



CHINA STUDIES

# AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF CHINA

He Zhaowu, Bu Jinzhi, Tang Yuyuan and Sun Kaitai



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# AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF CHINA

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## ***TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH VERSION***

The Chinese have one of the oldest and at the same time one of the longest continuous civilizations in the world. In the long course of her development of more than four thousand years, China has not only created a most splendid culture but has also preserved a collection of abundant historical documents. Viewed from these aspects, she possesses a position almost unique in the world both in history and in historiography. Yet because throughout her long history she has been relatively isolated from the rest of the world, her ideology and culture have not been fully recognized, nor has she made her due share of contributions to world civilization.

The present work aims at introducing to readers the development of the Chinese ideology from the earliest to modern times. It is not an exposition in detail; what it affords is no more than a brief account by way of introduction. But it does endeavour to give a general description about what constituted the characteristic features of the main currents of thought in each historical era and what the chief contributions of the most outstanding thinkers were in various fields of the Chinese ideology, how thought came about as a product of its specific historical background and how it influenced the development of history itself. Hence it will not assume the form of a record of specific thought, or of the narration of certain philosophical or scientific concepts, but will be an attempt at a comprehensive survey intended to summarize all the main intellectual elements in the history of China.

Chinese ideas are usually characterized by their close connections with the ethical practices in daily life. In their search after truth, most of the Chinese thinkers focus on the perfection of personal morality and the maxim of social ethics. The over-emphasis on the moral and the ethical has made Chinese ideas in some

aspects of pure thinking appear not so salient as those of the modern Occident. Nevertheless, this does not mean that China has not made immense contributions to the fields of intellectual activity. For instance, a comparison between the pre-Qin Dialecticians and the ancient Greek Sophists demonstrates how strikingly their ideas and arguments resemble each other. Some of their propositions are even identical in phraseology and content. This seems to indicate that in just the same golden age of the classical civilizations (about 4th century B.C.) the high speculative level reached simultaneously both by China and by Greece really amounted to a historical phenomenon, or a competition in brilliance and splendour between the East and the West. In a similar comparison, it is very probable that it is just because the Chinese laid over-emphasis on human relationships that throughout her history there had never been a religion or a theism dominating the whole sphere of spiritual activities as was seen in the mediaeval Christianity in the West. Indeed Buddhism was introduced to China from abroad, yet in course of time it gradually but thoroughly became indigenous or sinicized until at last it lost its original religious flavour. The flow of Chinese ideology and its comparison with others, especially with those of the West, is a complex and extensive area of historical studies. Full exploration of all aspects is hardly possible within the space of a short volume, we do hope the present work may help lead readers to further interest and further research.'

The mediaeval era lasted in China for more than two thousand years, while the mediaeval period in the West lasted only one thousand or so. This prolongation of the mediaeval period makes it possible for China to furnish the world a typical model of mediaevalism. For example, the peasant wars in China with their grand scale and frequent outbreaks were rare in the history of other peoples and hence afford a typical model for the ideology of peasants' wars. This mediaeval prolongation also made China lag behind the West in modern times. From an intellectual and cultural viewpoint, Chinese sciences and ideas, undoubtedly at a high level throughout the mediaeval period in world history, had begun falling behind the West since the Renaissance. Hence, the central theme of the modern history of China has been to learn, to equal and to compete with the West so as to become modernized and to

have a foothold in the modern world. In the transformation from a mediaeval ideology into a modern one, China has made tremendous efforts in modern times and paid greatly and dearly. China in ancient times had produced brilliant ideas and a culture which rivalled that of Greece and India, and again in the Middle Ages she had produced ideas and culture which rivalled that of the Arabs when the Occident still remained in their so-called "Dark Ages". There would be sufficient ground to expect that in modern times she would also be able to create advanced ideas and culture second to none of the world. But in order to create new ideas and culture, it is impossible to discard the past; for without the past as a starting point, there can be neither the present nor the future. Nor can the present be understood without a knowledge of the past. No ideology whatever in the world can ever come into being by neglecting the past tradition, especially in the case of such an immeasurably rich historical legacy as that of the intellectual history of China. It was with this knowledge in mind that we began to undertake the work on the present volume. It is our hope that through our present work readers might be brought to understand more about the intellectual history of China and to make further research on it.

The present work was written in the years 1977-79, the first part (the Pre-Qin Period) by Sun Kaitai, the second part (from Qin to Tang) by Bu Jingzhi, the third part (from Song to middle Qing) by Tang Yuyuan and the fourth part (modern times) by myself. The arrangement of the joint work and the publication was done by Tang Yuyuan, while the revising, polishing and editing of the whole work was entrusted to me. Though the first draft of each part was written by separate authors, the whole book as it appears in its present form was discussed, modified and unanimously adopted in collaboration as outlined above. In the process of writing, we tried for a compact and coherent form so as to bring various aspects of the Chinese ideology into a general perspective in the light of historical development. Since the authors are for the first time to make such an effort and works of a comprehensive nature treating the intellectual history of China are still rare, there are unavoidably some problems in this book. One of the defects we find is that there is more plain narration than overall and pene-

trating analysis through a historical perspective. To write an intellectual history in a more perfect way, to make it reflect in true depth the spirit of the age (or *Zeitgeist*, as the Germans term it) in the light of the interaction and the intermingling of different ideas, that is, to work out an intellectual history which really deserves its name, this is an ideal to be fulfilled in the future.

For many years the authors have worked in the Institute of History, Academia Sinica, and devoted themselves to research in the field of intellectual history under the tutorship of Prof. Hou Wailu, who with his outstanding scholarship and academic achievements has contributed much to this discipline for decades. As his long-time pupils and assistants, we should like to take this opportunity to pay our hearty homage to his guidance and instruction which enabled us to make such tentative research as the present work; but needless to say, any fault or defect that may appear in this book will be our own. Prof. Yang Xiangkui of our institute was kind enough to give many valuable suggestions in its writing and in its compilation. Mr. Meng Qingyuan of the Youth Publishing House rendered his generous services for its publication. For the present English version, The Foreign Languages Press has given us encouragement and valuable help. In the course of translation, I have kept constant contacts with the other three authors and consulted with them in detail. As for the scholars, living and dead, whose achievements are absorbed or assimilated in this book, though there are too many to have their names and works enumerated one by one within the space of this brief preface, we acknowledge here our sincere gratitude to all of them.

As for the present English version, it should be appropriate here to remark that by agreement with the authors as well as on the part of the press, I decided on a free translation of the original text of our work *History of the Development of the Chinese Ideology* rather than a literal word-by-word one. I followed the contents closely without any alteration or supplement which was not consulted with or agreed to by the authors. For the quotations from ancient works, except what were my own, I adopted freely the translations from various sources, the list of which would seem too tedious to be mentioned in the footnotes.

My thanks are due to Dr. Wykoff for his translation of parts



of Chapters 23 and 24 which appeared in the American journal *Chinese Studies of History* and which I adopted with revisions and supplements in the present English version.

**He Zhaowu**  
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*Beijing (Peking), 1985*

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*Part I*  
**IDEOLOGY OF  
THE PRE-QIN PERIOD**





## INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIETY AND IDEOLOGY OF THE PRE-QIN PERIOD

When the pre-Qin period is referred to, it means in general the historical period before the unification of the six states by the Qin Dynasty. There were comprised in it the succeeding epochs of the Xia, the Shang and the Zhou dynasties and the Warring States Period. It marked the beginning of the development of Chinese civilization and ideology.

Even in the primitive era before the establishment of the earliest dynasty of Xia, our ancestors through their age-long labour had not only formed societies but also had developed their thinking powers, thus bringing to life the earliest elements of human thought.

Later, with the growth of social productivity, it became possible for people to enjoy surplus products and with this the idea of private property began. Then classes and states came into being. According to legends, this transition took place with the founding of the Xia Dynasty (about 21st-16th century B.C.).

The Xia Dynasty was followed by the Shang Dynasty (16th-11th century B.C.). By that time reliable written records had appeared. After the fall of the Shang Dynasty came the Zhou Dynasty (11th-8th century B.C.) which marked the stage of the development of slavery. As an economic institution, land ownership began according to the “nine-squares” system (i.e. one square of land divided into nine smaller ones, the outer eight being allocated to slaves, who had to cultivate the central one for their lord) and enfeoffment (i.e., investing the nobility with hereditary titles, domains and slaves). In political institutions, the Zhou differed from the Shang Dynasty mainly in its adoption of the primogeniture upon which the patriarchal clan system was formed. On this basis Duke Zhou (named Dan), the leading statesman of the early Zhou, “instituted the rites” and then a rather complete superstructure based on slavery was established.