**A Comparative Analysis of Law and Governance in Old Assyrian civilisation under Shamshi-Adad I and King Wu of Imperial China**

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*‘The virtuous ruler is like the North Star; he dwells in his place, and the multitude of stars pay homage to him’*(Confucius, 1997, 2:1). This quote of Confucius showcases the importance of a virtuous ruler who, like a North star, influences and guides his subjects with wisdom, integrity and good governance. Having similarity to this concept, this essay showcases a comparative analysis of two emperor’s reigns throughout the most ancient, yet magnificent empires from world history: King Shamshi-Adad I of the Old Assyrian Empire (c. 2025 - 1364 BCE) (Gelb, 1954) and the King Wu of Zhou Dynasty (1046 – 256 BCE) of Imperial China (Nylan, 1998). The analysis continues onward while focusing on the similarities and differences between these civilizations based on their methodologies, true historical events as well as philosophical concepts to address how these factors have left an impact on shaping the law and governance of these civilizations. This paper argues that, the reign of King Shamshi-Adad I and King Wu of Zhou Dynasty was impactful not only because of their military excellence or tactics but also because of their religious and philosophical influence as King Shamshi-Adad I, despite not having a royal blood of Assur, conquered the city and under his governance the Assur and surrounding states rose as Assyrian Empire. Similarly, King Wu, along with his allies defeated the oppressive King Zhouxin, last king of Shang dynasty (Li, 2008) and established the reign of Zhou dynasty, which later became one of the longest ruling dynasties in Chinese history. Using the concept of the book “*The Mandate of Heaven: Hidden History in the I Ching”* by the author S. J. Marshall, as a primary text, the paper initially focuses on showcasing how King Wu of Zhou dynasty used the concept “Mandate of Heaven” to defeat the last king of Shang dynasty and established himself as a divine ruler of Imperial China. This similar concept also resembles from another primary text of the author *H.W.F. Saggs* “*The Might That Was Assyria*” where he showcases how the Assyrian King Shamshi Adad I established his kingship in Assur using the concept of “Divine Mandate of Kingship”. Next, using the concepts of the book *“The Imperialisation of Assyria: An Archaeological Approach”* by Bleda S. Düring, this essay dives deeper into analyzing how King Shamshi Adad I’s success of expanding Assyrian imperialism was influenced not only by his military campaigns but also through his ability to incorporate conquered regions using the centralization administrative system. In contrast, using the concepts of the book *“The Archaeology of China: From the Late Paleolithic to the Early Bronze Age”* by the authors Li Liu and Xingcan Chen, the essay also derives how King Wu of Zhou introduced the feudalism system to provide some level of autonomy for the provincial governors which eventually helped him to control Imperial China in a border sense. Moreover, the paper criticizes how both King Shamshi-Adad I of Assyrian empire and King Wu of Imperial China imposed heavy taxation in the name of the citizen’s welfare while building large infrastructural projects resulting in a change in law and governance of their imperials. While discussing these, the paper also discusses crucial underlined philosophical concepts with respect to the societal frameworks of both civilisations. Finally, this essay aims to show that the reign of King Wu of Zhou dynasty and Shamshi-Adad I had a similar impact on the reformation of the law and governance of both ancient imperial China and Assyrian civilization. This claim is portrayed through the analysis of their establishment of divine kingship, centralization of the administrative system and implementation of systematic taxation and resource management policies.

**Literature Review:**

According to Saggs (1984a), King Shamshi-Adad I was an amorite warlord and a successor to the throne of the Mesopotamian city-state Ekallatum, situated on the right of the Assur. He conquered the city-state of Assur and established himself as the emperor(c. 2025 - 1364 BCE) of the land. To legitimize his ruling, he introduced a political ideology “Divine Mandate of Kingship”. Saggs(1984b) explains that, in Assyria, The concept “Divine Mandate of Kingship” holds a magnificent role as it showcases the divine relationship between king and the gods, meaning the kings served as the earthly representative of the gods. Using this concept, King Shamshi-Adad I continued on expanding Assyria as a vast empire. Moreover, Düring (2020) examines the expansion of Assyrian Empire through an archaeological approach and explains that King Shamshi-Adad I established a centralized administrative system to govern his vast expanding empire. Moreover, he built many infrastructural temples, monuments and scribbles. According to Susan Pollock (1999), “In Assyria, monuments were ideological statements about social and political relations, publicly displaying the divinity of their territory”. To continue on building such large infrastructural projects, he imposed large amounts of taxations to people while explaining that these were built for the welfare of the people.

On the other hand, King Wu was the founder and the first king of the Zhou Dynasty. His father, King Wen of Zhou was assumed to be the first king of the Zhou dynasty, who died a few years before the Zhou Dynasty defeated the Shang Dynasty. According to Marshall (2001a), “After the death of King Wen, his successor King Wu saw a sign from the heavens that the Mandate of Shang Dynasty had lapsed and Passed to him”.

Using this narrative, he assembled his troops and attacked the Shang army at Muye, “the wilds of Mu” and after defeating King Xhouxin, the last king of the Shang dynasty, he declared the reign of Zhou Dynasty on Imperial China. After conquering, he declared that he had the “Mandate of Heaven” for legitimizing his reign. Marshall (2001b) described the concept of Mandate of Heaven(天命) as one of the key ideological foundations for imperial governance as it legitimized the divinity of rulers and dynasties based on the moral principles, virtue and characteristics of a king. Moreover, Liu & Chen (2012), explains that, during the reign of king Wu, he established “feudalism” as the administrative system. In the feudal system the nobles granted titles, lands and autonomy over their lands in exchange for their loyalty and military service. Moreover, the king also built many infrastructure to showcase the narrative of the kings, their principles as well as performed rituals for the welfare of their civilization and for doing all these they imposed heavy taxation systems and this reflects similarity between the reign of the king Wu and Shamshi-Adad I.

Some works have been done regarding how the establishment of divine kingship during King Shamshi-Adad I and King Wu of Zhou Dynasty reformed the law and governance of their respective empires. A paper called *The Decline of Shang Dynasty and the Rise of Zhou Dynasty of Early China* by *Li Feng* discusses the political and economic dynamics of the Zhou Dynasty and mentions how King Zhouxin oppressed civilizations because of his authorizations. Moreover, The paper *Assur and the ideology of Assyrian expansion* by *Lindquist* mentions how King Shamshi-Adad I in the name of Ashur expanded his empire, which played a crucial role in his acceptance as ruler. This also criticizes that the divine relationship between king and god is a narrative and the king used this narrative to propose changes in the existing succession system of Assyria. Next, the power centralization is mentioned in the paper *The Administration of the Assyrian Empire* by Ignace Jay Gelb, which analyzes the administrative and military policies of Assyrian Empire. Here it is mentioned that King Shamshi-Adad I divided his expanding kingdom into districts, where he employed his loyal officials. By this, he was able to establish his rule throughout the empire and his loyal district ruler ensured King Shamshi-Adad I’s centralization of rule. Furthermore, An article called Zhuhou 諸侯, the regional rulers by China Knowledge mentions King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty introduced the feudalism system where provincial lords(*zhuhou)* were granted autonomy over their vassal states. By this King decentralized his rule to gain the support as ruler from the provincial lords. However, his mandate gave him the authority to rule over China and by gaining the support of the provincial lords made his power more centralized in a decentralized way. Next, the reformation of systematic taxation and resource management policies can be observed in both King Shamshi-Adad I and King Wu of Zhou Dynasty’s reign. *Susan Pollock’s* work *Ancient Mesopotamia: The Eden that never was*, popular perceptions of Mesopotamia get challenged. Here it is described that in Assyria, monuments were publicly displayed to showcase the divinity of the king. This eventually made King Shamshi-Adad power more visible and he spread fear among the general population. By this, he was able to impose high taxation without facing operation. In the case of the Zhou Dynasty the book *The Asiatic Mode of Production in China* by Zhao Lisheng mentions that providing high tax to emperor provincial nobles reformed the existing governing system by implementing the “well-field” system. By this King Wu reformed existing laws which benefited him to collect more taxes for infrastructural projects and monuments. As a result, using these theories, the essay is about to justify both King Shamshi-Adad I and King Wu’s reformation of law and governance reflected similarly on the basis of their establishment of divine kingship, centralization of the administrative system and implementation of taxation system for the welfare of the people.

The initial part of the thesis statement elaborates how both King Wu of Zhou dynasty of Imperial China and Assyrian King Shamshi-Adad I, despite not being a royalty of their conquered lands, established and justified their kingship using divine concepts like: “Mandate of Heaven” and “Divine rule of Kingship”. This eventually created a momentous change in the law and governance of their respective empires.

“When Heaven appoints a ruler, the people’s duty is to obey and when the ruler loses the Mandate of Heaven, it is then their right to overthrow” (Marshall, 2001c).

The above quotation from King Wu of Zhou dynasty played a vital role in shifting the law of the patrilineal bloodline kingship (Twitchett & Loewe, 1986) of Imperial China. This is because just like most of the other civilizations, ancient Chinese dynasties also followed the patrilineal bloodline kingship where the King passed his throne to his bloodline. This system was applicable during the reign of the Shang dynasty which lasted over six centuries (Feng, 2002a) and even though the last king of Shang dynasty, King Zhouxin, was known for his tyrannical and oppressive actions (Li, 2006), he was forcefully accepted by other dynasties because of his powerful royal bloodline. However, when King Wu of the Zhou dynasty rebelled against the oppressive Zhouxin, he mentioned the political concept “Mandate of Heaven” to justify that a king should possess good qualities to behold the authority of a realm and claimed to be blessed with “Mandate of Heaven” which means the divine power of heaven chose him as the emperor. This statement of King Wu not only legalized him as the emperor but also influenced a massive change in the law and governance of Imperial China. The civilization also accepted him as their invincible divine ruler because they believed that it was not possible to win a battle without heaven’s blessing. Consequently, the “Mandate of Heaven” became the most influential political concept for overthrowing a dynasty and legalizing new rulership in Chinese history. Consequently, the King Wu of Zhou dynasty was legalized and accepted as the rightful divine ruler with good moral conduct with the authorship to reform the law and governance of Imperial China.

Similarly, King Shamshi-Adad I of the Assyrian Empire also used a divine concept to establish himself as the king of Assyria. This is because the people of Assur valued the royal bloodline legacy for succeeding the throne and as an outsider with no association with the bloodline of the king of Ashur, Shamshi-Adad I was considered as a foreign invader (Saggs, 1984). To solve this situation, he introduced the concept “Divine rule of Kingship” in Assyria which represented his divine connection with the God Ashur.

“Under the watchful eye of the divine Ashur, I shall expand the empire till the end of the time” (Lindquist, 2003). This quote of King Shamshi-Adad I transferred him into a divine authority in the mind of the Assyrian people as God Assur was not only a divinity of heaven, but also a blessing to their everyday lives (Lambert, 1983). As a result, King Shamshi-Adad I established the divine concept to justify the divinity of a ruler which decreased the importance of a ruler having royal bloodline authorship. Consequently, this devine authority not only helped the King to establish his kingship, but also gave him the privilege, similar to the King Wu of Zhou dynasty of Imperial China, to reform the law and governance by breaking the norm of passing the throne only through the bloodline kingship of their respective civilizations.

The next part of the thesis statement discusses how both the Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad I and King Wu of Zhou dynasty of imperial China reformed the law and governance of their respective civilizations while centralizing their administration systems. To begin with, King Shamshi-Adad I as a military excellence succeeded in expanding his reign throughout the landscapes of Mesopotamian city-states. However, “King Shamshi-Adad I's rise to power and expansion of Assyrian imperialism stemmed not only from his military excellence but also from his administrative centralization of conquered territories” (Düring, 2020).

The above quotation mentions the concept of a centrally organized administration system which was established by the king to gain massive control over his conquered territories. To implement this administration, King Shamshi-Adad I divided his expanding kingdom into districts(Gelb, 1971) and elected his preferred candidates as the governing figures of these territories. As a result, the king made a vigilant change on the law and governance of the Assyrian empire. However, the reason for electing his preferred candidates as the governing figure was not only to show favoritism, but to prevent any disruption to his kingship. To elaborate, the city-states that were unified under the divine rulership of the emperor as vassal states, were previously independent city-states with their own governing system and political significance. For this reason, there were chances for these city-states to demand their independence back and to prevent such incident from occurring, he assigned his chosen governing figures. This impressive strategy of the king resulted in a significant change in the vassal state’s political situations as they were fully controlled by their central and provincial governors. These strategies and propagandas of King Shamshi-Adad I played a significant role in establishing himself as an invincible ruler and gave him the authority to reform the law and governance of the Old Assyrian Empire.

On the other hand, King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty introduced the feudalism system that decentralized the power of the emperor as provincial lords(*zhuhou)* were granted autonomy over their vassal states in exchange for loyalty and military support (Theobald, n.d.). Even if this feudal system decreased the control and influence of the empire over vassal states, it eventually helped the king Wu to rule as one of the longest dynasties in Chinese history. The reason is, the last oppressive King of Shang Dynasty tortured the empire with his centralized administrative system(Feng, 2002b). As a result, when the Shang dynasty fell and the Zhou dynasty rose, King Wu established the feudalism system as he was also previously tortured by the centralized governing system. Moreover, the chance of failing the emperor while following the feudal system was thin as the system was justified by the moral conduct of the nobles using the concept “Mandate of Heaven”. As a result, even if King Wu was not directly involved with the ruling of the vassal states, his morality and divinity put him in a higher place that influenced his subordinates to govern under his wings. This helped him to control the administrative system in a border sense as well as reformed the law and governance, like Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad to their respective empires.

The final part of the thesis statement discusses how both King Shamshi-Adad I and King Wu of Imperial China reformed the law and governance of their respective civilizations by changing the law of the taxation system in the name of people’s welfare while building large infrastructural projects. During the reign of King Shamshi-Adad I, he built numerous monuments, temples and other infrastructural projects in his capital to demonstrate his favoritism towards his citizens, his virtues and his divine relationship with the god Ashur. Moreover, he also performed royal rituals into lavish infrastructural temples to showcase his devotion towards the God Ashur. However, these infrastructural projects played a significant role in the context of the Assyrian period. According to Susan Pollock(1999), “In Assyria, monuments were ideological statements about social and political relations, publicly displaying the divinity of their territory”.

This means, the display of large infrastructural monuments positively influenced the mind of the citizens to think good about the king as well as weakened the influence of rival territories. Using this concept, the emperor charged heavy taxation to its vassal states and this implementation of the heavy taxation system eventually reformed the law and governance of the Assyrian empire. Because, even if the emperor invested large amounts of money to build these magnificent infrastructural projects, he collected more tax by convening people about how their welfare is connected with these rituals and large infrastructural projects. As a result, the royal treasury flourished during this reformation of the taxation law.

Similarly, King Wu of the Zhou dynasty was known for introducing significant administrative and bureaucratic reforms that rectified the law and governance of Imperial China. While the King Wu of Zhou dynasty introduced the feudal system that gave some autonomy to the governor of the vassal states, he also imposed obligations onto these states. In the form of obligation, the provincial nobles had to provide goods, grains, and life stocks as a form of taxation to support the emperor’s royal court(Larson, 2000), military and infrastructural projects. For providing these tributes to the emperor, the provincial nobles reformed the existing governing system by implementing the “well-field system” (Brook, 2018), in which the land of individuals was divided into nine equal plots and only one plot was cultivated by the peasant family for their own earning whereas the remaining eight owned by the states to generate surplus for taxation. Using this method, the provincial nobles collected tax from his territories to provide these tributes to the emperor and this ‘well-field system’ became a traditional way to collect taxes from peasants and working class people and eventually this system reformed the law and governance of the ancient imperial civilization. The provincial nobles gave taxation to the emperor not only because he had the power to wage war against them, but also because of their belief system: that is, the emperor used tributes to build infrastructural projects and majority of these were used to build temples. In these temples, the emperor used to do rituals to keep up with the satisfaction of the heavenly power and so this representation of power convinced the people to pay the heavy amount of taxation while giving the emperor authority to impose such taxation laws which eventually changed the law and governance of Imperial China.

Thus, the reign of the Assyrian Emperor, Shamshi-Adad I, reflected through the reign of King Wu of the Zhou dynasty of Imperial China as the reformation of law and governance of their respective empires left a significant impact on history. This is because both of the emperors positioned themselves as the new emperor of their respective territories while overthrowing the typical royal bloodline kingship. Moreover, they centralized their administrative systems as well as imposed taxation systems for the betterment of their territories which eventually led to reforming the law and governance of respective territories. However, the main focus of the similarity of their reign that left an impact on the history lies within their use of divine concepts that legitimized their kingship. The reason is, even though both of them conquered their positions as emperors of Old Assyria and Imperial China using their external military forces, they understood that only using external forces were not enough to continue their legacy for a long time. For this reason, they introduced divine ideas like ‘Mandate of Heaven’ and ‘Divine Mandate of Kingship’ that preached the idea of the kings to be appointed from heaven and this influenced the mind of their civilizations as they believed that, whoever is chosen from the heaven was blessed with divine power and blessings and so they accepted the superiority of these rulers even if they continue on torturing people while expansion, imposed heavy taxation or disrupt law and governance. These types of similar narratives are still visible in the modern world. For instance, in modern democratic countries, a person should have the right to vote, own property and most importantly express their freedom of speech as well as question their government. However, even after having these rights, in some democratic countries, most of the people remain calm without questioning the governmental faults. From my perspective, this is similar to the divinity concept, people let the governors have more authority than they should have from ancient times and it eventually leads towards the disruption of the law and governance of their country.

In brief, the paper justifies that the reformation of law and governance of both Assyrian empire and Imperial China resonates because of their establishment of divine kingship, centralization of the administrative system and implementation of taxation system for the welfare of the people. This is because, while diving into the analysis of similarities and differences of these kingdoms, we find a similar divine approach of both kings which helped them to establish themselves as the divine ruler despite having no royal blood of their civilizations. Then, they centralized their administration by using their respective methods: For Assyrian Empire Shamshi-Adad I unified city-states under his single dynasty whereas, for Imperial China, the emperor Wu of Zhou dynasty applied the feudal system (Liu and Chen, 2012). Their divine authority helped them rule their empire while positioning themselves in the above positions. Moreover, they implemented taxation systems to welfare their territories, but eventually ended up benefiting their royal court by showcasing monuments, sculptures, wealth and most importantly, the divine relationship between heaven and their kings. All of these changes eventually paved a similar way for reforming the law and governance of their empires.

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