



Science and Civilisation in China

Title: The Nature of Traditional Chinese Society and Its Implications

Topic: How peasant-farmer dominance, bureaucratic structures, and non-interventionist philosophy shaped China's social order and scientific development

Thesis: Traditional Chinese society—rooted in agrarian life, Confucian-bureaucratic governance, and Taoist “wu wei”—fostered unique modes of production and early scientific inquiry, yet also inhibited the rise of capitalism and modern science until social conditions changed.

I. Peasant-Farmer Primacy and Governance

A. Absence of herding and seafaring

1. Command-obedience in cowboy/shepherd and naval contexts
 - i. Risk of coercion vs. peasant patience
 - ii. Sung parable: pulling plants vs. natural growth

B. Civil persuasion over military force

II. Merchant Class and Scholarly Aspiration

A. Wealth's lack of spiritual prestige

B. Merchant sons' goal: bureaucratic scholarship

C. Continuity in Communist Party officialdom

III. Debates on the “Asiatic Mode of Production”

A. Soviet-era discussions (1920–1934)

1. Primitive communalism → socialism sequence
2. Dogmatism and need for subdivisions (e.g., “proto-feudal”)

B. Marx and Engels: qualitative vs. quantitative differences

C. Applicability to other societies (pre-Columbian America, Ceylon)

IV. Hydraulic Bureaucracy and Its Limits

A. Wittfogel's “hydraulic society” thesis

B. Centralization via public works (irrigation, canals)

C. Inhibition of capitalism and mechanical clock development

V. Taoist “Wu Wei” and Early Scientific Achievement

A. Non-interventionist principles (“action without assertion”)

B. Encouragement of observation: seismograph, magnetism, tide theory

VI. Humanizing Bureaucracy in the Modern Era

A. Bureaucracy as an indispensable organizational tool

B. Need for transparency, service to ordinary people

C. Foundations in Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity, Marxism