

Chinese Humanist Thought on State and Society- Is There Something to Learn from Ancient Chinese Philosophical Writings for Modern Governments?

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Abstract

Modern day understanding of political terms like sovereignty, nation-states, liberty, property, law, power, justice, rights, as well as systematic reflection on the influence of such concepts as liberalism, materialism, utilitarianism, Socialism, Marxism, nationalism on the complex dynamics of state-society interactions are being shaped much through debate and discussion in present-day global academia. It is important to note here that although most of these aforementioned political terms and concepts seem to have emerged only lately through the nineteenth and the twentieth century, the science of politics, not in the modern sense of the term in the context of academic discipline as it exists today, but as an intellectual enquiry of any political phenomenon, has had an evolutionary history over centuries across the globe. Philosophical speculation of the organic articulation¹ of humankind colors the history of human thought. Political theory, a relatively new academic discipline is concerned with the study of the phenomenon of the state in both philosophical and empirical terms. However, this analytical eclectic subject under the influence of empiricism and logical positivism today relies too heavily on methodology, clarification of concepts, and logic of political appraisal only, while distancing itself from its sub-domain of classical political philosophy, despite the fact that the latter deliberates on some of the most fundamental issues of political organization. The study here argues in favor of the relevance of classical political philosophy in obtaining a profound understanding of contemporary political theories, with special reference to ancient Chinese political philosophy. Ancient Chinese Classics arguably dating around the 3rd century BCE reflected on the nature and purpose of true government, harmonious social relations, rights and duties of citizens, political democracy, social justice. This paper proposes that few of the underlying Confucian principles of political philosophy such as those concerned with humanitarian government, rule of righteousness, propriety, and benevolence, moral cultivation of the individual as the origin of a harmonious state-society relation, might offer useful insights to modern-day governance. Such principles are quite universal in nature and therefore can be applied to all forms of governance, irrespective of whether it is a parliamentary democracy or an authoritarian dictatorship.

Introduction

“... We should integrate the rule of law with the rule of virtue, intensify education in public morality, professional ethics, family virtues, and individual integrity, and advocate traditional Chinese virtues and new trends of the times. We should press ahead with the program for improving civic morality, exalt the true, the good, and the beautiful and reject the false, the evil, and the ugly. We should encourage people to willingly meet their statutory duties and obligations to society and family.

¹ The term ‘organic articulation of mankind’ has been borrowed from Otto Gierke. See Gierke. 1900. p. 98.

We should create a social atmosphere where work is honored and creation is lauded, and creates social trends of recognizing honor and disgrace, practicing integrity, honoring dedication, and promoting harmony...” (The Chinese Head of State and the General Secretary of the CPC CC, Hu Jintao’s key note address at the opening ceremony of the 18th CPC National Congress at the Great Hall of the People on 8 November, 2012)²

“What is meant by saying that the peace of the world depends on the order of the state is this: When the ruler treats the elders with respect, then the people will be aroused toward filial piety. When the ruler treats the aged with respect, then the people will be aroused toward brotherly respect. When the ruler treats compassionately the young and the helpless, then the common people will not follow the opposite course. Therefore the ruler has a principle with which, as with a measuring square, he may regulate his conduct.” (The Classic *Daxue* 500-430? BCE)³

Among diverse cultures of the contemporary world’s nation-states, one of the most pertinent questions is to what degree does any government (in particular and concrete circumstances) have to accommodate all citizens’ conceptions of the good (as deemed “reasonable” by somebody or other) in order to maintain a sufficient degree of public support in order to function effectively.⁴ The issue of the ideal or the most acceptable form of state-society interactions has been under serious speculation and has remained a much controversial topic of discussion from different perspectives of contemporary political theory. Politics, like other disciplines, fastened on to a part of socio-political world as the object of its analytical attention.⁵ Political phenomena and attempts to understand them, in different parts of the world across centuries, pre-date modern-day highly systematized academic analysis of the same. Although political theory, a sub-branch of political science as an academic discipline originated in the nineteenth century, the ‘philosophical speculation of political phenomena’ has been a tradition of the past, both in the west and the east.

In contemporary global academia, the importance of philosophy as being fundamental to grasping concepts of political theory of contemporary relevance is perhaps overlooked. The inter-relation between philosophy and politics is not quite recognized. In fact the significance of the study of philosophy in developing a mature understanding of the intricate issues of political theory is also understated.

This paper makes the following proposition. First, that not only is philosophy not redundant in comparison with other branches of empirical sciences, but it is by far intricately linked with the study of contemporary political theory. Second, that ancient Chinese humanist thought contains crucial guidelines for ideal state-society interactions, some of which if applied to modern governments could help us re-think political issues of liberty, justice, equality, rights, freedom and the like. It is important to note that ancient Chinese political philosophers from around the 3rd century BCE have been deliberating on issues such as the nature and purpose of true government, purpose of human life, unity of the individual with society, world and cosmos at large, harmonious social relations, rights and duties of citizens, moral cultivation of the individual for world peace and such. A critical study of the aforementioned underlying principles supports the argument that classical Chinese philosophy carries certain seeds of universal solutions for some of the most contentious issues which are in the present times affecting political and social relations among nation-states and their peoples. The paper ends with a final question as to whether the ‘normative’ or the ‘ethical’ can be weighed down by the ‘empirical’ in the study of a subject as dynamic as political theory, and whether all issues related to political phenomenon can be resolved only through the study of empirical facts and the clarification of concepts.

Arrangement of the Paper

The following paper is broadly divided into five major sections based on my approach to the subject of study. The first section discusses the most general underlying principles of classical Chinese philosophy accompanied by an analysis of the historical socio-political setting against which they emerged. The second section introduces the primary source texts which we use for reference. It then makes a critical study of a few relevant passages from the Confucian Classics which were grouped as the ‘*Four Books*’ (*Sishu* 四書) by Zhu Xi of the Ming dynasty.

² www.xinhuanet.com/english

³ Wing Tsit Chan. 1963. *A Source Book of Chinese Philosophy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 92.

⁴ Michael J. White. 2012. *Political Philosophy- A Historical Introduction*. New York, Oxford University Press, p. 412.

⁵ David Held. 1991. *Political Theory Today* (ed.), Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 3-4.

These source texts are namely the *Confucian Analects* (*Lunyü* 論語), the *Book of Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong Yong* 中庸). The third section deduces the influence of ancient Chinese Confucian political philosophy on some of the most distinguished political thinkers of modern and contemporary China, Kang Youwei, Hu Shi and Mao Zedong. The revival of Confucianism within the communist political domain of contemporary China also features in this section. The fourth section draws up a critique of ancient Chinese political philosophy in context with the modern global academic discipline of political theory. The fifth and final section raises a few relevant questions regarding the legitimacy of intensive research on classical Chinese political philosophy in finding alternative solutions to contentious issues on state-society interactions worldwide in the modern times.

In this study, I have tried to capture the intellectual fervor of ancient China during the period of the rise of a number of contending schools of political thought between the Spring and Autumn (chunqiu 春秋 770-453 BCE) and the Warring States period (zhanguo 戰國 453-221 BCE). This period in ancient Chinese history has arguably been one of the most intellectually vibrant periods, marked by free expression of ideas, and witnessing the rise of some of the major schools of Chinese philosophy namely, the Confucian, the Mohist and the Legalist schools. However, in the course of this study I have been rather selective in my approach. I have strictly confined myself here to those of the few Confucian philosophical texts which during the Ming-Qing period came to be compiled under the title “Four Books” (四書), so named by the Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi.

An Overview of the Fundamental Principles of Ancient Chinese Political Philosophy

The period of concern in this study, the Spring and Autumn (chunqiu 春秋 770-453 BCE), and the Warring States (zhanguo 戰國 453-221 BCE), were one of the earliest periods in the history of the evolution of Chinese political and philosophical thought. Chinese dynastic history has had a continuity of almost over two millennia and this uninterrupted imperial system which remained in position until the Republican times of the nineteenth century has borne strong allegiance to a profound ideological foundation which has been in place there, ever since the founding of the first dynasty in China. In the words of Yuri Pines, “Until the nineteenth century, empire was the only conceivable polity for the inhabitants of the Chinese world.”

The first major instance of consolidation of political power in ancient China was the establishment of the Zhou dynasty in 1100 BCE. Some of the very first ideas about political organization were beginning to be conceived of during this time, but with a radical transformation in the realm of human thought where focal point of dependence was gradually shifting from the forces of nature to human capability and talents. The first seeds of Chinese humanist thought were thus being sown.

With the power of the Zhou 周 ruling house gradually declining towards the end of the seventh century BCE, political turmoil and social disintegration became the order of the day, resulting in the eventual collapse of the multi-state system of governance which was prevalent until that time. In the government⁶ apparatus, power shifted from the hands of the regional lords to those in higher ranks of ministerial position. Over time, the regional heads in each of the states lost much of their economic, administrative and military authority to the hereditary office-holders. All along this period of social instability and political division, Chinese thinkers through repeated trial and error, developed distinctive administrative and military mechanisms to make inter-state relations work. In the process, they formulated political ideologies based on ethics and morals, thereby laying the initial foundations of an imperial unification.⁷ While during the Spring and Autumn period, Chinese thinkers attempted to find ways of creating a viable multistate order, in the Warring States period the search was for political unity as an antidote to the incessant political turmoil.

Interestingly, this period of socio-political disintegration has also been designated by scholars in the Chinese tradition as the ‘period of philosophers’ in ancient Chinese history, perhaps because some of the most fundamental principles of governance, centered around the task of assigning proper positions to all the stakeholders in society, namely the ruler, the elite-scholar-ministers and the common people. This concept was conceived of for the first time by the intellectual thinkers of the times. In fact a profound philosophical order was structured such that it could accommodate solutions for political crises at all times.

⁶ The term is not being used in its present-day connotation

⁷ Yuri Pines. 2009. *Envisioning Eternal Empire – Chinese Political Thought of the Warring States Era*, Honolulu.

The period therefore, marked the beginning of inter-linkages between philosophy and politics, and laid the foundation of a tradition of Chinese political philosophy. Although, there were arguably over a hundred contending schools of thought during this period, exerting varying degrees of influence on rulers of the warring states, there were some distinct philosophical ideals which served as the essential ‘building blocks of Chinese political culture’.⁸

‘Humanism’ (*rendao zhuyi* 人道主義) is one of the most dominant features which has characterized Chinese thought since the dawn of history.⁹ If humanism, as in the words of Corliss Lamont, is seen as the simple proposition that the chief end of human life is to work for the happiness of humans upon this earth and within the confines of the Nature which is our home¹⁰, then Chinese thinkers from the Zhou dynasty (1111-249 BCE) onwards, through their reliance upon human ingenuity, expertise, talents and capability laid the first foundation stones of a humanist Chinese society as an ideal to strive for. Society in China under the influence of the newly emerging tenet of humanism moved towards the convention of ‘man as the centre and man as the sanction’¹¹. While most ‘schools’ (*jia* 家) of philosophy dating back to the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States period, like that of Confucianism (*rujia* 儒家), Daoism (*daoia* 道家) and Legalism (*fajia* 法家) had their own ways of looking at the political issues of the times and formulating their own philosophical ideals, they all fundamentally agreed in striving towards a common good for all persons in society irrespective of their political, social and economic standing.

The other doctrine which has been influential in the history of Chinese thought is the ‘Mandate of Heaven’ (*tianming* 天命). The popularization of this doctrine as a self-existent moral law from the Zhou times onwards, has legitimized the ‘rule of virtue’, as a pre-requisite for receiving, upholding and defending the authority of governance by either an individual or a community. This has been one of the most essential doctrines upon which was founded the legitimacy of rule for successive Chinese dynasties across centuries. It was believed that Heaven granted the ‘most virtuous one’ with the authority to govern the others. Whoever would rule by ‘virtue’ would be granted the ‘Mandate of Heaven’ to rule, whoever would fail in his duties would be forfeited. ‘Virtue’ in this context stood for one’s ‘good words and good actions’.¹² This doctrine has been used in the Chinese political context for centuries by usurpers of the throne and revolutionaries to justify their actions. Related to this were the two other concepts of *tianxia* 天下 and *tianzi* 天子. The former was used to mean “all under Heaven”, while the latter “Son of Heaven”. It was believed that having received the “Mandate of Heaven” (*tianming* 天命), the “Son of Heaven” (*tianzi* 天子) could rule “all under Heaven” (*tianxia* 天下).

Ancient Chinese philosophical thought has also been distinctively characterized by the presence of an overtone of inter-relation between heaven and earth on the one hand, and individual human being and society on the other. There has been a suggestion of great unity between heaven, earth, and man in early Chinese thought, setting an exemplar for the later development of the doctrine of unity of man and nature, an ideology which has later dominated the history of Chinese philosophy from the tenth century onwards.

It is to be noted that the fundamental concepts of political organization in ancient China were perhaps founded upon these abovementioned guiding principles of Chinese philosophy. The evolution of political thought in the Chinese case progressed alongside the emerging philosophical theories and concepts. Politics in ancient China therefore might be seen as having been contained within the domain of philosophy.

Introduction to the Source Texts in Chinese

Relevant passages on government, people, state, society, human nature, and state-society relations have been selected for the purpose of our study from the “Four Books” in the Chinese Confucian tradition. Our source texts are the *Confucian Analects* (*Lunyü* 論語), the *Book of Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子), the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學), and the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong* 中庸).

⁸ The expression ‘building blocks of Chinese political culture’ has been taken from Pines’ work (2009: 2).

⁹ Wing-Tsit Chan. 1963. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 3.

¹⁰ Corliss Lamont. 1997. *The Philosophy of Humanism*. New York: Humanist Press, p. 39.

¹¹ Corliss Lamont, p. 12.

¹² Wing-Tsit Chan. 1963. p.3.

The *Analects* or *Lunyü* contain the collected sayings of the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius. Kongfu zi 孔夫子 (551-479 BCE) or as we know of him today by the more popular Latinized version of his name Confucius, was one of the most prominent philosophers and political thinkers of the Spring and Autumn period in Chinese history. He worked upon some of the most fundamental concepts in ancient Chinese systems of thought and formulated new political theories based on them. Humanism, the most prominent trait in ancient Chinese thought gained unprecedented significance in his teachings. Confucius called for a strong moral and ethical code to be the base for a good system of governance. The passages compiled in *Lunyü* depict Confucius as having always advocated a good society based on good government and harmonious human relations. "Virtue", as in the ancient Chinese thought, would, as suggested by Confucius be the governing criterion for a good government, where the essence of "good" would be reflected through righteousness and not "profit" or "utility". Although, the *Analects* contain Confucius's views on diverse issues, there were five fundamental concepts of Chinese philosophy which were conceived by him and which have been most prominently discussed in *Lunyü*.

The first of these concepts was the 'rectification of names' (*zhengming* 政名), whereby names, in their more philosophical aspect¹³ would have to correspond to actualities. This, opined Confucius, would ensure the establishment of a social order where names and ranks would be properly regulated. Thus, a 'ruler' would be called a 'ruler' and would maintain the position of a ruler, only when his actions towards his subjects would be in accordance with what is proper and characteristic of a 'ruler', that is to say, the name 'ruler' would have to correspond to the actuality. The moment it does not, the name would have to be rectified. This carried a strong implication of legitimizing the overthrow of a particular imperial regime if somehow the conditions of correspondence between names and actualities were not maintained.

The second perennially important theme in Confucius's teachings was the doctrine of the 'Mean'. It emphasized the need for adhering to that which was central and balanced. This concept of 'striking a balance' in all actions whether individual, social or political came to occupy a cardinal position in Chinese thought. It was employed later by the Neo-Confucianists in harmonizing yin and yang¹⁴ (the positive and negative elements or forces in the material world).

The most significant of Confucius's contributions to Chinese philosophy was his innovative ideas about human society and polity, and their inter-being. His political thoughts about the right form of government was revolutionary because he did not perceive the political organization of any particular state or kingdom as a solitary unit but as one which held intimate connections with society, family and the individual. Political issues such as governance of the state were, in his views, related to social issues of regulation of the individual, the family and finally the society at large. In order to have a peaceful, well-governed state, Confucius prescribed all individuals to act according to what is just and fair to their position in society. He insisted upon the cultivation of the following virtues of benevolence (*ren* 仁), conscientiousness (*shu* 恕) and altruism (*zhong* 忠) by every individual in society in order to be able to harmoniously unite the individual self with the state.

In a society where social position was the chief determinant of social rights, Confucius encouraged individuals to strive through moral self-cultivation to become a superior man or gentleman (*jünzi* 君子). So far in Chinese history, 'jünzi' literally meant the 'son of the ruler', but Confucius revolutionized the meaning of the term until it came to designate a morally superior man. Thus nobility, under the Confucian ideal came to be seen as a matter of character and not of birth. Confucius therefore might be seen as a political thinker and a philosopher who envisioned an ideal state of rule based on strict ethical codes of social conduct.

The *Book of Mencius* (*Mengzi* 孟子) is a compilation of the sayings of Mencius (371-289 BCE), the most distinguished of all disciples in the Confucian school of lineage after Master Kong himself. Although his understanding of the nature of things was guided by the central tenets of the Confucian school of philosophy, Mencius made certain concrete derivations from them.

¹³ Wing-Tsit Chan, p. 15.

¹⁴ The yin yang doctrine brings to the fore the balanced combination of two principles, forces or elements, one is the positive and the other is the negative. Here both the terms positive and negative mean opposite poles of character or property. This yin yang theory has all along influenced every aspect of Chinese thought.

First, he advocated that human nature is originally good, that human beings possess the innate knowledge of ‘good’ and possess the innate ability to do ‘good’, second, that when the mind is developed to the utmost, one can serve ‘Heaven’, third, that evil deeds are performed due to evil external influences, fourth, that efforts have to be made to recover the original goodness of nature that might be lost due to external conditions, and fifth, proper education could help one to retrieve one’s lost mind. What concerns us in this study, are his views on the nature and purpose of government. In the *Mengzi*, we encounter the term ‘humane government’, a government that rules with virtues like benevolence and righteousness, and is not driven by motives of profit or utility. In this, he follows Confucius closely. However, Mencius was the only philosopher in the Confucian legacy who brought the virtue of ‘humaneness’ to the position of being the ultimate decisive factor in choosing or rejecting a ruler. He was also the only political thinker to have advocated the concept of ‘political democracy’¹⁵ in Chinese history by consistently maintaining that people were the most important factor in a government, that a government could remain in power only if the people agreed to have it, and that a government could unquestionably be overthrown if the people willed so. The issue of equality between members in a society was also a new concept in the history of Chinese thought that originated with Mencius. When moral virtue was the only standard criterion for holding a political position, then human nature being innately good, any man from any section of society, from any rank of birth would have the right to be in the position of a ruler. The power of the people in deciding the future of a government, the legitimacy of people’s revolution, a humane government ruling through moral example, these have been the most significant political thoughts of Mencius which we find recorded in the *Book of Mencius* (*Mengzi*).

The third source text for our study is the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學). The reason why it has been selected for our study of classical Chinese political thought is that it contains treatises which deliberate on how to combine the social and the political, the individual and the state, something which has never before in any other Chinese Classic been so explicitly discussed. Originally a chapter (no. 42) of the Book of Rites (*Li ji* 禮記), the Great Learning was treated as a separate work by the Northern Song (960-1126 CE) Neo-Confucian scholars Cheng Hao 程顥 and Cheng Yi 程頤 and was later drawn up by the Southern Song (1127-1279 CE) Neo-Confucianist, Zhu Xi 朱熹 as one of the “Four Books”. It is unique in the sense that it interconnects the moral cultivation of an individual with the maintenance of general harmony in state and society, the underlying principle here being a co-relation between the micro and the macro, the micro self of the individual with the macro self of the state, the world and the cosmos. The text enumerates the principle of the ‘three items’, these being ‘manifesting the true nature of man’ (*ming ming de* 明明德), ‘approaching the people and getting close to the people’ (*qin min* 親民), and ‘to stop only after having attained the highest good’ (*zhi yu zhi shan* 止于至善), and the principle of the ‘eight activities’, these being ‘investigation of things’, ‘extension of knowledge’, ‘sincerity of will’, ‘rectification of the mind’, ‘cultivation of the personal life’, ‘regulation of the family, national order and world peace’. The significance of this Classic lies in the fact that it teaches how to apply the Confucian theoretical principles to practical educational and political programs.

Although our last source text of reference, the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong yong* 中庸) does not deal with social and political matters, but rather with psychology and metaphysics, we have opted to study relevant sections of it because it profoundly suggests an unbroken connection between philosophy and politics, between the metaphysical and the worldly. Study of anything political in the history of Chinese thought, whether it be the political organization of state, or the political role of a member of society, has all along been combined with the study of the phenomenon of a larger existential reality, of which the former is seen as a part of the latter. The principle of the ‘harmony of all existence’ is what is highlighted in this text and what has remained the core of Chinese political thought even in modern times.

Main Discussion on Passages from the Source Texts and their Analyses

We first deal with a few passages in the *Confucian Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語)¹⁶.

¹⁵ Wing-Tsit Chan, p. 50.

¹⁶ The passages have been taken from www.ctext.org/analects under the sections 學而, 爲政, 里仁, 雍也, 泰伯, 顏淵.

“子曰：道千乘之國，敬事而信，節用而愛人，使民以時。The Master said, “In order to rule a country with a thousand chariots, there must be (an attitude) of reverence towards affairs (of the state) and sincerity, there must be economy in expenditure, love for the people and engagement (or employment) for the people at the right seasons.”

“或謂孔子曰：子奚不為政？子曰：《書》云：『孝乎惟孝、友于兄弟，施於有政。是亦為政，奚其為為政？』Someone addressed Confucius saying, “Master, why do you not serve in the government?” The Master said, “The *Shujing* records the following about filial piety. You are filial (if) you discharge your duties as a friend and a brother, these (qualities) are displayed in the government. This then also is what is meant by government. What then is the need to be in a government?”

“子張問於孔子曰：何如斯可以從政矣？子曰：尊五美，屏四惡，斯可以從政矣。子張曰：何謂五美？子曰：君子惠而不費，勞而不怨，欲而不貪，泰而不驕，威而不猛。子張曰：何謂惠而不費？

子曰：因民之所利而利之，斯不亦惠而不費乎？擇可勞而勞之，又誰怨？欲仁而得仁，又焉貪？君子無眾寡，無小大，無敢慢，斯不亦泰而不驕乎？君子正其衣冠，尊其瞻視，儼然人望而畏之，斯不亦威而不猛乎？

子張曰：何謂四惡？子曰：不教而殺謂之虐；不戒視成謂之暴；慢令致期謂之賊；猶之與人也出納之吝，謂之有司。Zi Zhang asked Confucius, “In what way should one (in authority) act in order to conduct government properly? The Master said, “By honoring the five excellent things and casting away the four evils can one be able to govern properly.” Zi Zhang asked, “What are these five excellent things?” The Master said, “When the person in authority is beneficial and frugal, when he lays tasks on the people without being resentful, when he is desirous of something without being covetous, when he is at dignified ease without being proud, when he is majestic without being fierce, (these are the five excellent things).” Zi Zhang then asked, “What is meant by saying to be beneficial and yet without expenditure?” The Master said, “When (the person in authority) brings in more benefit for the people compared to the things (which are supposed to benefit them), would that not be called being beneficial and (yet) keeping a check on the expenditure? When he chooses the labor which is proper and makes them labor on them, who will be resentful? When he is desirous of benevolent (government) and obtains benevolent (government), who will accuse him of covetousness? If the (superior man) deals with many people and few, great things and small alike without showing disrespect, would it not to have a dignified ease without pride? If he adjusts his clothes and caps, and thereby looks dignified, and thus is looked at in awe, is this not about being majestic and fierce.” Zi Zhang then asked, “What are the four evil things?” The Master said, “To put to death the people without having instructed them is cruelty, to extract from them the full tale of work without having warned them, this is called oppression, to issue orders to them without a sense of urgency in the beginning and later to insist it upon them with severity, this is called injury, to be stingy in giving away rewards to men, this is what is meant by the ways of a mere official.”

The task of governance, as perceived by Confucius, is intricate. The state/kingdom was seen as a joint responsibility of the ruler as well as the people. The art of statecraft was a synthesis of administrative skills, economic tactics, military strategy as well as cultivation of moral ethics at an individual level. Political power could rest in the hands of a “gentleman” (*jūnzi*), although the term originally meant a “son of the ruler”, showing also that political power could be held by anyone who was morally and ethically well cultivated and deserving irrespective of social status. Such uprightness and sincerity of a person would exhibit itself in all social circles. A good ruler would therefore also be fulfilling his obligations as an ideal brother, an ideal son and an ideal friend. The following are the passages from the Book of Mencius (*Mengzi* 孟子)¹⁷

“梁惠王上：

孟子見梁惠王。王曰：叟不遠千里而來，亦將有以利吾國乎？孟子對曰：「王何必曰利？亦有仁義而已矣。王曰『何以利吾國』？大夫曰『何以利吾家』？士庶人曰

『何以利吾身』？上下交征利而國危矣。萬乘之國弑其君者，必千乘之家；千乘之國弑其君者，必百乘之家。萬取千焉，千取百焉，不為不多矣。苟為後義而先利，

¹⁷ The following passages have been taken from www.ctext.org/mengzi under the sections 梁惠王上，梁惠王下。

不奪不廢。未有仁而遺其親者也，未有義而後其君者也。王亦曰仁義而已矣，何必曰利？」 Mencius once went to see King Hui of Liang. King Hui said to Mencius, “Venerable Master, (since) you have not considered the distance of one thousand li to be too far away and have (taken all the trouble to) come, (may I presume that) you have (suggestions) to profit my country? Mencius replied, “Why do you your Majesty talk about profit? I have only (the counsels) that conform to (the virtues) of benevolence and righteousness. If your Majesty now says “What is to be done to profit my kingdom, then the higher officers will be saying, what is to be done to profit our families? And the lower ranking officers will be saying, what is to be done to profit our own selves. The higher and the lower officers will then be competing with each other in snatching away profit and the kingdom will then be endangered. In the kingdom of a ten thousand chariots, the murderer of the sovereign will become the chief of a family of a thousand chariots, in a kingdom of a thousand chariots, the murderer of the king will become the chief of a family with a thousand chariots. Now to have a thousand out of a ten thousand, and to have a hundred out of a thousand, is that a small number? If righteousness is put at the end and profit is placed in the front, they will not be satisfied without snatching it from others, there has never been a benevolent man who has neglected his parents, there has never been a righteous person who has placed his sovereign at the rear in consideration, let the majesty also talk about or consider these virtues of benevolence and righteousness and not about profit.”

“孟子曰，

以力假仁者霸 霸必有國 以德行仁者王 王不待大。湯以七十里 文王以百里 benevolence。以力服人者，非心服也，力不贍也；以德服人者，中心悅而誠服也，如七十子之服孔子也。《詩》云：『自西自東，自南自北，無思不服。此之謂也。』 Mencius said, “He who uses force in pretence of might certainly be the prince of a large kingdom, but he who uses virtue as the practice of benevolence will certainly be the sovereign of the kingdom. To become the sovereign, the prince need not wait upon to have a large kingdom. Tang did it with just seventy li, and king Wen with a hundred li. When men are subdued by force they do not submit in their hearts, they submit because they (are not powerful enough) to resist the power of the force, when men are subdued by virtue, the people are pleased in their hearts and they submit with all sincerity, as was the case with the seventy disciples who had submitted to Confucius. The Book of Poetry has been to have mentioned that from the west from the east, from the south from the north, there was no one who did not submit. This is how submission should be.”

Mencius advocated a non-utilitarian objective of governance. The rule of the state was not supposed to be driven along the motive of profit. Benevolence and righteousness would be the two decisive factors of rule in the kingdom. Humanitarian government and power to the people were the final words of Mencius.

Here are the passages from the Chinese Classic the *Great Learning* (*Daxue* 大學)¹⁸

“大學之道，在明明德，在親民，在止於至善。知止而後有定，定而後能靜，靜而後能安，安而後能慮，慮而後能得。物有本末，事有終始，知所先後，則近道矣。(To follow the path of) the Great Learning is to illustrate the illustrious virtue, to renovate the people, and to abide in the highest good. Only when it is known where to stop, can (the object of pursuit) be determined, only when the object of pursuit is determined, can there be calmness, only when there is calmness, can there be a tranquil repose, only when there is a tranquil repose can there be careful deliberation, only when there is careful deliberation can there be the attainment of (the desired end). Everything has its roots and branches, every matter has its beginning and end, to know what is first and what is last, this will (finally) help you get closer to the (path of the) Great Learning.”

“古之欲明明德於天下者，先治其國；欲治其國者，先齊其家；欲齊其家者，先修其身；欲修其身者，先正其心；欲正其心者，先誠其意，欲誠其意者，先致其知，致知在格物。物格而後知至，知至而後意誠，意誠而後心正，心正而後身修，身修而後家齊，家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平。自天子以至於庶人，壹是皆以修身為本。其本亂而未治者否矣，其所厚者薄，而其所薄者厚，未之有也！此謂知本，此謂知之至也。The ancients who wanted to illustrate the illustrious virtue under heaven, first ordered well their own kingdoms, wishing to order their own kingdoms they wish to first regulate their families, wishing to regulate their own families, they first wish to cultivate their own selves, wishing to cultivate their own selves, they will then rectify their hearts, wishing to rectify their own hearts they will first be sincere in their intentions, wishing to be sincere in their own intentions they will then extend their knowledge to the utmost. Extending knowledge to the utmost is what is known as the investigation of things.

¹⁸ The passages has been taken from www.ctext.org/liji/daxue.

Things having been investigated, knowledge is extended to the utmost, knowledge having been extended to the utmost, the sincerity of will is enforced, when there is sincerity of will, there is rectification of the heart. Hearts being rectified, cultivation of the self follows, when there is cultivation of the self, families are regulated, when families are regulated the kingdom is governed, when the kingdom is governed there is peace under heaven. From the Son of Heaven down to the common masses, (the spirit of) cultivation of one's own self is the most fundamental of all. It cannot be that when the root is not in order, the rest that emerge from it will be in order. It has never been so that which is important has been neglected and that which is trivial has been attached greater importance to. This is what is meant by knowing the root or the origin or the beginning of things, this is also which is known as being aware of where things end.”

The most essential political teaching in the “Great Learning” was the integration of the political with the social and moral, and the individual with the state. Moral cultivation of each of the members of society from the ruler to the common masses was seen as fundamentally essential to any political behavior. Proper regulation of the first would determine proper control of the other. There was neither an element of separation, nor compartmentalization.

The following are two translated passages from a secondary source text on our last Chinese Classic of reference, the *Doctrine of Mean* (*zhong yong* 中庸).

“What Heaven (Tian 天) imparts to man is called human nature. To follow our nature is called the Way (Dao 道). Cultivating the Way is what leads to learning or education. The Way cannot be separated from us even for a moment. What can be separated from us is not the Way. Therefore the gentleman or superior man is cautious over what he does not see and apprehensive about what he does not hear. There is nothing more visible than what is hidden and nothing more manifest than what is subtle. Therefore the superior man is watchful about himself when he is alone. Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy are aroused, it is called equilibrium (corresponding to the *zhong* or the central), when these feelings attain adequate degree, it is called harmony. Equilibrium is the great foundation of the world and harmony is the universal path. When equilibrium and harmony are attained to the highest degree, then Heaven and Earth will attain their proper order and everything else will flourish.”¹⁹

“Only those who are absolutely sincere can fully develop their nature. If they can fully develop their own nature, can they then fully develop the nature of others. If they can fully develop the nature of others, can they then fully develop the nature of all things, then they can assist in transforming and nourishing the processes of Heaven and Earth. They can finally form a trinity with Heaven and Earth.”²⁰

Politics did not end with the governance of state and its peoples, but with uniting the earth with nature and heaven. In indigenous Chinese political philosophy, the science of politics included prescriptions of how to maintain a fine balance between the state, society, people, nature, earth, heaven, and cosmos, and the *Doctrine of the Mean* was a fine example of this very principle.

Influence of Ancient Chinese Political Thought on Modern and Contemporary Chinese Thinkers

The third section of the study looks into the question of whether ancient Chinese political philosophy had ever exerted any influence upon modern China's understanding of state-society interactions.

Political theories formulated by modern Chinese intellectuals reveal a case of moderate influence of ancient Chinese political thought as much as the newly permeating western notions of science, democracy, liberty, justice and the religious ideals of Christianity do. In times of social and political crisis, Confucian political ideals were re-examined. Against hard-pressed socio-political circumstances, political thinkers re-interpreted ancient Chinese political thoughts and formulated their own political theories based on these fresh interpretations. For instance, when by the end of the fifteenth century, the orthodox interpretation of Confucian political ideals led to a society which no longer valued humanitarian government, service to its people, and world peace and harmony, and centered around personal gain and profit, the principle of ‘investigation of things’ expounded in the Great Learning got re-interpreted, from being an intellectual virtue with Zhu Xi to a moral virtue with Wang Yang-ming (1472-1529).²¹

¹⁹ Wing Tsit- Chan. 1963, p. 98.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 107-108.

²¹ Wing Tsit-Chan. 1963. p. 654.

In this section we touch upon three major phases in the political life of China in order to understand the evolution of ancient Chinese political thought and to read into its influence in later ages. The first phase is the period of the Reforms in 1898, the second is the period of the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement between the years 1915-1919, and the third relates to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949.

In modern China, the pioneer of reform, Kang Youwei (1858-1927), a strict Confucian himself, attempted for the first time to revolutionize the teachings of Confucius and apply his political ideals into practice in government and society to justify his own radical reform policies. Kang Youwei proposed that history evolves in three stages towards utopia, or the Age of Great Unity, and that the Confucian virtue of benevolence (*ren*) is ether and electricity. Through his proposition, a new state-society relation in China was on its way of being founded in the early years of the twentieth century. He observed a general pattern in the evolution of all societies in every country, emerging from family clans to tribes, from tribes to nations and finally to the ultimate sought-after realm of 'Great Unification'. Closely connected to this social transformation, was the inevitable change in political authority. Power got transferred from the individual man to the tribal chieftains, and alongside was established the rule of tribal chiefs. This then defined the correct relationship between ruler and minister. From autocracy, Kang Youwei suggested, "emerges (monastic) constitutionalism, from constitutionalism gradually emerges republicanism. Individual men form families where relationship between father and son, husband and wife is well defined. Fundamental principles governing family ties are then extended to the entire human society."²² In this way the ultimate goal of 'Great Unity' is achieved." Kang Youwei suggested, "In the world of 'Great Unity', the whole world becomes a great unity, there is no division into international states and no difference between races. There will be no war"²³ "In the 'Age of Great Unity', the world government is daily engaged in mining, road building, reclamation of deserts, and navigation as the primary task" (ibidem). "In the 'Age of Great Peace', all agriculture, industry, and commerce originate with the world government. There is no competition at all" (ibidem). "In the 'Age of Great Peace', there are no emperors, kings, rulers, elders, official titles, or ranks. All people are equal, and do not consider position or rank as honor either. Only wisdom and humanity are promoted and encouraged..." (ibidem). "In the 'Age of Great Peace', since men's nature is already good and his ability and intelligence is superior, they only rejoice in matters of wisdom and humanity..." (ibidem).

On looking closely, Kang Youwei's proposition of the 'Great Unity' was an extended understanding of the Confucian theory of history progressing from the 'Age of Chaos' to that of 'Small Peace' and finally culminating in the 'Great Unity'. His proposition based itself upon the Confucian ideals of the original goodness of human nature, humanitarian virtues as key to individual-society-state relations, state governance directed towards benefit of the masses. This marked the beginning of the tendency of syncretization with most of modern China's intellectuals, who formulated their political theories by drawing upon elements from diverse philosophical ideas from ancient China and the west.

Between 1915 and 1919, the fate of modern China was closely affected by the outbreak of two major intellectual movements, the New Culture Movement and the May Fourth Movement. Never before was the foundation of traditional Chinese culture shaken to its core. Decadent Confucian political and social ideals were accused by intellectuals of being the primary cause of China's moral, social, and political degradation. The superiority of the western military forces was attributed to its advanced knowledge of science and technology. Amidst slogans like, 'Down with the curiosity shop of Confucius' (打倒孔子店), echoed modern intellectual China's call for science and democracy. In his "Outline of the History of Chinese philosophy", published in 1919, Hu Shi, one of the most prominent intellectuals of modern China defined philosophy as 'the kind of learning that investigates the basic and crucial problems of human life and seeks a fundamental solution for them from a fundamental point of view'.²⁴ Although he seemed to have diverged from the ancient Chinese philosophical discussion about political matters, the fundamental questions posed by him reflected the universal nature of Confucian political philosophy which also highlighted a few of the very same issues two millennia ago.

²² Wing Tsit-Chan. 1963, p. 726.

²³ Ibidem, p. 733.

²⁴ Sung Peng-Hsu. 2001. 'Hu Shih 胡適', in Donald H. Bishop (ed.), *Chinese Thought: An Introduction*. South Asia Books, p. 2-4.

His questions on, ‘what is the extent, function, and method of knowledge and thought’, ‘what ought man to do in this world’, ‘how should man organize and maintain a society or state’,²⁵ were some of the cardinal issues which were discussed in the ancient Chinese Confucian Classics. Hu Shi conceived of the idea that every human action has a direct or indirect influence on society at large. His presumption of an uninterrupted chain of continuity between individual action and its far reaching impact on society and state was drawn from the ancient Chinese doctrine of ‘three immortalities’ found in the Zuo Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals, speaking of the immortality of virtue, service and wise speech.²⁶

Post-war China in 1949 witnessed the new-born People’s Republic. Marxist-Leninist ideology was being critically studied and adapted to suit the indigenous Chinese socio-political reality. Political philosophy in Communist China was evolving along the ideals of Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. In new China’s intellectual domain, there was not much reliance on ancient China’s philosophical treatises. Chairman Mao Zedong’s philosophy was eventually emerging as the new core area of study on political philosophy. In one of his most important essays, ‘On Practice’ (1937), Chairman Mao shares his conviction thus, “To discover truth through practice and through practice to verify and develop truth. To start from perceptual knowledge and actively develop it into rational knowledge, and then starting from rational knowledge, actively direct revolutionary practice so as to re-mould the subjective and the objective world...”²⁷ Though there never has been a recognition regarding continuity in the evolution of philosophical thought from ancient to contemporary times, Chairman Mao’s reiteration on the unity of knowledge and action can be traced back to the fundamental Confucian political thought of harmonizing true learning through the investigation of things with the act of governance.

The former Chinese Head of State, Hu Jintao’s 18th Party Congress speech is a fine admixture of elements borrowed from Communism and Confucianism. It cannot be ruled out that even in present times China has not been able to completely bid farewell to some of its ancient philosophical thoughts. “To integrate the rule of law with the rule of virtue, intensify education in public morality, professional ethics, family virtues, and individual integrity, and advocate traditional Chinese virtues and new trends of the times” is an outline of a program which bases itself on the subtle combination of the ancient with the modern.

Ancient Chinese Political Philosophy and Modern Political Theory- A Critique

In the fourth section of the paper it is attempted to understand how to relate to ancient Chinese political thought with our modern academic understanding of the subject. We would like to address a few questions here which might help us approach the subject better. Which academic discipline does the study of ancient Chinese political thought belong to? What do we read into this activity of philosophical speculation of political issues? How does philosophy relate to politics? Where does the study of philosophy intercept the study of politics? Is there any precedent in the history of societies where we find such inter-linkages between philosophy and politics?

Before we start seeking answers to the above questions, let us summarize the most essential contents of the preceding Chinese passages from philosophical source texts on their suggestions on the ideal form of political governance. Cultivation of the individual self with focus on virtues like benevolence, propriety, righteousness, regulation of family based on the principles of five golden relationships, governance of society featuring correspondence between names and actualities, seeking harmony between man and society, and also between man and nature under the influence of a self-existent moral code called the Mandate of Heaven (*tianming* 天命), are some of the key issues discussed in our source texts. They essentially propose an ideal form of governance where man, society and political organization are inter-linked and mutually influential. Broadly speaking, classical Confucian ideals focus on the mutually reciprocal forms of inter-state and intra-state interactions, while taking into account an individual’s moral obligation to its immediate natural environment.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

²⁷ www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1.

In the words of Michael J. White, “Many introductions to political philosophy are analytic and largely ahistorical explorations of such political concepts as justice, rights, equality, political obligation, and democracy, and of such issues as the relation or (opposition) between the individual person and the community, between liberty and equality, or between reward of individual merit and effort, on the one hand, and satisfaction of basic human needs, on the other.”²⁸ The above definition as well as the aforementioned fundamental teachings of classical Chinese political philosophy then suggests that the study of ancient Chinese political thought comes under the domain of political philosophy or the philosophy of politics.

The role which political philosophy plays with respect to maintaining the political organization of society in fine balance with the needs and aspirations of its people has been summarized by John Rawls as follows. “The first role is practical. Political philosophy can discover bases for agreement in a society where sharp divisions threaten to lead to conflict. The second role of political philosophy is to help citizens to orient themselves within their own social world. Philosophy can describe what it is to be a member of a society with a certain political status and can suggest how the nature and history of that society can be understood from a broader perspective. A third role is to probe the limits of practicable political possibility. Political philosophy must describe workable political arrangements that can gain support from the real people...A fourth role of political philosophy is reconciliation—to calm our frustration and rage against our society and its history by showing us the way in which its institutions are rational and developed overtime as they did to attain their present rational form.”²⁹

Philosophical speculation of the organic articulation of human beings dates far back in the history of human thought. This is not an exercise of recent times. However the irony remains that the modern academic understanding of political philosophy as well as its relevance in society and politics today is influenced to a considerable degree by nineteenth and post-nineteenth century intellectual developments in the west.

Political theory, a relatively new academic discipline is concerned with the phenomenon of the state both in empirical and philosophical terms. In the endeavor of interlinking politics with philosophy, political philosophy has now been placed under the category of normative political theory within the sub-domain of the history of political thought. With the rise of empiricism and scienticism, political theory over the past few years has emerged as an eclectic subject, highly analytical in approach and has begun to rely perhaps a little too heavily on the clarification of concepts, methodology, and the logic of political appraisal, while distancing itself from the normative, ethical, and moral aspect of political philosophy.

The task which is undertaken in this section is therefore of critically examining modern political theories in context and identifying their significant areas of divergence from the principal teachings of classical Chinese political philosophy. In this section would be highlighted fundamental differences of approach, if any, towards people, society, and state-society interactions between the modern-day academic discipline of political theory and that of classical Chinese political philosophy.

From the nineteenth century onwards, the global political and economic scene was dominated by political ideologies of liberalism, materialism, utilitarianism, social Darwinism, socialism, Marxism, and nationalism, leaving profound yet varying influences on the intricate dynamics of state-society interactions in different nations/states. These political ideologies were also responsible for coloring some of the prominent intellectual tendencies in modern societies. A few of the more prominent modern political ideologies will be discussed here.

Liberalism emerged as a distinct political movement during the Age of the Enlightenment and became popular among philosophers and economists in the western world. Liberalism stood diametrically opposed to traditional conservatism and absolutism, while advocating representative democracy and the rule of law. A new worldview was founded on ideas of liberty and equality, following which, the rights of individuals was firmly established outside of any government intervention. Absence of coercion and expansion of free trade and free markets marked nineteenth century Europe, Spanish America and North America. However, under certain liberal political theorists, liberalism in its application perhaps went too far. Thomas Hobbes’ theory of the ‘state of nature is a state of war’ presupposes a hypothetical war like scenario where citizens are in antagonism with each other as well as the state. His formulation of the ‘social contract theory’ constructs the idea that individuals could enter into a contract to ensure their security and in doing so form a state.

²⁸ Michael J. White. 2012. *Political Philosophy- A Historical Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 10.

²⁹ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Plato.stanford.edu/entries/rawls

Hobbes' view of one's social environment as a war zone is in complete contrast to the classical Chinese philosophical view of a harmonious society founded not on the principles of mutual suspicion and competition but on the mutual recognition of the universal principle of cooperation by individual members of any said society. Another Hobbesian conclusion based on his social contract method of equating political obedience with peace, of having everyone to submit to an unlimited and undivided absolute sovereign power was perhaps not liberty at its best. To yield to an absolute authoritarian sovereign in fear of any other government otherwise being dissolved into civil war made liberalism appear as a fake label which led citizens into forced submission. This was again in contrast with Mencius' doctrine of the right of citizens to revolt when the 'Mandate of Heaven' was being misused by the ruler.

The central theory of liberalism stands opposed to the spirit of communitarianism and collectivism of ancient Chinese philosophy. While the former undermines or devaluates the sense of community, the latter emphasizes the significance of it in view of upholding the essence of integrity and harmony between peoples, societies, nations, and ultimately nature and the cosmos.

The other nineteenth century theory of utilitarianism advocates the evaluation of persons, actions, and institutions in terms of their effects on human happiness. According to this doctrine, the primary objective of all actions is the maximization of sentient happiness. This theory, preaching the egalitarian conception of impartiality was universal in scope, where everyone's happiness mattered. To be driven by such an incentive of utility or profit is unknown in the ancient Chinese philosophical context where actions are supposed to be determined by virtue and benevolence only and not by ulterior motives of utility or profit. Mills' endorsement of the utilitarian idea that duty or right action is to be defined in terms of the promotion of happiness also does not find any equivalent in the Chinese context. Benthamite utilitarianism and Mill's doctrine of higher pleasure reflect a tone of acceptance and rejection of individuals on the basis of their utilitarian function. This is in sharp contrast with the Chinese understanding of the function and purpose of human life, at the core of which lies a non-utilitarian objective of creating a harmonious relation among all members of society.

Spirit of competition and struggle is also reflected in modern political theories of Social Darwinism and Marxism to a limited extent. Having based themselves upon the Darwinian theory of 'natural selection' which proposes 'survival of the fittest', social Darwinists have formulated arguments which justify imbalances of power between individuals, races, and nations because they have considered some people more fit to survive than others. Herbert Spencer's views about social evolution through competition leading to prosperity and personal liberty also reconfirms that Hobbesian theory of war-like social atmosphere lived on in the domain of political theory. The Marxian theory of class struggle under the dictatorship of the proletariat until the establishment of a classless society advocates the superiority or predominance of a certain class over the others, thereby overruling the traditional Chinese tenet of respecting the respective social positions of each member in society without striving to bring them to the same social position.

Is There Anything to Learn for Modern Governments from Ancient Chinese Political Philosophy?

We begin the final section of this paper by asking this question. We here purposefully use the term 'modern governments' irrespective of whether they are founded upon the political and social ideologies of political liberalism, constitutional democracy, individualism, utilitarianism or socialism, Marxism, authoritarian dictatorship, communitarianism and collectivism.

The fact that certain principles of ancient Chinese political philosophy which were once conceived of about two millennia ago are attempted to be analyzed through the prism of modern-day structured discipline of political theory, does not do justice to the study. It is essential to realize that political theories formulated during certain periods of time in diverse cultural realms cannot always be comprehensively studied from a modern perspective, but rather should be left to a historical understanding of the sociopolitical context, unique to its emergence and evolution, in its own rights.

The question as to whether ancient Chinese political philosophy can offer answers to unresolved political and social issues in societies both liberal and non-liberal, western and non-western is being approached thus.

Political theory is dynamic in the sense that contemporary political theorists address issues which keep on changing depending upon the needs of the hour. Liberalism arose out of the necessity of countering conservatism and absolutism.

Concepts of liberty and equality brought about greater independence of the individual, ending her subservient status to the state. The conflict between natural law and positive law continues with regard to the drawing up of constitutions in various societies across the globe.

However political philosophy addresses issues with political and social implications which go beyond space and time. These issues lie at the core of every political organization in every society. Ancient political philosophy, although once an inherent component of political theory, has been deemed redundant under the modern day ‘infatuation with the scientific model of knowledge’.³⁰

Classical political philosophy in general and classical Chinese political philosophy in particular bears a strong normative tone, which under the prevalent trend of empiricism is regarded as nothing more than cognitive nonsense. As a result, ancient political philosophy, once an inherent component of political theory, has been deemed redundant under the modern day ‘infatuation with the scientific model of knowledge’.³¹ However it is to be acknowledged that not all aspects of political philosophy can and should be answered within the scientific model.

Political philosophy, especially in the ancient Chinese context approaches the issue of state-society inter-linkages with its normative tone while political theory advances upon similar issues within an empirical framework. Ancient Chinese political philosophy’s view of state-society interactions is based on the central theme of ‘harmony’ and ‘integration’. The uniqueness of it lies in viewing the art of statecraft as an extension of the craftsmanship of cultivation of the moral behavior and ethical conduct of individuals. To view society/state as an extension of family, and the family as an extension of the individual is perhaps what ancient Chinese philosophical writings have to offer to modern societies and government. Compared to modern western, liberal societies where governance is directed top down from the state onto the individuals of society, traditional Chinese political philosophy treats governance from down up, that is to say from the individuals or masses to the state.

Concluding Remarks

Contemporary political theorist Brian Barry’s discussion of things Chinese was confined to brief criticisms of the Cultural Revolution and the traditional practice of foot binding.³² Although this appears to be an isolated case in global academia, the question arises as to whether most contemporary liberal, western political theorists believe that there is nothing substantial to be learnt from non-western, non-liberal societies in matters related to politics, governance, liberty, freedom, equality and the like, and therefore western, liberal political theories should be universally followed. It needs to be understood that Chinese culture is not about foot binding only, as anything close to Indian culture is not just caste system while anything European is not just a history of colonization.

The final question is therefore contemporary political thought or ancient political philosophy, which of the two, offers solution to the present-day volatile political situation worldwide. May we ask whether the Darwinian theory of “natural selection” justifies the ongoing civil wars in societies across the world, whether the Hobbesian theory of “state of nature is a state of war” legitimizes state-society imbalance and mass uprisings in countries worldwide, whether the theory of liberalism, which once gave freedom to individuals from government oppression, has gone too far with individuals in society turning away from each other?

There is a need, perhaps, to integrate both the elements of ancient political philosophy and contemporary political theory. Liberalism can be applied to its best when individuals in society follow the Confucian principles of self cultivation, materialism cannot lead to greed if limits to one’s possession is properly defined as in the Confucian philosophy, utilitarianism cannot create selfish motives if man and nature, state and society can be seen as inherent components of each other. The ‘normative’ must go hand in hand with the ‘empirical’, description of political phenomenon should accompany prescription for harmonious state-society relations, the understanding of ‘what is’ needs to be strengthened with a realization of ‘what ought to be’.

³⁰ Antonella Besussi. 2012. ‘Philosophy and Politics’ in Antonella Besussi (ed.), *A Companion to Political Philosophy. Methods, Tools, Topics*. Burlington: Ashgate, p. 4.

³¹ Antonella Besussi. 2012. ‘Philosophy and Politics’ in Antonella Besussi (ed.), *A Companion to Political Philosophy. Methods, Tools, Topics*. Burlington: Ashgate, p. 4.

³² Brian Barry. 1995. *Justice as Impartiality*. Quoted in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

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