



A
Study
of
Chinese
Culture

中国文化专论

◎ 董俊峰 著



ZHEJIANG UNIVERSITY PRESS

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故中国之教，得孔子而后立。中国之政，得秦皇而后行。中国之境，得汉武而后定。三者皆中国之所以为中国也。

夏曾佑

The making of China lies in the respective feats of three Founding Fathers, namely, Confucius who pioneered Chinese education, Qin Shihuang who created Chinese systems and Han Wudi who established Chinese territory.

Xia Zengyou

Chinese Culture

Foreword

China, with a recorded 5,000-year old history and splendid civilization, is situated in East Asia, on the western bank of the Pacific Ocean. China, rich in natural resources, is a very large country surpassed in area only by Russia and Canada, stretching for about 5,500 km from north to south, 5,200 km from east to west, and covering an area of 9,600,000 square km, approximately one-fifteenth of the land area of the Earth. China's land frontier is more than 20,000 km in length, bordering on Korea(DPRK) to the east, Russia and Mongolia to the north, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan to the west, Pakistan to the south-west, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, Laos and Vietnam to the south; China also faces Korea(ROK) and Japan across the Yellow Sea, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia over the South China Sea.

China is topographically varied, with a three-terraced terrain highest in the west and lowest in the east; 1. The first terrace: the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau in the west is 4,000 meters above sea level on the average; 2. The second terrace: to the north, beyond the Kunlun Mountains and Qilian Mountains, and to the east, across the Hengduan Mountains, there appear the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, the Loess Plateau and the Inner Mongolian Plateau, as well as the Sichuan Basin, the Tarim Basin, and the Junggar Basin, usually 1,000 to 2,000 meters above sea level on the average; 3. The third terrace: on the east side of the Greater Xing'an Mountains, the Taihang Mountains, and to the east edge of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, hilly areas and plains are found, usually lower than 1,000 or even 200 meters



in certain areas above sea level.

China is a mountainous country, with such major mountains as the Altay Mountains, the Tianshan Mountains, the Kunlun Mountains, the Karakorum Mountains, the Qilian Mountains, the Gandise Mountains, the Himalayan Mountains, the Hengduan Mountains, the Yinshan Mountains, the Qinling Mountains, the Nanling Mountains, the Greater Xing'an Mountains and the Changbai Mountains. China is also crisscrossed by the following famous rivers, such as the Yangtze River(6,300 km), the Yellow River(5,464 km), the Heilongjiang River, the Pearl River, the Liao River, the Hai River, the Huai River, the Qiantang River flowing eastward into the East China Sea; and also the Nujiang River and the Yaluzangbu River go all the way from Tibet through the Southern Asian Sub-continent, eventually into the Indian Ocean; in the western and the northern China, there are some inland rivers, such as the Tarim River (2,179 km). Ancient Chinese had built the longest man-made canal, the Beijing-Hangzhou Canal(1,801km.) in the world, connecting five major river systems, including the Hai River, the Yellow River, the Huai River, the Yangtze River, and the Qiantang River. China also boasts many lakes, with the fresh water lakes mostly found along the middle and the lower valley of the Yangtze River, such as the Boyang Lake, the Taihu Lake, the Hongze Lake and the Dongting Lake, and salt lakes in the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, such as the Qinghai Lake and the Nam Co, the largest inland Lake in Tibet. Along the long coastline of China, there dot a lot of islands, such large islands as Taiwan, Hainan, Chongming and Zhoushan and thousands of smaller islands scattered within both the East China Sea and the South China Sea. Greater parts of China are situated in the northern temperate and subtropical zones, with monsoon climate dominating, but climates of China are generally so varied as its territory is vast, topographically different, and the distance of each area from the sea different. The annual rainfall in the south-east coastal areas is about 1,500 mm, gradually decreasing westward, with the yearly rainfall of relatively dry north-west areas being 50 mm.

Administratively there are 4 municipalities directly under the jurisdic-



tion of the Central Government: Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin and Chongqing; 23 provinces: Hebei, Shanxi, Liaoning, Jilin, Heilongjiang, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Jiangxi, Shandong, Henan, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Hainan, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, and Taiwan; 5 autonomous regions: Inner Mongolia, Guangxi, Tibet, Ningxia and Xinjiang; and 2 special administrative regions: Hong Kong and Macau. China is a unified multi-nationality nation of 1.3 billion people, with the Han nationality accounting for 92% and national minority people 8%. Chinese government adopted the principle of the freedom of religious beliefs, with such major religions as Buddhism, Taoism, Islamism, Catholicism, and Christianity in China, and also atheism.

China is a country with long history and splendid culture, which contributed tremendously to the human civilizations. Only in the modern history, China suffered century-old humiliations and tortures, owing to its own backwardness and foreign invasions. Through undaunted and fearless struggles, with heavy national sacrifices, China finally won the thorough national independence and liberation in 1949, and began to embark on an arduous course of great national rejuvenation, which, it could be predicted, will enable China to contribute even more to the cause of peace and justice of mankind. Chinese culture embraces all aspects of human civilizations, so broad in nature that this special monograph could only include 8 aspects of Chinese culture, hopefully offering a general glimpse of Chinese culture to international friends so as to arouse their interests in learning more about Chinese culture. In China, there are a sea of excellent fruits of researches in this respect, but it is a pity that they are mostly written in Chinese, and the language barrier itself made them inaccessible. As an English language worker, I am entrusted the responsibility of introducing Chinese culture to the world and I sincerely wish that more people will join me in my personal efforts to promote this great undertaking.

前 言

中国位于亚洲的东部,太平洋的西岸。中国文化灿烂,历史悠久,有记载的历史可追溯到距今 5000 年前;物产丰富,幅员辽阔,其疆域南北绵延 5500 千米,东西纵横 5200 千米。陆地面积 960 万平方千米,占世界陆地面积 1/15,仅次于俄罗斯和加拿大。陆地疆界长 2 万多千米,与朝鲜、俄罗斯、蒙古、哈萨克斯坦、吉尔吉斯斯坦、塔吉克斯坦、阿富汗、巴基斯坦、印度、尼泊尔、不丹、缅甸、老挝和越南接壤。隔海与日本、韩国、菲律宾、马来西亚、文莱、印度尼西亚等国相望。

中国地形复杂多样,西高东低,自西向东分三级:西部青藏高原平均海拔 4000 米以上,为第一阶梯;青藏高原向北跨过昆仑山、祁连山,向东翻过横断山,地势陡降至 1000 至 2000 米的云贵高原、黄土高原和内蒙古高原,以及四川盆地、塔里木盆地和准噶盆地,为第二阶梯;大兴安岭、太行山、巫山和云贵高原东缘一线以东,海拔在 1000 米以下的丘陵和 200 米以下的平原,为第三阶梯。

中国是一个多山的国家,其主要山脉有阿尔泰山、天山、昆仑山、喀喇昆仑山、祁连山、冈底斯山、喜马拉雅山、横断山、阴山、秦岭、南岭、大兴安岭、长白山等。中国还是一个河流众多的国家,大多自西向东注入太平洋,主要河流有长江(6300 千米)、黄河(5464 千米),黑龙江、珠江、辽河、海河、淮河、钱塘江、澜沧江等;也有受山势影响,向南流经南亚次大陆,注入印度洋,如怒江、雅鲁藏布江等;在中国西部和北部,还有许多内河流,如塔里木河(2179 千米)等,中国古人还开凿了世界上最长的人工运河,京杭大运河(1801 千米)沟通海河、黄河、淮河、长江、钱塘江五大水系。中国有众多的湖泊,长江中、下游多是淡水湖,如鄱阳湖、太湖、洪泽湖、洞庭湖,而青藏高原多分布着咸水湖,如青海湖、纳木错等。在中国漫长的海岸线边,在东海和南海分布着为数众多的岛屿,其中有台湾岛、海南岛、崇明岛、舟山岛等大岛屿以及星罗棋布的小岛屿数千个。中国大部分地区位于北温带和亚热带,属于季风气候,由于疆土辽阔,地形复杂,各区域离



海洋距离差异较大,形成了复杂多样的气候。年降水量从东南沿海的1500毫米,逐渐递减,到比较干旱的西北部只有50毫米左右。

中国有北京、上海、天津和重庆四个直辖市,河北、山西、辽宁、吉林、黑龙江、江苏、浙江、安徽、福建、江西、山东、河南、湖北、湖南、广东、海南、四川、贵州、云南、陕西、甘肃、青海、台湾23个省,内蒙古、广西、西藏、宁夏、新疆5个自治区,香港和澳门2个特别行政区。中国是一个统一的多民族国家,全国人口13亿,其中汉族约占92%,通用汉语,其他55个民族,约占8%,有些民族有自己的语言和文字。中国人信奉的主要宗教有佛教、道教、伊斯兰教、天主教和基督教新教,也有无神论者,国家奉行宗教信仰自由的原则。

中国是一个具有悠久历史和灿烂文化的国度,曾经为人类的文明作出过巨大贡献。近代中国由于落伍和列强的侵略,曾遭受百年之久的屈辱与磨难。经过百年浴血奋斗、前赴后继,付出了巨大的民族牺牲,终于在1949年赢得了彻底的民族独立和人民解放,从此走上民族复兴的伟大征程,可以预见,中国将对人类的和平事业作出更大的贡献。中国文化囊括了人类文明的方方面面,本研究仅仅选择了其中八个主要方面加以概述和评介,希望能给国际友人以粗略的中国文化知识,使他们渴望了解更多的情况。有关中国文化研究的成果浩如烟海,其中不乏精湛之作,可惜大多是以汉语写作而成,西方人几乎无缘领略其精妙,作为英语工作者,应该责无旁贷,肩负起传播中国文化的历史责任,笔者仅作了一番初步尝试,以期有更多的优秀外语学者加入传播中国文化的行列中,共襄盛举,成就伟业。

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Chapter One

Two Economies and China's Agricultural Civilization

两种经济与中国的农业文明

China has always been a country with agriculture as the mainstay of its economy. Every dynasty attached so much importance to agriculture that they went so far as to neglect and even despise trade and businessmen. The overwhelming majority of its people have been peasants, involved in agricultural productions directly and indirectly, and with the lifestyle and habits of peasants acquired in agricultural productions. The Han Chinese had long cultivated a mentality characteristic of peasants; they enjoyed the settled life of ease in small villages, were satisfied easily, and never learned to be ambitious and militant; they had simple mind and pure heart, forever yearning for pastoral life.

I . Coexistence of Two Economies in Ancient China

In ancient China, there always existed two forms of economy, agricultural and nomadic economies, with the Great Wall, also geographically 400 mm precipitation line, as their dividing-line. To the south-east of this line was the semi-moist area influenced by the monsoon climate of both the Pacific and Indian



oceans, where it was suitable for agriculture, and to the north-west of the line was the semi-arid area, where the predominant economy was nomadic, with sporadic agricultural belts in the oases moistened by the groundwater and continental rivers. In ancient times, the agriculture from the Central Plains (中原) could spread northward as far as the Great Wall, beyond which it was the nomadic grassland. The 400 mm precipitation line, therefore, became the dividing-line between the agricultural and the nomadic people. Militarily speaking, the Great Wall, built and rebuilt by every dynasty, did provide protections to a certain degree for the agricultural people, their life and productions, but they acquired a deep-rooted habit to overdepend on the Great Wall, and with this, the agricultural people developed a passive mentality towards life in general. From the perspectives of economy and culture, the Great Wall was more an economic dividing-line than a military defensive works. The agricultural people generally could live all by themselves, without the aid from the outside except for some extreme floods or drought, but the nomadic people were constantly on the move, in search of water and grass, with more challenges and uncertainties in life so they depended more on nature than the agricultural people did. In this vast east Asian landmass, both agricultural and nomadic people coexisted, with their respective national characters, produced by their different ways of life. The nomadic people, constantly on the horsebacks, roamed for water and grass in a broad sphere, and this unsettled life made them physically robuste and strongly built, and what is more, the challenges and uncertainties in life cultivated their militant spirit and courage. The agricultural people, however, lived a settled life of ease, with a lot of family utensils and furnitures difficult to carry on the shoulders, seldom went beyond their immediate vicinity and adopted a narrow and limited outlook towards life, sentimentally attached to their land and nervous of the outside world unknown to them. The main theme running through Chinese history had been the conflicts of these two ways of life, two economies, and two people, with the agricultural people passively defending themselves and the nomadic people either invading in large hordes or harassing in small numbers. So the



nomadic encroachments on the borders had been a perennial problem, which were never solved root and branch in history except in the Yuan and Qing dynasties established by national minorities themselves.

II . Social Ideal and Life Pursuit of the Agricultural Civilization

Though ancient Chinese history had been a process of coexistence of two economies, filled with conflicts, struggles, even endless wars and national integrations, agriculture had always been predominant, and nomadic culture subordinate in terms of population, area inhabited, and the decisive historical role performed.

Chinese civilization is typically agricultural in nature, with strong agricultural characteristics in such aspects as clothing, food, housing and travelling. Even our earliest ancestors lived in small villages, ate grains as main food, used crockery cooking utensils and travelled either on foot or by horse-drawn cart, and later invented wheelbarrows for transportations. Even in their literary and artistic world, their aesthetic interests, social ideal and life pursuits were spontaneously revealed: They enjoyed such a literary conception as *“listening tranquilly to the raindrops pelting on the leaves of plantains, appreciating, with a light heart, smoke curling upwards from kitchen chimneys and merging into the floating cloud over the mountains at the dusk, casting a longing lingering look at the village path and watching leisurely the cypress vine and lily, even a calling of cuckoos made a wandering person in a distant land miss his mother.”*^① In their novels, stories are narrated in a slow pace, with a happy reunion as an usual ending; for dramas, audience care only for the singing and music, rather than the unfolding of the story. In paintings, painters delineated landscapes, rivers and mountains, with freehand brushwork aiming at catching the spirit of being “indescribably free”, “quietly elegant”, and “implicitly revealing”, which reflects the psychological tendency of agricultural people in the worshipping of pastoral life.

① Lin Yutang, “My Land and My People”, Hualing Press, 1995, p246



In their national mythical story of “Cowboy and Weaving Girl”(牛郎织女), their ideal of life had been embodied: men ploughed and women wove in a peaceful society; people enjoyed a happy marriage, in harmony with the heaven. Usually in an agricultural society, people could be easily contented with a simple and uneventful life, without the greed and avarice, so long as there was no war or natural disasters. The agricultural people would be extremely happy if they had food, as “Food is the first necessity of man”(民以食为天) had always been their motto. Home is where they can have comfort and ease, so harmony between husband and wife can provide them with almost all happiness. Their ultimate social pursuit was international and domestic peace and harmony with family members, neighbours and even foreign countries.

Ⅲ. The Birth and Evolution of Ancient Chinese Agriculture

Ancient Chinese agricultural production and development were revolved around the following four themes:

(I) The Cultivation and Introduction of Crops

The successful cultivation of crops marked the birth of agriculture. Ancient Chinese began to grow such dry crops as millet(粟) and broomcorn millet(黍) 7,000 to 8,000 years ago along the Yellow River Valley, but wheat was grown 5,000 years ago in the same regions. The Chinese ancestors first experimented with paddy growing in the Yangtze River Valley about 10,000 years ago.

Millet, an annual grass herbal crop, was domesticated from the wild green bristlegrass(野生狗尾草), mainly grown along the Yellow River Valley. Suited to the conditions of dryland in the north of China, broomcorn millet, like millet, was also an annual grass herbal crop, the main grain crop of the northern Chinese. Wheat growing was much later, about 4,000 years ago. Paddy, an annual grass herbal crop, was domesticated from the wild paddy which was grown along the Yangtze River Valley about 10,000 years ago and extended to many other places of the south and even to some places



in the north about 5,000 years ago and became the main food of the people in the south. Besides these grain crops, our ancestors also had vegetables, melons and fruits, such as bottle gourd (葫芦), muskmelon (甜瓜), lotus seed (莲子) and so on, which were wild with no human cultivation. In their gathering of fruits, tea plants were identified, differentiated from other plants for drinking to refresh people, gradually used by more and more people, and even exported to foreign countries.

The domestic and foreign exchanges, usually bidirectional or even multi-directional, had greatly enriched people's food supplies, increased not only in quantity, but also in variety of food. From the early time in history, Chinese rice had already spread to the Korean Peninsula and Japanese Archipelagoes, and, at the same time, many crops, some very significant, had been introduced to the Central Plains and the south of China from Western Regions (西域) of China, central, south, and west Asia, and even from then newly discovered Americas.

Alfalfa (苜蓿), introduced from Iran by Zhang Qian in the Western Han Dynasty, had been the important fodder for raising best horses, and this was of strategic importance as the successful introduction and cultivation of alfalfa had promoted the animal husbandry (畜牧业), and with it, agriculture had tremendously been pushed forward. Walnut (胡桃), pomegranate (石榴), flax (胡麻), cucumber (黄瓜), rocambole (胡蒜), pepper (胡椒) and so on were also introduced from Iran, which became the important sources of fruits, dried fruits, vegetables, seasoning and oil-bearing crops. Grapes, introduced from the Western Region to the Central Plains, had been one of the major fruits of the people there. Ever since the Western Han Dynasty, crops, fruits, and vegetables had been introduced to China by each dynasty, such as lettuce (莴苣) and spinach (菠菜) in the Sui and Tang dynasties, Zhancheng rice (占城稻) from Vietnam in the Song Dynasty, carrot in the Yuan Dynasty, and in the Ming and Qing dynasties; and also from Americas, were introduced such drought-enduring (耐旱) and barren-tolerant (耐瘠) grain crops as sweet potato (番薯), corn (玉米), potato (马铃薯), peanut (花生), and such vegetables as pumpkin (南瓜),



chilli(辣椒), tomato(番茄), kidney bean(菜豆), onion(洋葱), and fruits, such as mango(芒果), pineapple(菠萝), papaya(番木瓜), sweetsop(番荔枝), introductions and cultivations of which had met with the demands of growing population.

With needs of food being satisfied, people began to think of the question of clothing. With animal skins and tree leaves at the start, people made their clothes, and, little by little, learned to grow kudzu(葛) and jute(黄麻) for making fibrous clothes. Our ancestors discovered the making of cocoons by silkworms while gathering mulberry and then began to domesticate and raise the silkworm; they later mastered the silk reeling technology, wove silk cloth and made exquisite garments, which proved to be an innovation of epoch-making significance in human history.

(II) Animal Farming

Our ancestors had already raised dogs, pigs, cattle, sheep, and chickens about 8,000 years ago, but horse-raising started comparatively late, the domestication of these animals had occurred even earlier. Dogs were domesticated from the wild wolf, and could help hunters in hunting animals and also provided people with meat. Pigs, domesticated from the wild hogs, offered people their main source of meat. Sheep, also domesticated from the wild sheep, provided people with the main source of meat. Both cattle and buffalo, from different species of wild animals, could provide people with animal power and meat as well. Chickens, domesticated from the jungle fowls, were universally raised for satisfying people's needs for meat. Horse's domestication, possibly from Mongolian wild horses by Mongolians, started much later. These so-called "Six Domesticated Animals", dog, pig, sheep, cattle, chicken and horse, provided people with animal power for ploughing and also served as meat source, which became an organic part of an agricultural civilization.

(III) The Invention of Farm Tools

The invention of farm tools was an important step in the development of agriculture. The materials from which tools were made underwent a process