

CHU YU

CRITICISM OF THE CHINESE PEOPLE'S THINKING

All decided by the pattern of thinking



中央编译出版社
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If you brush aside all your knowledge and what people around you say, and look at this world with your own eyes, you will find that this world is different from the world you knew originally. Perhaps the world you see with your own eyes is truer.

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If we make a comprehensive survey of China's history of the past hundreds of years, we can find that our ancestors were so unintelligent and confused (comparing them with other nations in the same period instead of looking at the past only from a modern perspective). If our descendants look at the Chinese people of today , will they think that modern Chinese people are extremely unintelligent?

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A mode of thinking is formed by the environment and culture, but as soon as a mode of thinking forms thinking habits and thought sets, then a mode of thinking does not have much to do with the original culture. Instead, the mode of thinking dominates the trend of the culture.

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In any country and nation, intellectuals are a basic factor determining the fate of the nation and country. If a

Introduction

The reason why Chinese civilization did not progress in nearly two thousand years is precisely what is wrong with academic thought today. Simply put, what is devious is that people are under the impression that formulating academic theory is very difficult to do but easy to understand. This thought has misled China and misleads its scholars.

—Sun Yat-sen

The “mode of thinking” we will talk about is people’s mode of thinking, but this mainly refers to the philosophical perspective of modes of thinking. According to scholars and experts, mode of thinking is defined as a procedure of thinking that is long-term, continuous, and universally accepted as a group’s method or habit of thinking; the regularity in thinking forms and thinking structures; and can be regarded as the total of people’s thinking sets and “internalized” cognitive operation modes. As soon as a mode of thinking forms fixed mainstream thinking habits and frameworks among people, it can become the main composition of the way people think.

Since in Chinese the connotation and entire meaning of the phrase “way of thinking” is rather broad and vague, we use “mode of thinking” here to express this concept. Meanwhile, we use to phrase “thinking method” to refer to a specific concept within the framework of the mode of thinking.

A person usually has only one mode of thinking, and a nation usually has one main mode of thinking playing a dominant role. There cannot be two or more modes of thinking at the same time. There is no logical relationship between a mode of thinking and religious beliefs. People who share the same mode of thinking could very well believe in either communism or fascism. Similarly, there is no organic connection between a mode of thinking and a person’s occupation or moral character. People who share the same mode of thinking could be gentlemen or bandits. This book points this out in

order to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings.

This book uses historical facts to support and explain the decisive role that the Chinese “mode of thinking” has played in the development of the country and nation under certain conditions. Explaining through comparison the gap between Chinese and Western modes of thinking, this book illustrates the consequences brought on by Chinese traditional thinking, points out the fact that Chinese traditional thinking hinders China’s scientific and technological development, and finally proposes specific methods that could improve the defects of Chinese people’s current mode of thinking.

Finally I would like to especially state that this book does not address the issue of whether ideologies or social institutions and systems are good or bad, nor does it include a full comparison between Chinese and Western modes of thinking and culture. This book only elaborates on the defects of Chinese people’s thinking. The examples used in this book are meant to help illustrate and support the theories presented in this book and nothing more.

Chapter One

Current Mainstream Theories on the Cause of China's Backwardness and Their False Conclusions

Due to their enduring curiosity and passionate, unbiased exploration, the ancient Greeks occupy a unique and unmatched position in history.

—Rousseau

Following the prosperity of the Song Dynasty, China slowly declined until modern times. China was able to pull itself out of this decline only after enduring nearly a thousand years of backwardness and getting attacked without any recourse of defense. What is actually the root cause of China's backwardness? For the longest time, no consensus has been reached by scholars as to the real cause. To sum up, there are just the following three mainstream causes:

1. The feudal society and autocratic rule that existed in China for more than two thousand years;
2. Confucianism playing a dominant role in Chinese culture;
3. The problem of China's social institutions and political systems.

If the above views are truths, they should be universally applicable. If there are different conclusions or one unexpected result, the above views are not tenable. Shi Zhongquan, a famous Chinese scholar on researching Mao Zedong, thinks, "Only Mao Zedong, who made important developments to the Marxist philosophical theory, can be truly called a great philosopher." Mao Zedong believed that there was only one truth. Let us look at the facts.

I. The first argument, "feudalism and autocracy is the origin of China's backwardness," clearly is not tenable when compared against Chinese and foreign history.

Most Chinese and foreign scholars believe: human beings

must through the process of development experience primitive society, slave-owning society, feudal society, and capitalist society (at present some Chinese scholars are divided in their support or rejection of this theory, which is not discussed here). With the Netherlands, Britain and France as forerunners, almost all Western countries only experienced about a thousand years of feudal society and then made the transition to a capitalist society. However for more than two thousand years, China remained a feudal society and for nearly a thousand of those years even retrogressed until the navel guns of the West blasted open the doors to the country. Then some changes began to take place.

Historical facts prove that what is referred to as the feudal stage of development of society, experienced by all human societies, could not have played such a decisive role in the development of a country. It is just like continuing studying at the same school. Some people graduate from senior high school and pass the college entrance examination after three years, while some people fail to pass the college entrance examination after studying in senior high school for six years. If they blame their failures on the set up of senior high schools or the extended period spent studying in senior high school, instead of on their own shortcomings, that is a bit too much.

When observing the autocratic rule of feudalism, the repression of free thinking in Western feudal society, referred

to as the Dark Ages, was crueler more bloody than feudalism in China. During this period, when the church and political rulers were one entity, rulers harshly governed over their subject's spiritual and religious beliefs. Heresy and different beliefs were strictly forbidden.

Autocratic institutions in medieval Europe, such as the "Inquisition," had many laws and religious disciplines restricting the speech and actions of people—forbidding freedom of religion and speech. Violators were labeled "heretics" and cruelly persecuted. Many great thinkers and scientists were not spared. For example, the first generally recognized female mathematician in the world Hypatia, the later biologist Palissy, the medical scientist Servetus, the physiologist Vesalius, all were either burned to death or executed. Bruno, who just simply agreed with Copernicus's heliocentric theory of "the revolution of the Earth running around the sun," did not escape the misfortune of being burned to death in the Campo dei Fiori in Rome. At that time the period of Western Renaissance had already begun.

The persecution of people who did not believe in Christianity was even more appalling. People who were deemed as pagans or voiced the slightest doubt about the Bible, or disrespected God could be executed by the church. Even some women with freckles, strange moles, or fleabite scars were condemned as witches and executed in the name of God.

In China, under most circumstances of whatever dynasty, as long as people did not rebel, they could believe in Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity or whatever religion they wanted to believe in and worship whatever god they wanted to worship (more or less). Nobody cared if you said the Earth revolved around the Moon. In comparison with medieval times in the West, Chinese thoughts, beliefs, and speech were relatively free overall. For example, Xiao Yan, Emperor Wu of the Liang Dynasty, from the Southern Dynasties (464 – 549) was extremely obsessed with Buddhism. Xiao Yan left several times in order to become a monk. He even established Buddhism as the state religion and he made great efforts to carry forward Buddhist doctrines. Buddhism had absolute authority in terms of faith. Even so, Emperor Wu of Liang had a high-ranking ministerial official, Fan Zhen, a high ranking official, was an atheist. In addition, he also published a book, *On the Annihilation of the Soul*, which publicized his beliefs on atheism. Since the emperor was a pious Buddhist, he responded to Fan Zhen's book by having sixty-four Confucian scholars write seventy-five essays debating with Fan Zhen, who in the end were unable to disprove Fan Zhen's theories. At last, the emperor had no choice but to let him be. If this happened in Medieval Europe, Fan Zhen certainly would have been seen by all as offensive and unpardonably heretical. As the Chinese saying goes, he deserved the punishment of ten thousand cuts. Even if he had ten

thousand heads, they would have been chopped off, not to mention he would have lost his position as a high-ranking official.

Since the Renaissance, some Western scholars had theorized that China was literally a paradise of free thought. Some Western scholars whose excessive praise of China even help create a “China fever” in Europe, which played a role in promoting the development of Western Renaissance and capitalism. Clearly the theory that China is backwards because of its history as a feudal autocracy is untenable.

II. The second argument, “Confucian culture is the origin of China’s backwardness,” is groundless when compared against historical perspectives of all angles.

From a historical perspective: Confucian culture was far from playing a significant role in hindering the development of the Chinese society. Confucian culture was prevalent in the Han Dynasty and Tang Dynasty, but it did not affect the prosperity of the Han Dynasty and Tang Dynasty. These two dynasties are considered to have been great powers in the world in their own time and their policies on economy, culture, and political and foreign affairs did not seem to be negatively affected by Confucianism (here the Confucian culture refers to the original Confucian culture).

From a worldwide perspective: Because the Tang Dynasty was strong and prosperous, Confucian culture gradually spread to various countries in Northeast and Southeast Asia.

Among them, Japan and South Korea were the most influenced by Confucian culture, but the development of Japan and South Korea was not affected.

In the early 5th century, Confucian classics spread to Japan. Afterwards, Confucian thought influenced all levels of ancient or modern Japanese society, from regulations and institutions to folk customs and practices. Whether it was a time of war and chaos, or peace and prosperity; a time of militarism or constitutional democracy, Confucianism was an influence on Japan. Even Gu Hongming, a gifted Confucian scholar from the Qing Dynasty who obsessed about Chinese traditional Confucianism regretfully remarked, "We should say that the Japanese are the true Chinese, Tang Dynasty Chinese."

No matter how persistently Japan has held on to Confucian traditions, whenever it has faced a major crisis, Japan has always been able to get out of difficulties in a short time and still be counted as a developed country, no matter the time period. For example, in the shogun period before the Meiji Restoration, Japanese politics, economy and military affairs were very backward. After the Meiji Restoration, the industrial revolution reached a climax and Japan soon became prosperous and strong through learning from the West. From 1868 to the early 20th century, Japan became one of the world's top five economic powers in just fifty years. As a result of Japan's defeat in World War II and other factors, Japan's national economy was paralyzed. However, this only