

中國文化講座



主編 王路江

# Lectures on Chinese Culture (II)



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BEIJING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Chinese Culture  
(II)

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中华文化博大精深，源远流长。文学上，从先秦诸子到西汉大赋，从魏晋志人志怪小说到南北朝民歌，从唐诗宋词元曲到明清小说，产生的鸿文大作灿若星河；艺术上，从琵琶琴瑟到笔墨纸砚，从丝绢刺绣到水墨皴染，从京剧昆曲到越剧评弹，声声点点都蕴含着中华文化的精妙；思想上，从正心诚意到齐家治国，从君子不器到天下大同，从舍生取义到忧国为民，都体现出中华文化中的人伦之道；建筑上，从雄伟壮观的长城到清幽典雅的园林，从代表皇家气魄的紫禁城到散发着民间气息的平遥古城，从西安的大雁塔到拉萨的布达拉宫，无一不彰显着中华文化的魅力。

所有的文化都在潜移默化中影响着中国人的生活方式与行为理念，不管是文学艺术还是建筑精神，都体现着中国人所独有的审美取向与精神诉求。中国人讲求“天人合一”，人的一切活动应以天地四时的自然之法为最高准则，这正体现了中华文化“与自然和谐共生”的传统理念。另外，中国自古以来积极与外国进行经济、文化等各方面的交流。通过交流，不仅影响了周边国家，还通过丝绸之路将中国的丝绸、茶叶运到欧洲，与此同时传播的还有中国的思想和文化，并带回西方的先进观念和文化，使中华文化与世界文化相通。

今天，随着中国经济的飞速发展，中国与海外各国的经济、文化交流日渐紧密。国务委员刘延东在2009年外国汉语教师奖学金项目开学典礼上的致辞中讲到，“鼓励跨文化交流是中国政府的一贯主张。近年来，中国政府把人文交流提升到国家战略的层面，坚持官民并举，倡导不同文化在和而不同中取长补短，在求同存异中共同进步”。原全国人大常委会副委员长许嘉璐曾说，追求和谐与自然的中华文化是世界文化的重要一员，其传播不仅有利于世界人民了解中国，也有利于呈献世界文化的多元性。北京语言大学作为中国唯一所以汉语国际教育和对来华留学生进行汉语、中华文化教育为主要任务的国际型大学，在汉语和中国文化的海外传播中理应有独特的担当和责任。

为使留学生突破语言水平的限制，在更深层次和更广泛内容上加深对中国文化的认知和理解，促进中外文化的相互交流，学校利用高水平英语师资的优势，于2009年9月推出首期“中国文化英文系列讲座”，至今已经举办了六期，每期八至十讲。讲座内容涉及中国历史、文学、哲学、艺术、民俗、教育、经济、建筑等领



域，听众累计约4000余人次。其中的师生互动环节更体现了中外文化的交流与碰撞，深受广大留学生的欢迎。

学校从前三期讲座中精选了10讲内容，正式出版《中国文化讲座》（第一辑）；今年，又从前六期讲座中另选9讲，编辑出版《中国文化讲座》（第二辑）。我们还将不断创新、完善、充实讲座的形式和内容，努力使更多的留学生从中受益，使《中国文化讲座》成为学校留学生教育的品牌项目。

愿这一系列图书的出版能对中华文化的海外传播起到些许裨益，为中外文化交流贡献绵薄之力。

王路仁



## Foreword

Chinese culture boasts a long history, endowed with broad and profound significance. In literature, the works of great reputation and everlasting influence have been shining brightly as the stars in the galaxy: the great philosophers in the pre-Qin Dynasty (the period before the Qin Dynasty, the 21st century BC-221 BC), the vigorous *Fu*<sup>1</sup> in the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC-25 AD), the fantasies (the tales of mystery and the supernatural) in the Wei Kingdom (one kingdom of the Three Kingdoms Period, 220-280) and the Western and Eastern Jin Dynasties (265-420), the folk songs in the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589), the poems in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the lyrics in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), *Qu*<sup>2</sup> in the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368), and novels in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasty (1616-1911). In arts, the delicacy and exquisiteness of Chinese culture has been reflected in various aspects, such as *pipa* (a plucked string instrument with a fretted fingerboard), *qin* (a seven-stringed plucked instrument), and *se* (a twenty-five-stringed plucked instrument)<sup>3</sup>, writing brushes, ink sticks, paper and ink stones<sup>4</sup>, silk embroidery, Chinese ink and wash painting, *Cun* dyeing (a unique mode in Chinese painting), Beijing opera, *Kunqu* opera<sup>5</sup>, Shaoxing opera (a popular opera in Shanghai and Zhejiang Province), and *pingtan* (a popular local opera in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province). In thoughts, the human values in Chinese culture have been demonstrated in such qualities as integrity, honesty, family harmony, ambition in state-

1. A literary form, once translated as "rhyme prose", "poetic prose", or "prose poem".

2. Also known as Yuan songs, a type of verse popular in the Yuan Dynasty, including *zaju* and *sanqu*, sometimes referred to as *zaju* only.

3. All these are typical traditional Chinese stringed musical instruments.

4. These are the four essential components in Chinese calligraphy.

5. Also known as *Kunju*, one of the oldest forms of Chinese opera.



running, versatility in one's ability, harmonious world, dying for righteousness, and devotion to one's nation and people. In architecture, the enchantment of Chinese culture has been manifested in the majestic Great Wall, the quiet and elegant gardens and parks, the Forbidden City representative of royal imposing manner, the Ancient City of Pingyao (Shanxi Province) symbolic of ordinary style, the Greater Wild Goose Pagoda in Xi'an (Shaanxi Province), and the Potala Palace (Lhasa, Tibet).

All these cultural constructs have always been exerting their subtle and persistent impact on Chinese people's life and behavior. And Chinese literature, art, and architectural pattern, in turn, have expressed Chinese people's unique aesthetic orientation and moral quest. Chinese people advocate the philosophy of the "unity of heaven and man" so that everything in one's life shall be subject to the natural law of the heaven and the earth, an exact representation of a traditional Chinese cultural concept of "harmony and coexistence with nature". Besides, since ancient times, China has been actively conducting economic and cultural exchanges with other countries, which have not only made an immense impact on China's neighbors, but also brought China's silk and tea to Europe by way of the Silk Road<sup>6</sup>. Meanwhile, these exchanges have helped to both spread Chinese thoughts and culture and introduce advanced ideas and cultures from the West so that a cultural communication has been fulfilled between China and the world.

Nowadays, China's rapid economic growth

6. An ancient trade route that linked China with West Asia and Europe.



has brought about increasingly closer economic and cultural exchanges between China and other countries. In her speech at the opening ceremony of the Scholarship Program for Overseas Teachers of Chinese Language (2009), State Councilor Liu Yandong said: “The Chinese government has been consistently promoting cross-cultural exchanges. In recent years, the Chinese government has identified cultural exchanges as its national strategy and has made great efforts in this regard through both governmental and non-governmental channels. And we maintain that different cultures can achieve ‘diversity in unity’ by learning from others to address their own deficiency and that they can strive for a mutual progress by ‘seeking common grounds and shelving differences’.” Xu Jialu, former vice chairman of China’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee, once said that Chinese culture, one that treasures harmony and naturalness, is an important component among the cultures in the world. Chinese culture’s transmission, therefore, will both help other peoples to understand China and promote the cultural diversity globally. Beijing Language and Culture University, as the only higher educational institute in China specialized in Chinese language and culture education for the students studying Chinese as a foreign language, should shoulder its distinctive duty in the transmission of Chinese language and culture.

In order to help the international students overcome the linguistic barriers so as to sharpen





and broaden their recognition and understanding of Chinese culture for the ultimate better exchange between China and the world, we launched the English lectures featuring Chinese culture in September 2009. So far, the lectures have been running for six rounds, each comprising 8-10 lectures, covering such wide topics as Chinese history, literature, philosophy, art, folk customs, education, economy, architecture, etc. More than 4,000 students have attended the lectures. The lectures, the question-and-answer sections in particular, have enjoyed great popularity among the international students, who have managed to experience the exchanges between Chinese culture and other cultures.

Ten lectures from the first three rounds were selected and published as *Lectures on Chinese Culture (I)* last year; and this year nine lectures from the six rounds have been selected to be compiled and published as *Lectures on Chinese Culture (II)*. Furthermore, we will make more innovation and improvements in the lectures in both format and topics for the benefit of the wider and more diverse international students so that the *Lectures on Chinese Culture* can serve as a model program in international students' education.

It is our wish that the books can be of assistance for the transmission of Chinese culture and make their contribution to the cultural exchange between China and the world.

Wang Lujiang

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# The Philosophical Ideas of Han Feizi

## 韩非子的哲学思想

Ning Yizhong 宁一中

### 1. General Introduction

Han Feizi (韩非子, 281-233 B.C., also translated as Han Fei-tzu, Han Fei-tse, etc.) was a prince of the royal family of the State of Han (Warring States Period, 475-221 B.C.). He was one of the most famous philosophers and thinkers in ancient China, and the founder of legalism.

His philosophy, especially those ideas concerning legalism, provided the theoretical foundation for the birth of China's first state with imperial central concentration. It was said that he studied under the eminent Confucian philosopher Xunzi (荀子), and that one of his fellow students Li Si (李斯), who was to become prime minister and chief aid to the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.), sinisterly murdered him.



Han Feizi



Han Feizi lived in a time when the State of Han was undergoing a dim and precarious period. His own political ambition could not be fulfilled. What was worse, he stuttered badly, which was a tremendous handicap in an age when eloquence was a potent political weapon and the statesmen with glib tongues were usually most successful. Out of patriotic feelings and distressed by the dangerous conditions of his state, he submitted letters of remonstrance to his ruler, presumably King Huanhui (桓惠王, 272-239 B.C.) or his successor. But the king refused the book entitled *Han Feizi* (《韩非子》) by later historians, which includes such famous essays as “The Five Vermin (《五蠹》),” “The Difficulties of Persuasion (《说难》),” “The Way of the Ruler (《主道》),” and “On Having Standards (《有度》).” In the book, he suggested that the ruler should reinforce the army and rule the country by law. But his efforts were in vain. He felt very much frustrated. Then the book came to the hands of the king of Qin, the youthful ruler who ascended the throne of Qin in 246 B.C. and was soon to conquer and rule all over China under the title First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty (秦始皇). He expressed great admiration for Han Feizi’s ideas. At the time when Qin was launching an attack on Han Feizi’s native state, the king of Han decided to dispatch him as the envoy to Qin for a peace talk. He was warmly received by the king of Qin, but Li Si, his former fellow student, out of personal jealousy, warned the king of Qin that since Han Feizi was a member of the royal family of Han, he was not to be trusted. In the end, the king of Qin was persuaded. He handed Han Feizi to the law officials for investigation and soon sent him to jail. Before he had time to regret his decision, Li Si sent poison to the prison, and ordered Han Feizi to drink it and kill himself. That ended the philosopher, who was in his forties or early fifties.

Han Feizi is a representative of the school of philosophy called Fa Jia (法家), the Legalist School. His work *Han Feizi*, with 55 sections, over 100,000 words in total, is a great work on the ideas of this school, concentrating on the subject of political science, and the nature and use of power. Unlike the Confucian School, which advocated “restoration to the ancient way” and “following the former kings,” he was strongly against such a restoration. Instead, he emphasized rule by law, strict penalties, growth of agriculture and aggressive warfare. The purpose of these are: strengthening the central government, establishing a more effective control over the land and the population through laws and strict penalties, replacing the old aristocracy, encouraging agriculture to provide a steady food supply, and staging warfare to expand the borders

of the state, thus insuring a tough, alert and well-disciplined population.

The style of Han Feizi's writing is on the whole clear, concise, and polished. He treated the issues in the book in witty, trenchant, and blatant ways with an air of sophistication and a touch of humor. He also made use of fables, folktales and anecdotes to illustrate the abstract notion of truth, making his ideas easily understood. Many idioms of the Chinese language can be attributed to Han Feizi and his works.

## 2. Warming-up Questions

- (1) Do you have any idea about the legalists in ancient China?
- (2) What is the very seed of your country's legal system?

## 3. Lecture

Generally, Han Feizi's ideas cover the following five aspects: his view of historical progress, the nature of people, central concentration of power, social reform and rule by law, and dialectical thinking.

### 3.1 Progressive View of History

Han Feizi believed that history was developing and progressing, and that it would be laughable if people today were still holding fast the rules of the ancient people, as he said in "The Five Vermin," "The sage does not try to practice the ways of antiquity or to abide by a fixed standard, but examines the affairs of the age and takes what precautions are necessary." The policies of the present time should hinge upon the present situation. As he put it, "Past and present have different customs, new and old adopt different measures." This view of history provided the theoretical basis for the reform of the then landlord class.

### 3.2 View of the Populace

Han Feizi had a low opinion of human nature. He thought it to be basically evil. He followed the idea of his teacher, Xunzi, maintaining that the populace is greedy, and that they loved ease but hated work by nature. Therefore there must be very strict rules and laws on them regarding rewarding and penalty. This side of Han Fezi, however, would easily lead to the other side of him. He strongly promoted the alleviation of



people's taxes, thinking that heavy taxation would only weaken the people, thus harming the rule in the end.

### 3.3 Centralization of Power

On the basis of the thoughts and practice of the Legalist School, Han Feizi put forth the political idea of centralization of power by absolute monarchy. He held that to rule efficiently, the ruler must hold power solely by himself. In his philosophy, the ruler could firmly control the state with the help of three concepts: his position of power (*shi*, 势), certain techniques (*shu*, 术), and laws (*fa*, 法). Legalism assumed that everyone acted according to one principle: the law must severely punish any unwanted action, while at the same time reward those who followed the law. Legalism was perhaps the harshest philosophy. Han Feizi believed human nature was evil and people should be punished according to their actions. Simply put, Legalism posited that because people were inclined to act badly, society needed strict laws and harsh punishments. This necessitated what some would term “rule by fear.”

Just to add a few words about the sources of his *shi* (his position of power), *shu* (techniques) and *fa* (laws). Legalists synthesized the ideas of Shang Yang (商鞅), Shen Buhai (申不害) and Shen Dao (慎到, 395-315 B.C.). For example, Han Feizi borrowed Shang Yang's emphasis on laws, Shen Buhai's emphasis on techniques and Shen Dao's ideas on position of power.

The concept of *fa* comes from Shang Yang's book *The Book of Lord Shang* (《商君书》), referring to the elaborate system of laws that is to be drawn up by the ruler, distributed by his officials, and taught and explained by them to the populace. By such a system of laws, and the inescapable punishments that backed it up, all life within the society was to be ordered, so that nothing would be left to chance, private judgment, or the appeal to privilege. To this concept, he added another concept borrowed from the writings of Shen Buhai, the concept of *shu*, which refers to the techniques, policies, methods, and art of governing. The populace was to be controlled by the laws, and the ruler was to be guided by a set of principles by which he wielded authority and controlled the men under him. The ruler had to have a body of people doing administrative work. Unable to attend all affairs in person, he had to make certain that the men to whom he delegated power did their work efficiently and without deceit. He needed a set of rules for management and personnel control, and this set of rules is supplied under the name of *shu*. One example is Han Feizi's term of *xing-ming* or

“form and name,” borrowed from the logicians. The logicians in Han Feizi’s time used the term to emphasize the need for an exact correspondence between the name of a thing and its actual form or reality. Han Feizi adopted it and gave it a political interpretation. By “name,” he meant the name of the office a man held, the list of duties he was expected to perform, or the proposals he made; by “form,” he meant the actual performance of the man in office. He insisted that only when these two factors coincided exactly could the man be regarded as doing his job properly. He therefore urged the ruler to keep constant check upon the correspondence between names and forms. If they tallied, the man was to be rewarded and promoted; if they failed, he was to be punished. This was also included in *shu*.

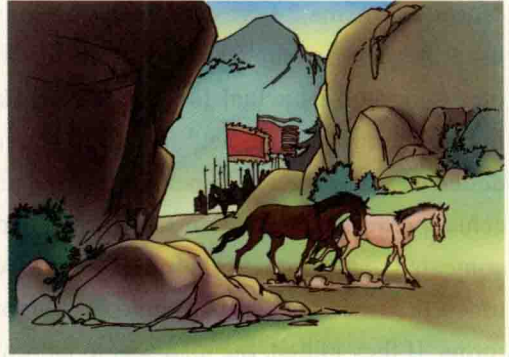
### 3.4 Reform and Rule by Law

For political affairs, Han Feizi asserted reforms and rule by law. Instead of abiding by the teachings of previous kings, he advocated the abolishing of the old rules, and insisted that the law was the best teachings. He emphasized that laws, once drawn up, must be strictly reinforced, without exception for anybody. High officials were to be punished by law so long as they violated it, and the lowest people were to be rewarded for any good they had done according to the law.

He thought that a good society could be built only when the “five vermin” were done away with. Vagabonds and draft-dodgers, merchants and artisans who dealt with nonsensical goods, scholars who spread doctrines at variance with Legalist teachings, cavaliers who took the law into their hands—all these kinds of people, he thought, were not good for agriculture and warfare, and they were like the vermin that only did harm to the state, and therefore were to be unmercifully quashed, and the people were to be kept in a state of ignorance and awe.

### 3.5 Dialectical Thinking

One of the characteristics of *Han Feizi* is the prominence of dialectical ideas. Han Feizi used fables to illustrate his ideas, making his ideas easy to understand and well received. For example, one of the most famous stories “Zi Xiang Maodun” (自相矛盾, self-contradictory) is from this book, and it is also the source for the Chinese philosophical concept *maodun* (矛盾, contradiction). The story goes that in the State of Chu (Spring and Autumn Period, 770-476 B.C.) there was a man who was selling both the shield (盾) and the spear (矛). When he was selling the spear, he boasted that his



“What if you use your own spear to stab your own shield?”

An old horse knows the way

spear was the sharpest in the world, which can pierce any shield, no matter how hard it is. But when he was selling his shield, he bragged that his shield was the strongest which could withstand any spear, no matter how sharp it was. Then a bystander asked him what would happen if people used his spear to stab his shield. The man was dumfounded and could say nothing. Other stories like “Watching the Stump for the Rabbit (守株待兔),” “An Old Horse Knows the Way (老马识途),” “Conceal One’s Fault for Fear of Criticism (讳疾忌医),” “Making up a Number without Active Work” (or “Holding a Post without Qualifications”) (滥竽充数), are all in plain language but contain profound truth.

#### 4. Conclusion

Han Feizi’s ideas cover his views on political government, the rule of the society, the legal system, human nature, and the inner contradictions of things of the world. His ideas not only provided theoretical support for the First Emperor of Qin’s rule after the unification of China, but also supplied political resources for all generations of rulers in ancient China.

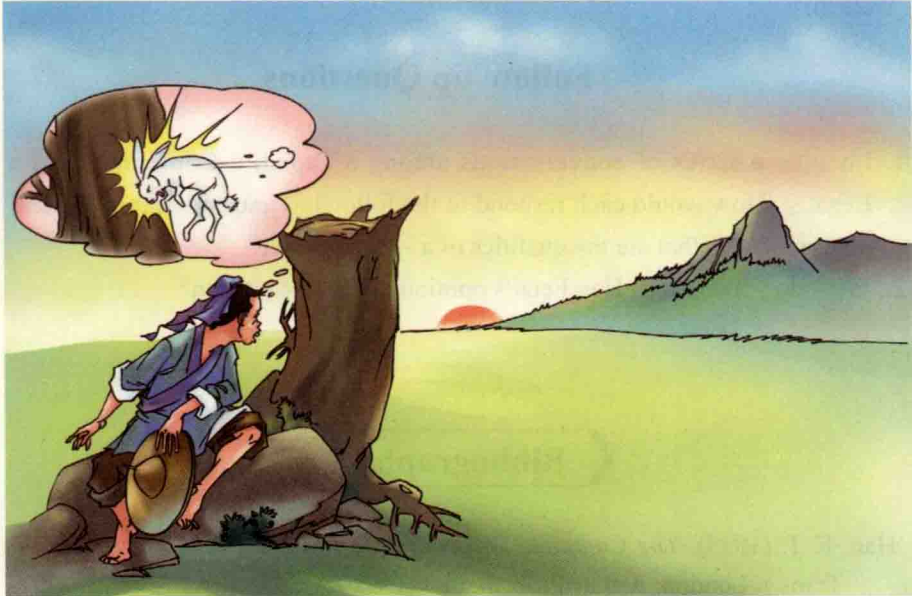
Passages from *Han Feizi* for Appreciation and Discussion:

##### Passage 1

There was a farmer of Song who tilled the land, and in his field was a stump. One day, a rabbit, racing across the field, bumped into the stump, broke its neck, and died. Thereupon the farmer laid aside his plow and took up watch



beside the stump, hoping that he would get another rabbit in the same way. But he got no more rabbits, and instead became the laughingstock of Song. Those who think they can take the ways of the ancient kings and use them to govern the people of today all belong to the category of stump-watchers! (from “The Five Vermin”) (translated by Burton Watson)



Watching the stump for the rabbit

## Passage 2

These are the ten faults: 1. To practice petty loyalty and thereby betray a larger loyalty. 2. To fix your eyes on a petty gain and thereby lose a larger one. 3. To behave in a bad and willful manner and show no courtesy to the other feudal lords, thereby bringing about your own downfall. 4. To give no ear to government affairs but long only for the sound of music, thereby plunging yourself into distress. 5. To be greedy, perverse, and too fond of profit, thereby opening the way to the destruction of the state and your own demise. 6 To become infatuated with women musicians and disregard state affairs, thereby inviting the disaster of national destruction. 7. To leave the palace for distant travels, despising the remonstrance of your ministers, which leads to grave peril for yourself. 8. To fail to heed your loyal ministers when you are at fault, insisting upon having your own way, which will in time destroy your good reputation and