



# 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