheng District, Beijing.

Zhu Yuanzhang also established the imperial secret intelligence system, known as Brocade-clothed Guard (Jinyiwei), which, while managing ceremonial duties and serving as imperial bodyguards, also acted as his eyes and claws for patrolling and arresting. His successors, such as Emperor Chengzu and Emperor Xianzong, expanded this practice, creating a

dense network of spies and secret police known as the Factory and Guard system, responsible for anti-corruption, national security, and intelligence. The "Factory" refers to agencies like the Eastern Factory, Western Factory, and Imperial Household Factory; the "Guard" refers to the Brocade-clothed Guard. Although initially this system had a huge deterrent effect on official corruption, it cast a shadow of terror, with civil officials constrained and soldiers alienated. Setting aside the officials who were silenced by fear, daring not to overstep boundaries, the Factory and Guard system also catalyzed intricate political struggles from the imperial court down to the local government. Officials used this secretive channel for mutual accusations and personal vendettas, while the Factory and Guard, composed of imperial confidants, abused their privileges either to form cliques for personal gain or to expand implicating others to curry favor, resulting in countless miscarriages of justice, from which even imperial relatives were not spared.

Living under the iron curtain of political surveiliance and imminent oppression, the emperor might have appeared dignified and secure on his throne, but the political system was constantly roiling with undercurrents. When everyone was seeking self-preservation, the bureaucracy was made hypocritical, and the royal family lived in constant unease, creating a stressful and oppressive political atmosphere. Zhu Yuanzhang had 26 children; his sons were mostly appointed as regional princes, and his daughters married into families of trusted ministers, weaving a vast network of familial governance. However, his descendants either spent their days in terror of suspicion or vied against each other, colluding with court eunuchs in power struggles.

To prevent the princes from gaining excessive power and to solidify his imperial authority, Zhu Yuanzhang's chosen heir and favored

grandson, Emperor Huizong - posthumously known as Emperor Jianwen - implemented drastic measures shortly after ascending the throne. He sought to diminish the power of the princes by deposing or directly executing several uncles, including the Princes of Zhou, Dai, Qi, and Xiang. Zhu Di, the fourth son of Zhu Yuanzhang and Prince of Yan, stationed in Beiping (now Beijing), was a bold and militarily skilled ruler. Unwilling to be restrained, he had long positioned spies throughout the court and won the hearts of the people, feigning foolishness while covertly marshaling his forces. In 1399, under the guise of "clearing the emperor's side", he initiated what became known as the "Campaign to Rescue the Emperor". His rebel forces marched south, aiming directly for the capital, Nanjing. The ensuing three-year civil war, a power struggle between uncle and nephew within the same dynasty, led to the loss of countless innocent lives, including those of soldiers and officials. Among the high-ranking officials who either perished in the conflict or were executed for refusing to submit to Zhu Di were the Minister of Rites Chen Di, the Ministers of War Qi Tai and Tie Xuan, the Minister of Justice Bao Zhao, the Minister of Personnel Hou Tai, the Left Censor-in-chief Jing Qing, the Right Censor-in-chief Lian Zining, and the scholar-official Fang Xiaoru, whose extensive families also suffered greatly.

Fang Xiaoru, a disciple of the renowned Confucian scholar Song Lian, was highly valued by Emperor Jianwen Zhu Yunwen, serving consecutively as Imperial Lecturer and Academician at the Hanlin Academy. Recognizing Fang Xiaoru's loyalty and literary talent as exemplary among the scholars of the time, Yao Guangxiao, a high monk and strategist for Prince Yan Zhu Di, specifically instructed him to provide special care to Fang in order to counteract the criticism from literati who

condemned his usurpation of the throne. Before leading his army south in rebellion, Zhu Di sought to win over Fang Xiaoru.

However, after Zhu Di captured Nanjing, Fang Xiaoru adamantly refused to draft the imperial edict proclaiming Zhu Di's ascension to the throne and openly rebuked him in court for his nefarious act of seizing power. Enraged, Zhu Di ordered that Fang be torn apart by carts in the market and executed all of his family members and relatives, totaling 873 people, creating an unprecedented massacre of associative kinship families in Chinese history. Fang's works were also banned, and Zhu Di decreed that during the Yongle period of his reign, anyone found possessing his books would be sentenced to death.

Embracing his fate, Fang Xiaoru composed his final words: "Heaven brings chaos, who can know its cause? The treacherous minister succeeds in his scheme, plotting for the nation as if it were his own. The loyal minister, filled with indignation, sheds blood and tears. To die for my lord, what more could I desire? Alas, I lament, may others not blame me too!" He was forty-six at the time. His disciple, Duke Deqing Liao Yongzhong's grandson Yong, along with his brother Ming, recovered and buried his remains outside the Jubaomen in the mountains.

——*"History of the Ming, Biography of Fang Xiaoru"*

16.4 The Manificient Maritime Expediations

In 1402, Zhu Di replaced his nephew Emperor Jianwen and became the third emperor of the Ming Dynasty, known as the Yongle Emperor, historically referred to as Ming Chengzu. Ming Chengzu was a man of

great talent and strategy aside from his brutality and grandiosity. He expanded the empire's borders, moved the capital, and developed Beijing into the political center of China. He ordered officials to closely observe the public sentiment, develop the economy, and commanded the compilation of the extensive "Yongle Encyclopedia". He also initiated the historic voyages of Zheng He to the Western Seas, creating what is known as the "Yongle Golden Age" of the Ming Dynasty.

After the fall of Nanjing, a massive fire set the sky above the Imperial City ablaze, and the whereabouts of Emperor Jianwen and his crown prince, Zhu Wenkui, vanished, becoming a mystery that has remained unsolved through the ages. To legitimize his ascension to the throne, Chengzu claimed that "unexpectedly, Jianwen was coerced by treacherous officials to set the palace ablaze", and thus he conducted a grand funeral for him. In fact, in that era deeply influenced by the orthodox Neo-Confucian ideology of unconditional loyalty to the emperor, he was constantly anxious, fearing that Jianwen might someday reclaim the throne. Therefore, he immediately ordered a search throughout the kingdom to eliminate any latent threats. Amid various speculations, one theory suggests that Jianwen had taken monastic vows under an assumed name and fled to a remote temple in the far southwest; another posits that he had fled overseas, leading to the historic maritime expeditions of the Ming Dynasty's treasure fleets. According to the "History of the Ming, Biography of Zheng He", "Chengzu suspected that Huizong Emperor had escaped overseas, desired to trace him, and also wished to display military power in foreign lands, demonstrating China's wealth and strength". Additionally, the fact that he dispatched a court eunuch, Zheng He, who recognized the face of the deposed Emperor Jianwen, to command the expedition, accompanied by a large number of soldiers and armored

guards, further supports the initial intention - to search for the lost emperor rather than conduct international trade - behind sending the fleets to sea.

In 1405, Zheng He (Sanbao Eunuch) led a fleet composed of 208 ships to set sail.[60] Accompanying him were Ma Huan and Gong Zhen, who respectively recorded in "Yingya Shenglan" and "Xiyang Fanguo Zhi": "The treasure ships numbered sixty-three, the largest being forty-four zhang and four chi in length and eighteen zhang in width; the medium ones being thirty-seven zhang in length and fifteen zhang in width." "The treasure ships they rode were towering and massive, so large and formidable that their sails, anchors, and rudders could not be operated without the efforts of two to three hundred people."[61]

The configuration of the fleet highlighted the three major tasks of Zheng He's voyages: 1) Initially, it was to search for the whereabouts of Emperor Jianwen and to inform other nations of the new emperor's accession to the throne, hence the appointment of the eunuch Zheng He, who recognized Emperor Jianwen, as the fleet commander, and the majority of the accompanying personnel were soldiers and warriors, not merchants engaged in trade; 2) To display the imperial might of the dynasty and subdue foreign lands, hence the preparedness with both "carrots and sticks"; 3) To attract tributaries from the "four barbarians" in exchange for exotic goods, as "kings also sent their leaders to accompany the return to the treasure fleet to offer local products as tribute to China", aiming to achieve "pleasing the near and attracting the distant". According to the

---

[60] The imperial court commanded Wang Hao to build a total of 249 ships. See "History of Chinese Navigation", published by People's Transportation Publishing House, 1998, page 257.

[61] The once incomparably magnificent size of Zheng He's treasure ships: just how big were they? http://www.sina.com.cn, June 6, 2005

records in "Yingya Shenglan", during Zheng He's fourth voyage to the Western Seas, the personnel of his fleet included "officials, banner troops, warriors, interpreters, civilians, compradors, and scribes, totaling 27,670 individuals. Among them were 868 officials and 26,800 soldiers." Wherever they went, they first convened the local leaders to announce the imperial edicts of the Ming Emperor, rewarding those who were compliant with goods and inviting them to bring local products to China as tributes on the ships, "and those who did not comply were intimidated with military force."

On the eve of his seventh mission to the Western Seas, Zheng He led his fleet to anchor in Changle, Fujian, to wait for the monsoon winds to set sail. During this time, he locally commissioned the carving of the "Divine Inscriptions of the Heavenly Consort" stele, which more comprehensively summarized the strategic intentions and nations reached by the voyages to the Western Seas.

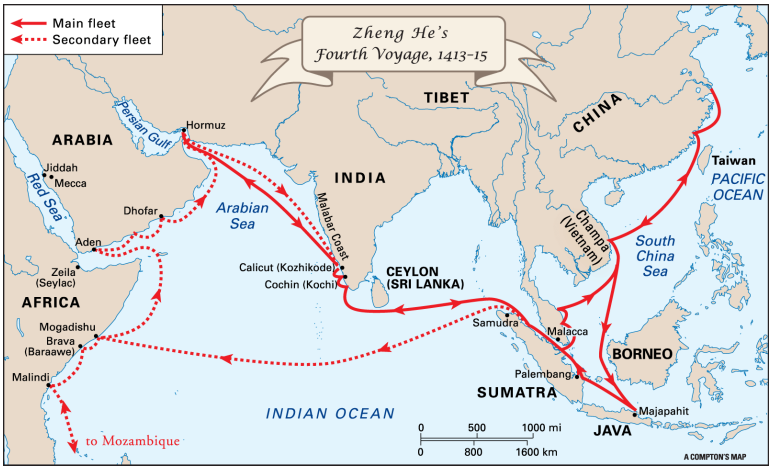
If the foreign nations overseas, truly distant and remote, all bring precious gifts and tributes, with translators attending the court. The Emperor, appreciating their loyalty, commanded Zheng He and others to lead tens of thousands of officials and banner troops, aboard over a hundred large ships, carrying currency to bestow upon them, thus spreading the Emperor's civilizing influence and pacifying distant peoples. Since the third year of the Yongle era, dispatched to the Western Seas, up to now for seven times, the countries visited include Champa, Java, Srivijaya, Siam, extending beyond South India, the Kingdom of Kandy, Quilon, Calicut, reaching as far as the regions of Hormuz, Aden, and Mogadishu in the Western Regions, encompassing more than thirty large and small nations, crossing over a hundred thousand li of the vast seas. ... And upon

approaching foreign lands, those foreign kings who were disrespectful were captured; marauding barbarians who pillaged were annihilated.

The cargo on the ships can be categorized into three types: coins, local specialties, and industrial products, including musk, raw silk, colored silks, porcelain, copper coins, camphor, and others. These goods served three purposes: the first type was as gifts for various foreign kings, the second was for exchanging the tribute items from those nations, and the third was for rewarding the crew venturing out to sea, allowing them to carry certain goods. Only the third category, items like porcelain, tea, musk, and iron pots, were purely intended for overseas trade. Zheng He's case was particularly special, as the court granted him a large sum of money to use as capital for his personal trading ventures. In the fifth year of the Xuande era (1430), an imperial decree instructed Zheng He that "one hundred thousand strings of cash be disbursed from the Nanjing Treasury of Heavenly Wealth to cover your expenses in visiting the foreign nations."

Zheng He, at the imperial command, embarked on seven voyages to the Western Seas, cutting through waves and with sails that obscured the sun, spanning 28 years from 1405 to 1433. His travels covered over 30 countries across Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, and the eastern coast of Africa, significantly expanding the geographical horizon of the Chinese people. (Figure 16-2) These voyages also offered deep insights into the customs and cultures of foreign lands, while simultaneously fostering a sense of superiority in the Ming Dynasty, which was magnified when compared to the less developed regions along the route.

Figure 16-2 Voyage of Zheng He



In contrast to the Portuguese Vasco da Gama, who rounded the Cape of Good Hope to reach India at the end of the 15th century, and the Genoese sailor Christopher Columbus, who discovered the Americas under the sponsorship of the Spanish crown, Zheng He's voyages occurred nearly a century earlier. These expeditions showcased China's advanced shipbuilding skills, the grand scale of the missions, sophisticated navigational technology, strict organizational management, and substantial imperial support, demonstrating an unparalleled level of superiority that was rare globally. However, while the former were motivated by profit-seeking and trade expansion that laid the groundwork for long-term colonization and contributed to the initial accumulation of capital for Western capitalism, the latter pursued a geopolitical agenda aimed at inspiring awe and allegiance, merely mobilizing foreign leaders to come in succession, bringing local products as tributes to enhance the emperor's subjective

sense of supremacy. The starkly different missions of these ventures led to vastly different outcomes.

The Ming Dynasty's maritime initiatives ran counter to the theories of absolute or comparative advantage in international economics, hence they failed to achieve the goal of enriching the nation through overseas trade. More thought-provoking is the fact that despite venturing to over 30 countries in just 30 years and receiving countless foreign envoys, the Ming Dynasty never signed any boundary or trade treaties with any country.

Firstly, it was commonly believed at the time that "the Celestial Empire lacks nothing and does not rely on foreigners," hence the elaborate voyages to the Western Seas were not aimed at mutual market exchanges with foreign countries to meet the needs of the populace. The treasures collected by the fleet, or "gifts" from the "barbarians" such as giraffes (referred to as unicorns), lions, pearls, gems, agarwood, sappan wood, and pepper, were primarily luxury items intended for imperial enjoyment or to be bestowed by the emperor upon his confidants. These contributed little to the national economy. Either out of awe or for profit, foreign envoys who came to pay tribute had to do so in the status of subjects; in dealings with foreign nations, politics took precedence, crafting a facade of "generous treatment of the distant and minimal reciprocation" and "appeasing the remote", adjusting prices based on the level of compliance or generously rewarding those who were submissive. This was contrary to the basic principles of equal and mutually beneficial trade and was therefore unsustainable. In 1567 and 1619, Russia sent envoys hoping to establish trade but was refused an audience for lack of tribute. However, by 1636, when Russia sent a Dutch merchant as an envoy who adhered to the tributary rituals, they were allowed to engage in trade.

Secondly, from the very start of his reign, Emperor Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang implemented maritime prohibitions, forbidding coastal military and civilians from "privately visiting foreign lands and engaging with foreigners". Initially, this policy aimed to prevent remnants like Zhang Shicheng, who occupied the seas, from threatening the new regime, and more importantly, to guard against Japanese pirates disrupting the southeastern coast (during Japan's period of division in the North and South Courts, many disempowered feudal lords organized samurais, ronin, and merchants to engage in armed smuggling and piracy). Contrary to intentions, the strict maritime ban directly jeopardized the livelihoods of coastal residents, inadvertently driving them to collude with the Japanese pirates, leading to an increasingly severe piracy problem.

The forceful conscription of labor for shipbuilding and the procurement of large quantities of overseas goods, coupled with lavish receptions provided by local governments and post stations for foreign envoys, led to "enormous expenditures that depleted the treasury", increasingly burdening the people. As a result, "the larger the scale of tributary trade, the heavier the burden on the people, and the tighter the government's expenses. During the Xuande period, the government was at times unable to pay officials' salaries and had to use the stored sapan wood in the treasury as a substitute for cash."[62] According to records, during the Yongle period, about two thousand new and refurbished sea ships were built, each costing approximately five to six thousand silver taels, with significant expenses also incurred for various gifts carried on the ships.[63] The "History of Ming,

[62] Ge Jianxiong, Commemorating the 600th Anniversary of Zheng He's Voyages: Historical Lessons are Equally Precious, First Financial Daily, July 11, 2005.

[63] Zhang Jianjing, Why were Zheng He's Seven Voyages to the Western Seas Halted? "Wen Shi Bo Lan", https://www.sohu.com/a/201484514_815620

Biography of Zheng He" states: "Zheng He served three emperors, and in his seven missions, he visited over thirty countries. The unnamed treasures he acquired were countless, yet the waste and depletion for China were immense." It is no wonder that Liu Daxia, a royal court official, openly criticized Emperor Xianzong, saying: "Sanbao's voyages to the Western Seas cost hundreds of thousands in money and grain, and tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians died. Even though rare treasures were brought back, what benefit do they provide to the state! This is merely a flawed policy, which ministers should vehemently oppose. Even though the records exist, they should be destroyed to eliminate their root. Why bother investigating whether they have any merit?"

In 1424, after the death of Ming Chengzu, his son Ming Renzong Zhu Gaochi and grandson Ming Xuanzong Zhu Zhanji abandoned their ancestor's penchant for grandiose deeds and ended the tribute trade of the treasure fleets to the Western Seas, decreeing "All treasure ships heading to foreign nations from the Western Seas are to be halted; those already anchored in places like Fujian and Taicang are to return to Nanjing." The following year, Zheng He, who had made six voyages to the Western Seas, was ordered to stay and defend Nanjing with his original crew, thus fading into obscurity. He also implemented a series of policies such as lenient governance and resting the military to cultivate the people, reversed some political injustices, and eased increasingly sharp social conflicts, ushering in a prosperous era comparable to those of the Zhou and Han dynasties, historically known as the "Renxuan Sound Governance".

In 1430, Ming Xuanzong reinstated Zheng He's mission to the Western Seas, with the scale largely consistent with the previous six voyages. This journey reached as far as the southern tip of Africa, near the Mozambique Channel. Zheng He did not return; the more credible speculation is

that he died during the voyage, although there is also conjecture that as a devout Muslim, he secretly traveled to Mecca to fulfill his final wish. Ten years later, the Ming court conducted several more oceanic voyages, but these were significantly smaller in scale and scope. As China's maritime endeavors drew to a close, Western European nations such as Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands, and England, rejuvenated by the Renaissance, accelerated their global expansion, gradually gaining naval supremacy, which greatly facilitated their wealth accumulation and scientific development. Liang Qichao lamented in comparison:

"When observing Admiral Zheng, there are few in the entire history of the world known as 'great maritime figures' who could stand shoulder to shoulder with him. Admiral Zheng's initial voyages took place over sixty years before Columbus discovered America and seventy years before Vasco da Gama found the new route to India. Yet why is it that the achievements of Columbus and da Gama have clearly marked a new era for the whole world, while the fervor of Admiral Zheng disappeared with his passing? Although our nation has slightly benefited from his offerings, these are nearly forgotten. After Columbus, there were countless others like Columbus; after da Gama, there were countless others like da Gama; but after our Zheng He, there has been no second Zheng He. Alas, could this be Zheng Jun's fault?" "After Zheng He, there was no more Zheng He." "The enterprise of Zheng He, its prime mover, was indeed the peerless and heroic Ming Chengzu."

——*Liang Qichao: "Biography of Zheng He, the Great Navigator of Our Country"*

The Ming Dynasty's voyages to the Western Seas indeed exemplified a model of peaceful and friendly missions with other nations. With the economic and military strength at the time, the Ming fleet could have easily dominated the world, but they harbored no intentions of aggression or expansion; they neither established military bases overseas nor engaged in any colonial activities. During Zheng He's first voyage, 170 crew members who went ashore were mistakenly killed by the followers of the Western King during a local civil war in Java. However, Zheng He did not retaliate militarily but instead implemented the Ming court's general policy of winning people over with virtue. "The Western King, fearful, sent envoys to apologize. The Emperor bestowed an edict severely reprimanding him, ordering the payment of 60,000 taels of gold as compensation." On Zheng He's second voyage to Java, the Western King gave everything he had, only managing to present 20,000 taels. The Ministry of Rites, finding the ransom insufficient, requested that the envoys be imprisoned, but Emperor Chengzu displayed extraordinary magnanimity: "I deal with distant people wishing only for them to fear their crimes, would I then covet their gold?" He thus waived the remainder, not pursuing the matter further. Thereafter, Java "contributed annually, sometimes biennially".

During the voyages, Zheng He's fleet captured Chen Zuyi, a pirate leader who had long plagued the Malacca area, and extradited the King of Kotte, Alakeshvara, who had repeatedly attacked envoys from various countries and robbed Ming ships. Such acts of justice actively contributed to ensuring the normal maritime interactions of Southeast Asian countries. "Thus the sea routes were pacified, and foreign nations relied on this for their peaceful livelihood."

16.5 The Decline of the Ming Dynasty

In 1435, nine-year-old Ming Emperor Yingzong, Zhu Qizhen, ascended the throne. The eunuch Wang Zhen tightly seized power, creating chaos within the court and depleting the national treasury. Officials intensified their exploitation, which led to widespread displacement of people and numerous peasant uprisings across the region. In 1449, seizing an opportunity, the Mongol Oirats invaded. Emperor Yingzong, under the instigation of Wang Zhen, personally led a military campaign but was captured during the Battle of Tumu Fortress. This event, known as the "Tumu Crisis", marked a turning point for the Ming Dynasty, from prosperity to decline. Yu Qian, the resolute Minister of War, adhered to the Confucian principle taught by Mencius that "the state is more important than the sovereign." He rejected the Oirat leader Esen's demands for an exorbitant ransom in exchange for Emperor Yingzong's release and successfully defended Beijing. However, this refusal, coupled with Yu Qian's decision to appoint an acting emperor in his stead during his absence, based on the Confucian principle that "a state cannot be without a sovereign for even a single day", planted seeds of resentment toward Yu Qian in Emperor Yingzong's heart.

In 1457, Emperor Yingzong, after seven years of house arrest following his release, initiated the "Gate Seizure Coup" and, with the support of Shi Heng and others, successfully reclaimed the throne from his younger brother, Emperor Daizong Zhu Qiyu. Yingzong then launched a severe political purge; Yu Qian and other heroes who defended the capital were falsely accused of conspiring to install an external regime and were executed immediately. This led to the tragic downfall of a generation of devoted and upright officials, a great injustice mourned by the nation.

In 1464, Crown Prince Zhu Jianshen (Emperor Xianzong) ascended the throne and corrected the internal chaos, vindicating Yu Qian posthumously. However, his favoritism towards Concubine Wan and eunuchs like Wang Zhi and Liang Fang led him to indulge in alchemy, allowing corrupt officials to dominate and weakening the governance.

In 1487, Emperor Xiaozong Zhu Youcheng ascended the throne and diligently governed the state. He revitalized civil governance, opened communication channels, curtailed the power of eunuchs and secret police, appointed capable officials, reduced taxes, and initiated what became known as the "Hongzhi Renaissance". His son, Emperor Wuzong Zhu Houzhao, infamously established the "Leopard House" filled with women. His lustful indulgence ended in a disgraceful death without an heir, leaving behind a legacy of shame in Chinese imperial history. During his rule, the empire faced internal and external crises, including Tatar invasions, royal rebellions, and widespread uprisings.

Ming Xiaozong's nephew, Ming Shizong Zhu Houcong (the Jiajing Emperor), was another disappointing emperor. He neglected governance for years, ignored the court, indulged in Taoist alchemy, and appointed a large number of Taoist priests to official positions in the imperial court. His reign saw a decline in public welfare, a rise in banditry, continued Tatar invasions in the north, pirate raids along the southeastern coast, and the Portuguese settlement in Macau, along with the introduction of opium to China.

In 1566, Emperor Muzong Zhu Zaihou ascended the throne and, with the assistance of ministers like Zhang Juzheng, launched the "Longqing New Policies". These policies secured peace with the Mongols and opened maritime trade, marking a revival for the Ming dynasty. Zhang Juzheng later supported the young Emperor Shenzong Zhu Yijun in

implementing further reforms, collectively known as the "Wanli Renaissance". These reforms streamlined the bureaucracy, introduced the Single Whip Law to alleviate peasant burdens, commissioned Pan Jixun to manage the Yellow River's flooding, and reinstated the renowned general Qi Jiguang to continue his campaigns against Japanese pirates and enhance defenses along the Great Wall. These initiatives, part of the broader "Longwan Reforms", disrupted the interests of some powerful elites. After Zhang Juzheng's death, he became the target of political adversaries who stripped him of his titles, confiscated his properties, and subjected his family members to imprisonment and starvation.

Emperor Shenzong of the Ming dynasty reigned for the longest period of 48 years. After he started ruling personally, particularly concerning the issue of appointing an heir (known as the "Struggle for the Foundation of the State"), he harbored resentment against the conflicts and admonitions from the Cabinet and court officials. In the later part of his reign, he indulged in alcohol and women, and for 28 years, he did not attend court sessions, leaving all memorials unaddressed and stuck in limbo. The bureaucratic system was in a long-term state of paralysis, with rampant factions and power struggle among the court officials. Consequently, most historians say that the Ming dynasty "effectively perished during the Wanli era". In 1620, Emperor Shenzong passed away, and his eldest son Zhu Changluo ascended to the throne. However, as a result of sexual indulgence, he died suddenly a month later after taking a dose of red pills, a type of medicinal remedy, and Emperor Xizong succeeded him, initiating the Tianqi era.

Gu Xiancheng, who had been dismissed and returned to his hometown, along with Gao Panlong and others, revived the Eastern Forest Academy in Wuxi, which had originally taught the Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism

during the Northern Song period. There, they discussed current affairs and evaluated individuals, advocating the spirit of "reading, teaching, and patriotism", making it a center for public discourse on national policy. It was praised as "the foremost among academies under heaven". Gu Xiancheng wrote the famous couplet "The sound of wind, the sound of rain, and the sound of reading enter the ears; concerns for home, the state, and the world weigh on the mind", inspiring countless intellectuals' patriotic feelings. The political stance of the Eastern Forest group gained wide acceptance in the court and society, forming what was known as the Eastern Forest Party, which directly confronted the Eunuch Party led by Wei Zhongxian. The latter persuaded Emperor Xizong to issue decrees, leading to the mass arrest of prominent Eastern Forest Party members and the destruction of academies nationwide, eventually driving Gao Panlong to commit suicide by drowning himself in a pond.

In 1627, Emperor Xizong of the Ming dynasty fell ill after an accidental drowning and soon passed away. Zhu Youjian succeeded the throne as Emperor Chongzhen. He eliminated the Eunuch Party and sought earnestly to reform the court's administration. During this time, vassal kings encroached on land, disasters struck various regions, and the financial system was on the verge of collapse. The dynasty faced simultaneous threats from border troubles and peasant uprisings, leaving it in a dire, seemingly incurable crisis. The "History of the Ming" notes that by the end of the first year of Chongzhen's reign, the Mongol tribes were starving and requested grain, which was denied. The famine-stricken people of Shaanxi were subjected to triple taxation, which led to the rise of bandits who plundered Fuzhou (now, part of Yan'an city) and Yan'an.

Nurhaci, leader of the Jurchen tribes of Jianzhou who had previously submitted to the Ming, unified the Jurchen tribes outside the Great Wall

in Northeast China, establishing the Jin state (later known as the Qing). His successor, Huang Taiji, launched multiple invasions southward, approaching the capital and wreaking havoc in North China. In 1636, Huang Taiji proclaimed himself emperor in Shenyang, changed the state's name to the Qing, and renamed his tribe the Manchu.

In 1643, after the peasant rebel army led by Li Zicheng from Shaanxi captured Beijing, Emperor Chongzhen hanged himself at Coal Hill, located behind the Forbidden City. The whereabouts of the crown prince became unknown. Wu Sangui, the commander at Shanhai Pass, surrendered to the Qing forces, assisting them in driving out Li Zicheng. Aisin Gioro Fulin then entered Beijing, becoming the first Qing emperor known as Emperor Shunzhi.

The Ming royal family initially took refuge in Nanjing, starting with Prince Fu Zhu Yousong, which sparked a fierce struggle for succession. The Minister of Personnel, Zhang Shenyan, along with other scholars, supported Zhu Changluo, a nephew of Emperor Shenzong noted for his wisdom and virtue, for emperorship. Although Prince Fu, a grandson of Emperor Shenzong Zhu Yijun, had seniority, he was criticized for seven major flaws: greed, debauchery, alcohol abuse, lack of filial piety, cruelty to subordinates, illiteracy, and interference in official affairs. Ultimately, the military, claiming to uphold royal ethics, overcame the scholars. Ma Shiying, the governor of Fengyang, united military commanders to back Zhu Yousong as Emperor Hongguang. Despite this, Zhu Yousong neglected the dire need to save the Ming dynasty, indulging in building palaces, selecting beauties, and enjoying lavish entertainment until he was soon captured. The Qing forces continued to chase the fleeing Ming court and suppress peasant rebellions, until in 1662, they captured and executed

Zhu Youlang, the Prince of Gui and the last Ming emperor, in Burma, officially marking the end of the Ming dynasty.

17

THE QING DYNASTY RULED BY MANCHURIAN AISIN GIORO

The deteriorating Ming Dynasty faced massive peasant uprisings, spurred by a corrupt court and widespread pestilence, ultimately falling to the Manchurians, a nomadic tribe from northeast China. This ushered in the Qing Dynasty, which adapted more to Han culture and traditional governance than its predecessor, the Yuan Dynasty, despite official racial prejudices. The Qing ruled China for 268 years until 1912, facing significant challenges from foreign colonialism, especially after the Opium War. The national upheaval targeted both foreign invaders and the Manchu rulers.

The Qing Dynasty made several notable achievements: 1) It brought Taiwan under its control, first from the Dutch and then from the exiled regime of the Zheng family; 2) It clarified territorial borders with Russia through bilateral treaties; 3) It initiated the Westernization Movement to adopt advanced technologies and modern equipment from the West.

The mid-19th century Opium Wars and subsequent foreign colonization marked a “century of humiliation” for China, but also prompted Chinese elites to seek national rejuvenation. After a decisive defeat in the first

Sino-Japanese War at the end of the 19th century, the Treaty of Shimonoseki imposed severe reparations and territorial concessions on the Qing, more onerous than those of the Treaty of Nanking after the Opium Wars. This realization led Chinese elites to understand that mere military modernization was insufficient; comprehensive systemic reforms were necessary to propel China into modernity. The Democratic Revolution eventually toppled the Qing Dynasty, but it did not achieve a unified and independent China.

17.1 The Rise of Manchurian Power and Its Conquest on China

The downfall of minority regimes was often caused by internal strife, including power struggles and fratricidal conflicts among the royal nobility, as well as deadly battles with other tribes. However, after their raids and conquests, these rulers typically neglected governance, donning a semblance of authority without substance, and lost their territories and power, resorting again to plundering once their resources were exhausted. Emperor Taizong of the Qing dynasty, Huang Taiji, broke this curse. The eighth son of Nurhaci, the founder of the Qing dynasty, he was chosen in 1626 to succeed as Khan. He grasped the essence of governance, focusing on the social structure and rights of ownership.

The main elements of society were those engaged in production and those engaged in warfare. Starting with land policy, he commissioned land surveys and redistributed the “remaining lands” to households for cultivation. On one hand, he restricted the privileges of the Manchu nobility, forbidding banner lords and nobles from owning private estates, and on the other hand, he liberated some slaves and serfs, turning them

into registered civilians, thus achieving a degree of social equality within certain limits and motivating the majority of laborers. He implemented the "tenant household system", grouping every eight able-bodied men into one tenant unit, while "the remaining Han people were settled separately as civilian households". He deeply studied Han Chinese culture and ordered Confucian scholars to translate Chinese books. Inspired by the Han Chinese feudal centralization, he abolished the old system of joint administration with the three great Beile, opting to "sit alone facing south", emphasizing a supreme ruling model. He was far-sighted and focused on ideological construction, reforming the Manchu script, and promoting Lamaism to bridge connections with Mongolia and Tibet.

Nurhaci established the Eight Banners system, integrating soldiers and civilians based on the Jurchen hunting groups, and Huang Taiji further broke away from strict bloodline restrictions, expanding the Mongol and Han Banners, significantly enhancing the responsiveness and combat capability of his forces. The Eight Banner nobility played crucial roles in conquering cities and unifying China under military rule, but during the governance period, they became the main culprits exacerbating ethnic tensions and ultimately, due to their corruption and degeneration, became the gravediggers of the Qing dynasty.

Starting from 1636, when Huang Taiji changed the state name from Later Jin to the Great Qing, until 1912, when the last emperor was expelled from the Forbidden City, the Qing Dynasty under the rule of the Manchu Aisin Gioro clan spanned 12 generations of emperors and lasted for a total of 276 years. In 1644, Wu Sangui, the Ming commander at Shanhai Pass, defected to the Qing, leading the Qing forces under Dorgon into the pass and establishing their capital in Beijing. This marked the last conquest of a Han Chinese regime by a northern minority group.

Over the next 20 years, the Qing court eliminated the Daxi and Dashun regimes led by Zhang Xianzhong and Li Zicheng, quelled the "Revolt of the Three Feudatories", recaptured Taiwan, and achieved national unification.

Shi Kefa was known for his integrity and straightforward nature, serving as a staunchly loyal royalist. He initially rose to prominence for his efforts to suppress peasant armies but later faced charges due to unsuccessful attempts to quell rebellions. He supported proposals from Zhang Shenyan and others to appoint a wise ruler but accepted the fait accompli of Prince Fu ascending the throne, advising cautiously within bounds and loyally serving the emperor and the nation. When the Southern Ming Emperor Hongguang retreated to Nanjing, he appointed Shi Kefa as the Minister of War and Grand Scholar of the Wuying Hall, conferred him the title of Guardian of the Crown Prince, and put him in command of the troops stationed in Huai'an and Yangzhou.

As Li Zicheng attacked Beijing, Shi Kefa gathered his officials to swear allegiance to the king and widely issued proclamations, calling for the various garrison troops to advance together. However, as they crossed the river to Pukou, news arrived that the capital had fallen and Emperor Chongzhen had died. According to "Nanjiang Yishi, Volume 7", Shi Kefa faced north, wept bitterly, and his head struck a pillar, causing blood to flow down to his heels. He then promptly sent people to search for the coffins of the deceased emperor and empress, as well as the whereabouts of the crown prince and the second prince. Many court officials had previously surrendered to Li Zicheng's Dashun regime and later defected south to join the court after the Qing forces entered the city. Shi Kefa astutely grasped the societal and political dynamics, advising through his memorials to punish only a few deeply culpable traitors severely, while

others should be employed at discretion, allowing them to serve despite their faults, thus avoiding a bloody massacre.

Initially, under the flanking maneuvers from both the Qing troops and peasant armies, Shi Kefa and his ministers primarily adopted the strategy of "allying with the invaders to suppress the rebels", hoping to leverage the Qing's power to first eliminate the bandit leader Li Zicheng. Thus, they regarded Wu Sangui's act of inviting the Qing troops into the pass as beneficial, even dispatching General Gao Jie to lead troops northward to Henan to assist the Qing army in fighting Li Zicheng. Unexpectedly, Gao Jie was killed by Xu Dingguo, the commander in Henan, as a gesture of surrender to the Qing.

When Li Zicheng was defeated by the Qing forces and abandoned Beijing to flee westward, the counties such as Qingzhou, which had previously enthusiastically welcomed King Chuang into the city, began to kill the officials he had appointed, seizing castles to defend themselves. The Ming generals such as Wu Sangui, Shang Kexi, and Geng Jingzhong succumbed to the temptations offered by the Manchu regime and were respectively titled King of Pingxi, King of Pingnan, and King of Jingnan.

17.2 Massacre by the Manchurian Troops

The Qing forces advanced fiercely, and various Ming military leaders were summoned to surrender. Shi Kefa, who was defending Yangzhou alone, called for reinforcements from various towns, but none arrived. Despite knowing the stark disparity in strength and the inevitability of defeat, he resolutely refused Dorgon's offers and enticements to surrender, leading the local military and civilians in staunch resistance. He wrote four wills, hoping his wife would join him in a martyr's death and be

buried beside the Ming Taizu's Xiaoling in Zhongshan. On May 20, 1645, when the city fell, Shi Kefa was captured. Faced with persuasion to surrender by Prince Dodo of the Qing forces, Shi Kefa vehemently declared, "I am a high official of the Heavenly Dynasty, how could I stoop to live a cowardly life and become a sinner for all eternity! My head can be taken, but my integrity is unyielding. The city is lost, and so am I. Even if my body is hacked to pieces, I accept it willingly!" He went to his death with dignity and valor, and his adopted son and the people of Yangzhou erected a memorial tomb for him at Meihuazhuang outside the city. Enraged, Dodo used Shi Kefa's refusal to surrender as a pretext to allow his troops to burn, kill, and loot indiscriminately, committing unspeakable atrocities, and then ordered the city to be massacred, killing up to 800,000 military personnel and civilians over ten days. The once beautiful and prosperous city of Yangzhou was left covered with corpses, turning it into a ghost town. This event is known in history as the "Ten Days of Yangzhou".

From the first day of the intercalary sixth month to August 21, 1645, to resist the Qing hair-shaving order, Yan Yingyuan, Chen Mingyu, and other leaders inspired the people of Jiangyin to rise up. Despite being besieged by a Qing army of 240,000 troops equipped with over 200 cannons, they held the city for 81 days without a single person surrendering. The citizens of Jiangyin sacrificed 172,000 lives, inflicting over 75,000 casualties, including dead and injured soldiers, on the Qing forces. After the Qing army massacred the city, only 53 people survived by hiding in temple towers. This heroic episode is known as the "Eighty-One Days of Jiangyin". Similarly, local gentry Hou Tongzhen, patriot Zhu Ying, and others led an uprising in Jiading against the Qing. Within just one month, the Qing forces slaughtered about 100,000 people in three successive

massacres, an event known as the "Three Massacres of Jiading". (Figure 17-1)

Figure 17-1 Three Massacres of Jiading



Regarding the various atrocities committed by the Qing forces after entering the pass, the Qing dynasty deliberately obscured and covered up these events, which was also the initial motive for their extensive use of literary inquisition. Records of Qing military crimes, such as Wang Xiuchu's "Diary of Ten Days in Yangzhou" and other documents, were only brought back from overseas to China on the eve of the Xinhai Revolution, exposing these tragedies to the world. Lu Xun in his "Miscellaneous Memories" wrote:

"There was another group of people who focused on collecting the works of the surviving Ming loyalists and records of Manchu brutality. They worked in libraries in Tokyo and elsewhere, copying, printing, and importing these materials into China in the hope of rekindling forgotten old resentments and aiding the success of the revolution. Thus, works like 'Diary of Ten Days in Yangzhou', 'Brief Record of the Jiading Massacre', 'Collected Works of Zhu Shunshui', 'Collected Works of Zhang Cangshui', along with 'Huang Xiao Yang's Turning Back' and other individual pieces were reprinted. I can no longer recall all their titles now."

The dissemination of these documents played a significant role in rallying public support for the early 20th-century program of the Chinese Revolutionary Alliance, which advocated for "expelling the Tartar barbarians and restoring China", and united efforts to overthrow the Qing dynasty's rule.

17.3 The Governance of Qing and Territorial Management

Over its 268-year reign, the governance of the Qing Dynasty created a complex and multifaceted administrative system, deftly managing the ethnic diversity of its vast empire, which included Han Chinese, Manchus, Mongols, Tibetans, and Uighurs. Initially, the Qing rulers, originating from Manchuria, approached the Han Chinese traditions with a mindset of conquest but gradually shifted towards assimilation, integrating these traditions into their governance while maintaining their distinct Manchu heritage.

At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, the government continued the tradition of the "Eight Princes' Regency". After Emperor Kangxi ascended to the throne, with the assistance of Empress Dowager Xiaozhuang, he eliminated overly ambitious ministers such as Suo'etu, Soni, and Suksaha, who were imperial advisors. This move eradicated the pattern where noble powers constrained the royal authority, but this centralization of power also led to the chaotic court struggles known as the "battle among the princes for succession".

At the apex of this system was the Emperor, revered as the Son of Heaven. He wielded absolute power with a divine mandate to rule with moral rectitude and benevolent governance, establishing a highly centralized autocracy that permeated every layer of government. This centralized power was orchestrated through a structured administration composed of the traditional six ministries - Personnel, Revenue, Rites, War, Justice, and Works - each tasked with overseeing specific aspects of governance. This structure was bolstered by crucial entities such as the Grand Council, which emerged in the 18th century as a key policymaking body.

The integrity of the bureaucracy was upheld through the civil service system, anchored in the imperial examination. Rooted in Confucian texts, this system aimed to fill governmental posts with the most educated and ethically upright individuals. Parallel to this, the "Great Qing Legal Code" provided a comprehensive set of laws emphasizing Confucian values like filial piety and social hierarchy. These laws were enforced rigorously across the empire, maintaining order and discipline.

The military organization of the Qing Dynasty was another pillar of its governance. Initially exclusive to the Manchu clans, the Banner System later expanded to include Mongolian and Han Chinese banners, playing a crucial role in the empire's defense. This system not only maintained

military efficiency but also integrated diverse ethnic groups into the Qing military framework.

Regional administration was meticulously organized, with the empire divided into provinces, each governed by officials such as governors-general and governors appointed by the central government. These officials were responsible for both military and civil administration, ensuring the emperor's decrees were effectively implemented across the expansive territories.

The Censorate played a critical role within the Qing administration by monitoring the bureaucracy to ensure compliance with the laws and maintaining the power to critique the emperor. This body acted as a crucial balance within the power structure, safeguarding the system from potential abuses and corruption.

Through these elaborate and sometimes rigid governance structures, the Qing Dynasty managed to sustain a vast and diverse empire for several centuries. This system reflected a unique blend of traditional Chinese bureaucratic practices and the distinct contributions of the Manchu leadership, adapting over time to meet the challenges of ruling such a sprawling and varied domain.

Upon establishing control over the Central Plains, the Qing Dynasty reorganized the administrative structure to reduce the burden on peasants, effectively easing ethnic tensions and class conflicts. By the late Qianlong period, the population had surpassed 300 million, accounting for about one-third of the world's population at the time, marking the prosperity of the Kangxi and Qianlong era.

Before the Opium War, the Qing Dynasty demonstrated significant strategic prowess in territorial management and expansion, which included the conquest and consolidation of Taiwan and intricate

negotiations with neighboring powers. Emperors Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong played crucial roles in quelling rebellions and pushing the empire's frontiers outward, ultimately extending China's territory to 13.16 million square kilometers.

In 1683, under the military leadership of Admiral Shi Lang, the Qing successfully annexed Taiwan after defeating the Kingdom of Tungning, established by the Ming loyalist Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga). This conquest was strategically important to prevent the island from becoming a base for Ming loyalist challenges against Qing rule. The incorporation of Taiwan was followed by policies that encouraged Han Chinese immigration, significantly altering the island's demographic and cultural landscape.

The Qing Dynasty's efforts at border consolidation were extensive, involving significant military campaigns and diplomatic maneuvers across regions such as Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang. A key event in these efforts was the conquest of the Dzungar Khanate, pivotal for establishing control over Xinjiang. Additionally, the Qing engaged in strategic diplomacy with Russia, resulting in the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689 and the Treaty of Kyakhta in 1727. Despite these treaties allowing for cross-border trade, the Qing showed little interest in international commerce, maintaining a policy consistent with earlier dynasties.

The border situation intensified following the Battle of Yaksa in 1686, which severely weakened Russian forces and led to the demarcation of borders under the Treaty of Nerchinsk. Although this treaty brought nearly a century of peace to China's northeastern frontier, it resulted in Russia acquiring significant territories west of the Outer Hinggan Mountains, including areas west of the Argun River. Further territorial concessions to Russia occurred in 1727 through the Treaty of Kyakhta, which

saw nearly 100,000 square kilometers south and southwest of Lake Baikal pass to Russian control.

As the Qing Dynasty faced decline, Emperor Xianfeng's reluctant agreements with Russia - the Treaty of Aigun in 1858 and the Treaty of Beijing in 1860 - marked a significant erosion of Qing territorial integrity. These treaties ceded vast territories, including the strategic locations of Yaksa, Sakhalin Island, and Vladivostok, meaning "Ruler of the East", which Russia renamed to symbolize its dominance over the East, indicating a significant shift in regional power dynamics.

Throughout their rule, the Qing understood the importance of managing the diverse ethnic groups within their empire. They implemented a dual system of administration for Han Chinese and other ethnic groups, which helped maintain stability and control over a multi-ethnic empire. These policies, along with their military and diplomatic efforts, reflect a dynasty adept at navigating complex territorial challenges. However, despite initial successes in stabilizing and strengthening their vast territory, these efforts were eventually undermined by internal rebellions and external pressures, leading to the Qing Dynasty's decline.

Despite these treaties initially fostering peace on China's northeastern frontier, the later treaties under duress marked a significant loss of sovereignty. The Qing rulers, originally from a tribal federation, had a deep understanding of the importance of managing the diverse ethnic groups within their empire. They implemented a dual system of administration for Han Chinese and other ethnic groups, which helped maintain stability and control over a multi-ethnic empire.

These efforts at territorial management and expansion before the Opium War reflect a dynasty adept at military conquest, diplomatic negotiations, and integration policies, all aimed at stabilizing and

strengthening their rule over a vast and diverse territory. However, these efforts were later challenged by internal rebellions and external pressures as the Qing Dynasty approached its decline.

17.4 Oppressive Control

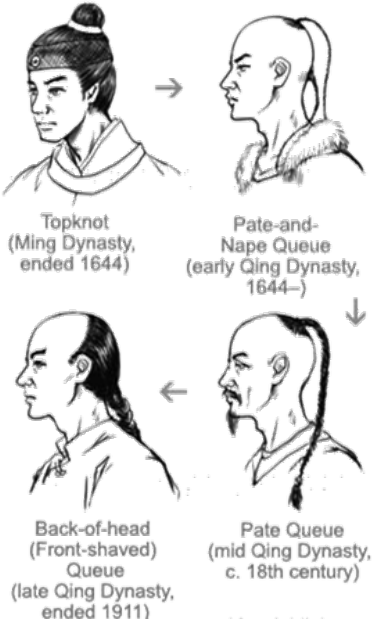
The Qing dynasty is notorious for its bullist policies on compulsory hair-shaving order and oppressive literary inquisition.

In the early Qing period, social conflicts appeared ethnically based but fundamentally stemmed from the Manchus' inept class-based rule. Firstly, the privileged Banner nobility were not only exempt from taxes and labor but continued to occupy the lands of the indigenous people and arbitrarily seize Han Chinese properties, behaving more like conquerors than rulers. Secondly, the Qing court brutally attempted to transform Han culture, most notably through the imposition of the hair-shaving order. To weaken the Han people's will to resist, the Manchu mandated, immediately upon entering the pass, that officials and civilians alike adopt the Manchu hair-style, with hesitators executed as rebels! In their view, adopting the Manchu hairstyle and dress was a crucial symbol of submission to Qing rule. This drastic change clashed violently with the deeply ingrained cultural customs of the Han people, as the "Classic of Filial Piety" states: "The body, hair, and skin are received from one's parents; one must not damage them - this is the beginning of filial piety." (Figure 17-2)

The people of China had no political demands for democracy and cared little about who ruled them, but they possessed a strong sense of ethics. The hair-shaving edict directly violated their ethical threshold, leading officials and civilians alike to unite in desperate resistance. The Manchu decree was "keep your head, not your hair; keep your hair,

not your head", while the resisting Han Chinese proclaimed: "Better to be a ghost with hair, than a hairless man!" To this day, the saying "do not cut your hair in the first lunar month, cutting hair brings death to one's uncle" persists among the Han, allegedly because the Qing's hair-cutting decree was issued in the first month. Under the oppressive power of the Qing government, to avoid persecution through censorship, the people's nostalgia for old customs and "thinking of the old" was metaphorically expressed as "death of the uncle".

Figure 17-2 Forced Hairstyle Change



Driven by the fear stemming from their illegitimate seizure of power and in order to cover up the brutal massacre of the Han people and suppress the spread of resistance, rulers of the Qing Dynasty consistently

created a peak of cultural terror in Chinese history. The "Encyclopedia of China" directly defines literary inquisition as "a type of imprisonment set up during the Qing Dynasty to eliminate dissenters through accusations based on writings or by using writings as pretexts to fabricate charges." It is evident that literary inquisition, as a fully-fledged system of cultural authoritarianism, was officially characterized during the Qing Dynasty, especially during the early reigns of the Shunzhi and Qianlong emperors, where it was most severely abused.

There have been cases of scholars being punished for their words since ancient times. The earliest known case occurred in 548 B.C. in the state of Qi, where the historian brothers were killed by the powerful minister Cui Shu for directly recording "Cui Shu murdered Duke Zhuang". During the reign of Emperor Xuan of Han, Yang Yun was accused of "treating the sovereign as a joke, with language verging on rebellion". He was imprisoned and demoted to a commoner by Marquis Pingtong, and later executed by waist-chopping for the crime of "extreme disloyalty and treachery" in his "Letter to Sun Huizong".

Fortunately, most cases before the Ming dynasty targeted officials who spoke directly in their writings against emperors and powerful ministers, and most of these outspoken officials were not sentenced to death but were demoted or fined. The most famous is the "Wutai Poetry Case" during the reign of Emperor Shenzong of Song, involving over 70 people. Su Shi gave a poem to his good friend Shen Kuo, who had been wrongfully demoted, as a parting gift. However, Shen Kuo used this poem as evidence to denounce Su Shi for satirizing and defaming the court. Under continuous impeachment by many officials for various poems and writings, Su Shi was imprisoned for the crime of "implying criticism through allegory" and, after his release, was exiled to Huangzhou.

This practice by autocratic rulers of fabricating charges against scholars based on their writings and imposing political persecution is known as “literary inquisition”. The institutionalization of literary inquisition began during the Ming Dynasty, and the Qing Dynasty further developed and sustained it at its peak. Ming Taizu Zhu Yuanzhang, of humble origin and prone to paranoia, was neurotically sensitive about his past as a bandit and a monk. Whether official documents, articles, or poems, any inadvertent mention of words like “thief”, “monk”, “bald”, “light”, or any homophones or similar characters, could lead to imprisonment or execution of the author. He issued various decrees such as “Guidelines for Petitions”, “Prohibitions on Redundant Writings”, and “Standard Formats for Memorials”, specifying formats and taboos for official and civilian submissions, and prohibiting arbitrary drafting based on personal interpretation. Not only were ministers at risk due to their writings, but even the tributary state of Korea was not spared. When the Korean King Lee Sung-tan submitted a memorial with inappropriate wording, Zhu Yuanzhang ordered all tribute items returned and demanded the extradition of the scribe Jeong Jong. Korea, fearing repercussions, sent Jeong Jong to Nanjing, where Zhu Yuanzhang exiled him to Yunnan and also banned Koreans from crossing the border or engaging in trade.

Successors followed suit. After Ming Chengzu executed the family of Fang Xiaoru, he decreed that anyone found possessing Fang Xiaoru's writings would be put to death. Three years later, the scholar Zhang Pu was executed for having Fang’s writings at home. All writings related to Emperor Jianwen and the former ministers who supported him and were executed were banned. During the Jiajing Emperor’s reign, he strictly prohibited scholars from deviating from traditional forms or respecting ancient norms, dismissing any who did. The Minister of Personnel, Li Mo,

was tortured to death by the Imperial Guard for drafting exam questions that mocked the current dynasty using Han and Tang dynasties' examples. The emperor criminalized writings based on personal likes and dislikes, while court officials deliberately misinterpreted texts to target political rivals. Secret police exploited these accusations for extortion, leading scholars to avoid government service or expressing their opinions through poetry or essays, critiquing social injustices. Coupled with the restrictive eight-legged essay format, the literary scene during the early Ming was bleak until some recovery during the Xuande era. Gu Yanwu lamented, "The harm of the eight-legged essay is as destructive as burning books, ruining talents more severely than those buried at Xianyang, who numbered just over 460."

Since the Manchus took control of central China, the Han people's resistance has persisted, with some even rallying under the banner of Zhu surname descendants to carry out anti-Qing and restore Ming movements, continually challenging the Qing dynasty's rule. Emperor Yongzheng once said: "It has always been common for different surnames to succeed the throne, and many from the previous dynasty's royal family have submitted to the new rulers, but never have there been as many treacherous people as in our dynasty, falsely claiming the Zhu surname to delude the public." However, the Qing rulers refused to reflect on the cause and effect of oppression and resistance, instead intensifying their bloody repression. Scholars who satirized the regime and its problems, viewed as "decayed Confucians" in the Ming eyes, were considered unforgivable "traitors" under the Qing. There were about 180 documented cases of literary inquisition during the Qing era, with Emperor Qianlong alone implementing it 130 times. The scale, extent of association, absurdity of the

miscarriages of justice, and the cruelty of the persecution were unprecedented.

The first literary inquisition of the Qing began in 1660 when Shunzhi believed Zhang Jinyan's phrase "talents of the Ming" in his writing was cryptic and ambiguous, leading to Zhang's execution. Dai Ming's "Nanshan Collection", which gathered some historical records of the Ming, was accused of harboring anti-Qing sentiments, leading to over three hundred people sentenced to death by Kangxi. The Jiangxi chief examiner, Zha Siting, was implicated for using the phrase from the "Book of Songs", which was interpreted as an attempt to remove the "Yongzheng" from his name. This enraged Yongzheng, who then discovered "reactionary diaries" at Zha's residence, leading to Zha's posthumous mutilation, execution of his son, and exile of his family. A well-known case involved Xu Jun, a scholar of the Hanlin Academy, whose line in a draft poem "The clear wind knows not the script, how can it disturb the pages?" was suspected of mocking the Qing, resulting in his immediate execution for grave disrespect and destruction of his poems.

By the Yongzheng era, the Han had largely submitted. Yue Zhongqi, then Governor of Sichuan and Shaanxi and a descendant of the national hero Yue Fei, cunningly arranged for the anti-Qing advocates Zeng Jing and Zhang Xi to be escorted to Beijing for Yongzheng's personal review. While claiming credit, he also implicated the case of Lu Liuliang, leading to the posthumous mutilation of Lu Liuliang, Lu Baizhong, and Yan Hongkui, the gruesome death of Shen Zaiwen, and the execution of all male relatives over sixteen of Lu and Yan, with their women and children sent to the northeastern frontier as slaves. However, Emperor Qianlong did not relent but became even more excessive. He used the compilation of the "Complete Library of the Four Treasuries" as an opportunity to

inspect and censor or destroy so-called "seditious" or "obstructive" books nationwide, causing another calamity for ancient texts and books after the burning of books and burying of scholars. Mr. Zhang Taiyan summarized: "When the initial decree was issued, it condemned the unofficial histories of the late Ming. Later, during the discussions in the Siku Quanshu, it was particularly severe against the Song writings about the Liao, Jin, Yuan periods, and Ming writings about the Yuan, proposing destruction of all extremely biased discussions...From Longqing to the late Ming, writings by ministers and courtiers were all but extinct."[64]

Gong Zizhen's poem "Ode to History" depicts the hedonistic lifestyle of the upper classes and the helplessness of intellectuals at the time, thus reflecting the moral decline of society. It reveals the sentiments of a righteous scholar who, despite adversity, still cares deeply for the world.

Gold and powder paint the southeast's vast lands,
Grudges and favors held in celebrities' hands.
In the wine basin, guests plot the night's course,
While round-fan scholars rise, an elite force.
Seats shunned for fear of the scribe's harsh jail,
Each penned volume, a bid for grain, not fail.
Tian Heng's men - five hundred strong in lore,
Could all return as lords, marquises sure?

——*Gong Zizhen, "Ode to History"*

[64] Zhang Taiyan, "Letters of Complaint", Lamenting the Burning of Books, No. 58.

Another of his poems, "Miscellaneous Poems of Yi Hai, No. 220", has become widely celebrated. While it exposes the dark politics of the time, it also passionately expresses the aspirations of the enlightened not to sink into despair but to strive for impact.

"The spirit of the nine provinces relies on wind and thunder,
A thousand horses silent, a sight of woeful wonder.
I urge the heavens to rejuvenate with vigor strong,
Let talents rise in every form, righting every wrong."

Mr. Lu Xun once made a sharp and insightful summary of the literary inquisition during the Qing Dynasty, which expressed both the sorrow of the frivolous and pedantic literati and highlighted the brutality of feudal rule:

"Everyone generally believes that the disasters of the written word began with mocking and cursing the Qing Dynasty, but this is not entirely true. Some were reckless; some were insane; some were provincial pedants, truly unaware of taboos; and some were naive commoners, genuinely concerned for the royal family. Their fates were likely very tragic, not enduring death by dismemberment or the extermination of their clan, then immediate execution, or perhaps 'beheading after detention', still with no chance of survival."[65]

Throughout the Qing Dynasty, the rulers fortified centralized control through a pervasive practice of literary inquisition, which severely

[65] Cao Juren, "A Critical Biography of Lu Xun", New Vision Press, Hong Kong, 1955, page 171.

restricted thought and silenced speech. This oppressive regime stifled intellectual and cultural expression, leading to a situation described as "a thousand horses are silent", which left a lasting impact on the intellectual and literary landscape. This suppression significantly hindered the development of science and culture in China, reflecting the increasing decay and decline of feudal absolutism in intellectual and cultural affairs. This occurred during a critical era when the imperial court was oblivious to the fact that the Western world was thriving in theoretical research and technological advancement, positioning itself to become a dominant global force, where the arrogant Chinese empire was the target of impending predation.

17.5 The End of Chinese Dynastic Rule

The decline of the Qing Dynasty, which once ruled with majestic authority over the vast expanse of China, is a tale of internal strife, external pressures, and the eventual crumbling of a centuries-old regime. As the 19th century unfolded, the Qing Dynasty faced an onslaught of challenges that would eventually lead to its downfall.

The seeds of decline were perhaps sown with the Opium Wars, when the British, seeking to balance trade deficits, forced opium into Chinese markets. The Qing government's inability to fend off British demands revealed its military weakness and administrative inefficiencies. The Treaty of Nanking in 1842, which concluded the First Opium War, ceded Hong Kong to Britain and opened several ports to foreign trade, marking a significant erosion of Chinese sovereignty. This period of humiliation at the hands of Western powers was exacerbated by the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), led by Hong Xiuquan, who proclaimed himself the younger

brother of Jesus Christ and sought to overthrow the Qing and establish the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. The rebellion devastated large swathes of Southern China, severely weakening the Qing government's control over its own territory.

Further weakening came from the Self-Strengthening Movement, which, despite its intentions to modernize China's military and industry, failed to address the underlying structural issues within the government. The corruption and inefficiency within the bureaucracy persisted, and the Qing leadership struggled to adapt to the changing global dynamics.

The turn of the century brought the Boxer Rebellion, an anti-foreign and anti-Christian uprising, which further showcased the Qing's inability to manage internal dissent or control foreign encroachment. The Eight-Nation Alliance's intervention to suppress the Boxers led to yet another humiliating defeat for China, culminating in the Boxer Protocol of 1901, which imposed crippling reparations and further concessions to foreign powers. Amidst these upheavals, the Qing attempted reforms such as the establishment of a constitutional monarchy and the formation of a modern legislative assembly, but these efforts were too little too late.

The revolutionary fervor had already taken root, led by figures like Sun Yat-sen. The Wuchang Uprising of 1911 triggered a series of revolts across the empire, leading to the proclamation of the Republic of China on January 1, 1912. Thus, with the abdication of the young Emperor Puyi in February 1912, the Qing Dynasty came to an end, closing the chapter on more than two millennia of imperial rule in China. The once mighty dragon throne now stood empty, overshadowed by the rising sun of republicanism and modernity.

Empress Dowager Cixi, who dominated the Qing government, adopted a capitulationist approach of "utilizing China's resources and

aligning with foreign powers to their delight", which further exacerbated the crisis of rule. The Republic of China (1912-1949), as the first democratic republic in Asia, was proclaimed, establishing a provisional government in Nanjing with Dr. Sun Yat-sen as the provisional President. This monumental shift overthrew more than two thousand years of feudal rule in China, as Dr. Sun himself said: "The Republic belongs to the people. It is established for the people and governed by the people." Unfortunately, the cunning warlord Yuan Shikai staged a deceptive acceptance of power transfer, usurping the fruits of the Xinhai Revolution, only to die 83 days after declaring himself emperor. The empire that had ruled with such might and splendor was now relegated to the annals of history, a victim of both its internal vulnerabilities and the inexorable tide of change sweeping across the globe.

17.6 Controversy over Four Outstanding Figures in the Qing Dynasty

Four outstanding figures who played pivotal roles in the Ming Dynasty and exerted a profound impact on recent Chinese history have stirred lasting controversy. They are Li Zicheng, who led a massive peasant rebellion; Shi Kefa, who led the resistance against the Manchurian conquest; Wu Sangui, who frequently shifted his allegiance between the Ming Dynasty and the Manchurian reign; and Emperor Chongzhen, who struggled to manage the sinking ship of the Ming Dynasty and ultimately ended his life in suicide. These individuals' complex legacies continue to evoke debate and reflection on their influence and the tumultuous period they navigated.

Li Zicheng is often remembered as a significant figure in the closing chapters of the Ming Dynasty, embodying a dual role: fighting against the Han Ming rulers on behalf of the peasant class and resisting the Manchurian invasion as a representative of the Han nationals. As the founder and ruler of the short-lived Shun Dynasty, his rise and fall are crucial for understanding the complex and turbulent period that marked the transition from Ming to Qing rule in China.

Born into a modest peasant family in Shaanxi, Li Zicheng initially served as a minor official, but personal misfortunes and the harsh realities of life under a corrupt and decaying Ming administration drove him toward rebellion. His charisma and leadership qualities quickly attracted a large following among those disaffected by the government's inability to manage a series of natural disasters, economic hardships, and rampant corruption within the imperial bureaucracy.

By the 1640s, Li Zicheng had amassed a significant rebel army, capturing numerous cities and gaining momentum against a demoralized and ineffective Ming military. In 1644, he achieved a monumental victory by seizing the Ming capital, Beijing, an event that led to the tragic suicide of Emperor Chongzhen, the last Ming emperor. Li declared himself the emperor of China, marking the beginning of the Shun Dynasty. However, his rule was short-lived, largely because he struggled to transition from a rebel leader to a stabilizing monarch.

Li Zicheng's inability to consolidate power effectively or garner widespread support among former Ming loyalists and his own ranks led to rapid challenges to his authority. His failure to establish control and governance that could replace the Ming infrastructure resulted in widespread chaos and continued warfare. The pivotal moment of his decline came when he faced the forces of the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty, which had

allied with the Ming general Wu Sangui. The Qing forces quickly gained the upper hand, capitalizing on the disarray and disillusionment among Li's followers.

Li Zicheng's retreat and subsequent disappearance after his defeat mark the end of his direct influence, but his legacy is complex. On one hand, he is viewed as a revolutionary hero who rose from humble beginnings to challenge a corrupt regime; on the other, his inability to manage the consequences of his uprising is seen as a cautionary tale of revolutionary excess leading to chaos. His brief rule is a significant, though ultimately tragic, footnote in the broader narrative of China's transition from the Ming to the Qing Dynasty, highlighting the difficulties of founding a stable government amidst the ruins of an old order.

Today, the main entrance of the Shi Kefa Memorial in Yangzhou bears the couplet: "A few plum blossoms mark the tears of a fallen nation, a sliver of the bright moon reflects the heart of a loyal official." This famous line by Qing dynasty poet Zhang Erjin not only expresses the sorrow of the Ming loyalists over their lost nation but also reflects the admiration for Shi Kefa's "bright loyalty and solitary integrity". Interestingly, based on Shi Kefa's heroic acts, the Southern Ming court posthumously honored him with the title "Loyal and Righteous", and even Emperor Qianlong of the Qing, who saw Shi as a stubborn enemy, posthumously bestowed upon him the title "Loyal and Upright", and personally wrote the words "to comfort the loyal soul" in praise of his brave and loyal spirit. This indicates that a person who stands firm in their beliefs can possess a powerful personal charisma and a steadfast spirit, enough to win over even their enemies. Guan Yu supported the Shu Han regime, resisted Sun Wu in the east and Cao Wei in the north, and after being killed by Lü Meng at Maicheng, Wu attempted to use the strategy of setting a tiger to swallow

a wolf by sending his head to Cao Cao to stir up enmity between Shu and Wei. However, Cao Cao buried this formidable foe with the honors due to a prince. General Zhang Zizhong, who died heroically in the battle of Zaozhi against the Japanese invaders, was buried with the highest military honors by the chief of staff of the Japanese 39th Division, Tokiwadaira Masatomi, out of respect. As Zhang's body passed through Yibin, tens of thousands of people spontaneously paid their respects, and Japanese aircraft circled overhead three times without dropping a single missile.

Conversely, those who are opportunistic chameleons, seemingly astute and adept at self-preservation but frequently changing allegiance, are often despised by everyone. Wang Jingwei, who was vigorous in his youth and played an active role in overthrowing the Qing dynasty, was imprisoned for attempting to assassinate the Qing Regent Zaifeng. Later, he followed Sun Yat-sen in promoting the Nationalist Revolution, then assisted Chiang Kai-shek in slaughtering communists, and finally betrayed his country to become an accomplice of the Japanese invaders, forever nailed to the pillar of shame in history as a traitor. It shows that integrity is a character trait that transcends conflicts of interest and is widely recognized.

There has been controversy over Shi Kefa's deeds, whether it was right for him, knowing his inability to defeat the enemy, but he insisted the war of resistance at the cost of 800,000 lives to accomplish his personal reputation as a die hard patriotic in history. There is no doubt that he was a clean official and a patriotic national hero, but some also point out that he did not organize an effective resistance nor did he significantly damage the Qing forces. In this regard, compared to the leaders of the "Eighty-One Days of Jiangyin" and the "Three Massacres of Jiading", he falls short. Additionally, as the Minister of War and the supreme

commander overseeing all military forces, prioritizing the suppression of peasant rebellions and even welcoming the turncoat Wu Sangui to bring in Qing forces to assist in suppressing bandits diminished his halo as a national hero. The high praise he receives is primarily due to his high status and his prolific writings, with "The Collected Works of Loyal and Righteous Minister Shi" being passed down through the ages. Focusing on a respected figure for detailed portrayal and adding glory through literature is a reasonable act for scholars and poets.

Wu Sangui is a highly controversial figure in Chinese history, especially noted for his role during the tumultuous transition from the Ming to the Qing Dynasty. His actions had profound implications for the future of China, and they continue to spark debate among historians.

In the late Ming Dynasty, Wu Sangui was a powerful military general stationed on the empire's northeastern frontier. He was tasked with defending the border against various threats, including the Manchu tribes who were poised beyond the Great Wall. However, his role in history is most famously defined not by his defense against foreign invaders but by his crucial decision at a critical juncture.

As the Ming Dynasty weakened from internal strife and corruption, and the rebel leader Li Zicheng proclaimed himself the new emperor after capturing Beijing in 1644, Wu Sangui faced a pivotal choice. The fall of Beijing and the subsequent suicide of the last Ming emperor, Chongzhen, created a power vacuum. Wu Sangui, initially loyal to the Ming, found himself in a precarious position as Li Zicheng's forces moved to eliminate the remaining loyalists.

Wu Sangui is a highly controversial figure in Chinese history, particularly noted for his pivotal role during the tumultuous transition from the Ming to the Qing Dynasty. His actions during this period had profound

implications for the future of China, and they continue to spark debate among historians to this day.

In the late Ming Dynasty, Wu Sangui was a powerful military general stationed on the empire's northeastern frontier, tasked with defending the border against various threats, including the Manchu tribes poised beyond the Great Wall. His historical significance, however, is most famously defined by his crucial decisions at a critical juncture rather than his defense against foreign invaders.

As internal strife and corruption weakened the Ming Dynasty, and after the rebel leader Li Zicheng proclaimed himself the new emperor following the capture of Beijing in 1644, Wu faced a pivotal choice. The fall of Beijing and the subsequent suicide of the last Ming emperor, Chongzhen, created a power vacuum. Initially loyal to the Ming, Wu found himself in a precarious position as Li Zicheng's forces moved to eliminate the remaining loyalists.

Driven by both personal and strategic considerations, particularly after Li Zicheng captured his family and threatened his power base, Wu made a fateful decision to ally with the Manchus. He opened the gates of the Great Wall at Shanhai Pass, allowing Manchu forces to enter China proper. This alliance was instrumental in the Manchus' defeat of Li Zicheng's rebel forces and their eventual establishment of the Qing Dynasty, which would rule China for nearly three centuries.

Wu Sangui's initial support for the Manchus earned him high positions within the Qing administrative structure, but his relationship with the new regime was complex and fraught with tension. Later in life, he led the Revolt of the Three Feudatories, aiming to carve out an autonomous domain in the southwest of China. This revolt, ultimately unsuccessful, marked the end of Wu's ambitions.

Wu zealously suppressed peasant uprisings during his tenure and later guarded the southwestern and southeastern frontiers. After Emperor Kangxi, also known as Xuanye, stabilized the political situation, he grew concerned that powerful regional commanders like Wu, if they retained their armies too long, could pose a threat. Kangxi's decision to abolish their fiefdoms led to the rebellion of these three commanders. Compared to Li Zicheng's peasant army slogan, "Welcome King Chuang, refuse to pay grain", Wu Sangui's banner of "Revive Ming and Expel the Barbarians" appeared to reflect a higher level of nationalism. However, it was primarily driven by a reluctance to relinquish personal power. Had the rebellion been against a non-foreign dynasty, Wu likely would have proclaimed a banner of "Purifying the Emperor's Side". Thus, the "Revolt of the Three Feudatories", due to the treacherous and fickle behavior of its leaders and their insincere nationalist slogans, lacked moral justification and failed to elicit a positive response from the masses.

Wu Sangui's legacy remains mixed; he is often seen as a traitor by those who view his betrayal of the Ming as a pivotal moment that led to the foreign conquest of China. Others argue that his actions were a pragmatic response to a chaotic and desperate political landscape. Regardless of perspective, Wu Sangui remains a pivotal and enduringly fascinating figure in the history of China.

Emperor Chongzhen, the 17th emperor of the Ming Dynasty, reigned during one of the most tumultuous periods in Chinese history. Ascending to the throne in 1627, he inherited a realm in decline, weakened by corruption, factional infighting, and a heavy financial burden from military expenditures and natural disasters. This was compounded by the legacy of his predecessor, Emperor Tianqi, who had shown more interest in carpentry than governance, leaving the actual power in the hands of eunuchs.

Aware of the decay, Chongzhen attempted to implement reforms and was known for his direct engagement in the affairs of state, a trait that sometimes led to decisive but harsh measures. Despite his genuine efforts to revitalize the faltering state, he struggled with the loyalty and effectiveness of his officials. His reign was plagued by rebellion, most notably the peasant uprising led by Li Zicheng. The emperor's attempts to suppress these revolts were undermined by a demoralized and underpaid military, leading to widespread desertion and defection.

As the rebels advanced towards the capital, Beijing, in 1644, Chongzhen, overwhelmed by despair and feeling betrayed by his officials who deserted him in droves, tragically ended his life. He hanged himself on a hill behind the Forbidden City, a poignant end to both his reign and the Ming Dynasty. His final imperial edict expressed a deep sense of failure and sorrow: "I, with insufficient virtue, have caused heaven's wrath, and all my ministers have misled me. I die with no face to meet my ancestors, I remove my crown and cover my face with my hair. Let the rebels divide the land, do not harm a single person."

His death symbolized the ultimate failure of his efforts to save his dynasty, which was soon replaced by the Qing Dynasty established by the Manchus. Chongzhen's legacy is often viewed with sympathy as a ruler who faced insurmountable challenges with determination but ultimately could not avert the destiny of his dynasty. His reign is a sad chapter in the history of imperial China, reflecting the complexities and the heavy burdens that come with the crown. His choice to die for the common people rather than surrender achieved both moral righteousness and justice, preserving the lives of the people and marking him as a figure of tragic nobility.

Globethics

Globethics is an ethics network of teachers and institutions based in Geneva, with an international Board of Foundation and with ECOSOC status with the United Nations. Our vision is to embed ethics in higher education. We strive for a world in which people, and especially leaders, are educated in, informed by and act according to ethical values and thus contribute to building sustainable, just and peaceful societies.

The founding conviction of Globethics is that having equal access to knowledge resources in the field of applied ethics enables individuals and institutions from developing and transition economies to become more visible and audible in the global discourse.

In order to ensure access to knowledge resources in applied ethics, Globethics has developed four resources:



Globethics Library
The leading global digital library on ethics with over 8 million documents and specially curated content



Globethics Publications
A publishing house open to all the authors interested in applied ethics and with over 190 publications in 15 series



Globethics Academy
Online and offline courses and training for all on ethics both as a subject and within specific sectors



Globethics Network
A global network of experts and institutions including a Pool of experts and a Consortium

Globethics.net provides an electronic platform for dialogue, reflection and action. Its central instrument is the website:

https://globethics.net ■

Globethics Publications

The list below is only a selection of our publications. To view the full collection, please visit our website.

All products are provided free of charge and can be downloaded in PDF form from the Globethics library and at https://globethics.net/publications. Bulk print copies can be ordered from *publications@globethics.net* at special rates for those from the Global South.

Prof. Dr Fadi Daou, Executive Director. Prof. Dr Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ékué, Academic Dean, Dr Ignace Haaz, Managing Editor. M. Jakob Bühlmann Quero, Editor Assistant.

Find all Series Editors: https://globethics.net/publish-with-us
Contact for manuscripts and suggestions: *publications@globethics.net*

Cultural Series

China Ethics: *Co-Publications in Chinese and English with Center for International Business Ethics (CIBE)*

Liu Baocheng and Dorothy Gao (Eds.), **中国的企**业社会责任, *Corporate Social Responsibility in China*, 2015, (Available only in Chinese), 459pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-050-0 2.

Bao Ziran, **影响中国**环境政策执效果的因素分析 *China's Environmental Policy, Factor Analysis of its Implementation,* 2015, (Available only in Chinese), 431pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-051-7 3.

Yuan Wang and Yating Luo, *China Business Perception Index: Survey on Chinese Companies' Perception of Doing Business in Kenya*, 2015, (Available in English), 99pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-062-3.

王淑芹 (Wang Shuqin) (编辑) (Ed.), *Research on Chinese Business Ethics [Volume 1]*, 2016, (Available only in Chinese), 413pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-104-0.

王淑芹 (Wang Shuqin) (编辑) (Ed.), *Research on Chinese Business Ethics [Volume 2]*, 2016, (Available only in Chinese), 400pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-108-8.

Baocheng Liu, *Chinese Civil Society*, 2016, 177pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-168-2

Liu Baocheng and Zhang Mengsha, *Philanthropy in China: Report of Concepts, History, Drivers, Institutions*, 2017, 256pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-178-1

Liu Baocheng and Zhang Mengsha, *CSR Report on Chinese Business Overseas Operations*, 2018 (Availabe also in Chinese), 286pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-250-4

Liu Baocheng and Chandni Patel, *Overseas Investment of Chinese Enterprises. A Casebook on Corporate Social Responsibility*, 2020, 381pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-355-6

Liu Baocheng, 中国价值观：理念与实践, *Chinese Values: Conception and Practice,* 2022, 685pp. ISBN: 978-2-88931-439-3 / DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4136082

Liu Baocheng, *Chinese Values: Conception and Practice, Volume 1*, 2nd Ed., 2024, 599pp. ISBN 978-2-88931-584-0 / DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4312480

Baocheng Liu, Christoph Stückelberger and Einar Tangen, *Trust, Legality and Exceptionalism*, 121pp. 2022, ISBN 978-2-88931-464-5 / DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4244417

Co-Publications Series

Other Co-Publications

You Bin 游斌, *The Lord's Prayer: A Chinese Catechism of Praying, Chinese Catechism 2,* 2023, 145pp. ISBN 978-2-88931-505-5 / DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4271536

You Bin 游斌, *The Ten Commandments: A Chinese Catechism of Living, Chinese Catechism 3*, 2022, 171pp. ISBN 978-2-88931-507-9 / DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4263338

You Bin 游斌, *Christian Liturgy: A Chinese Catechism of Celebrating, Chinese Catechism 4,* 2023, 217pp. ISBN 978-2-88931-509-3 / DOI: 10.58863/20.500.12424/4283186

Ignace Haaz / Amélé Adamavi-Aho Ekué (Eds.), *Walking with the Earth. Intercultural Perspectives on Ethics of Ecological Caring*, 2022, 324pp. ISBN 978-2-88931-434-8

Journal of Ethics in Higher Education

The focus and scope of JEHE is to answer to the request made by many faculty members from Globethics Consortium of higher education institutions, Network, Partners, Regional Programmes and participants to Globethics International Con-ferences to have a new space on Globethics platform for the publication of their research results in a scientific Journal.
https://jehe.globethics.net

ISSN: 2813-4389

No. 1 (2022)// Transformative Ethics and Education

No. 2 (2023)// Values and Power Dynamics of Languages in Higher Education

No. 3 (2023)// Time for Education

This is only a selection of our latest publications, to view our full collection please visit:

https://globethics.net/publications

ISBN 978-2-88931-584-0

Second Edition

Chinese Values: Conception and Practice

Vol. 1

China stands as a testament to a profound and enduring history under a unified regime in succession, a vibrant and dynamic present, and a crucial role on the world stage. This book endeavors to uncover and interpret the moral values of China, considering its rich historical, political, and cultural contexts with a critical perspective. It reveals the rationale and legitimacy behind the proposition of socialist values that define contemporary China. Through its nuanced approach, this book provides readers with a deep and critical understanding of the Chinese cognitive framework, collective attitudes and behaviors, all shaped by its enduring unique cultural norms and institutional settings.

Prof. Dr. Liu Baocheng

Director of the Center for International Business Ethics (CIBE) and Deputy Dean of the Academy of Global Innovation and Governance (AGIG) at the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE), Beijing/China. His area of research and teaching covers business, cross-cultural communication, ethics and law.

Globethics