**UNIVERSITY OF JOS**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

**COURSE CODE: HIS 405**

**COURSE TITLE: PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY**

**GROUP 4**

**ASSIGNMENT QUESTION**

**DISCUSS THE VIEW OF THE CHINESE MANDARIN TO PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY**

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The word Mandarin comes from the Portuguese word “MANDARIM” or “MANTRI” which means counselor or minister of the state. The Mandarins (145 – 87BC) as scholars and civil servants within the Chinese imperial system, were key figures in the preservation, transmission, and interpretation of historical knowledge. The view of the Mandarin on the philosophy of history is a complex intersection of Confucian ideology, and an enduring belief in the cyclical nature of historical development. The Mandarins played a crucial role in interpreting and recording history, and their conception of history was deeply intertwined with their Confucian worldview, which held that moral order and social harmony were paramount. This writing critically examines the Mandarin’s approach to the philosophy of history, considering the influence of Confucian thought, Taoist perspective, historical continuity, and the role of the state in shaping historical narratives, as well as the challenges and limitations posed by these views.

One of the most prominent features of the Mandarin’s philosophy of history is the belief in the **CYCLICAL NATURE OF HISTORY**. Drawing from the Confucian (551BC-479BC) [[1]](#footnote-1)worldview and earlier Chinese philosophical traditions, the Mandarins saw history as a repeating cycle of rise and fall, where dynasties would rise to power, flourish, and eventually decline due to moral decay or the failure of leadership. This cyclical view was not deterministic but allowed for the possibility of renewal, provided that moral and virtuous rulers could restore order.

This idea of cyclical history was often articulated through the concept of the **“Mandate of Heaven” (Tianming)**, which held that the legitimacy of a ruler or dynasty was granted by Heaven based on the ruler's virtue and ability to govern.

When a ruler became corrupt or failed to fulfill his duties, Heaven would withdraw its favor, leading to the collapse of the dynasty and the rise of a new one. According to Confucian historiography[[2]](#footnote-2), the rise and fall of dynasties were not random but followed a moral logic: good rulers brought prosperity and harmony, while immoral rulers led to decline and chaos (Sima Qian, 1993)[[3]](#footnote-3). The Mandarins, as the intellectual elite, were instrumental in maintaining this belief, seeing their role as ensuring that rulers adhered to the moral principles that would sustain their rule and the dynasty (Li, 2008).[[4]](#footnote-4)

Taoism rejects linear or progressive views of history, favoring a perspective that emphasizes balance and harmony. Historical events are seen as manifestations of the interplay between yin and yang, the dual forces of the universe. When human actions disrupt this balance—through excessive ambition, control, or exploitation—chaos ensues, and the natural order seeks to restore equilibrium.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Taoist concept of wu wei (non-action or effortless action) underscores its historical philosophy. It suggests that human attempts to force historical outcomes often lead to unintended consequences. Instead, individuals and societies should align with the natural flow of events. As Laozi observes, “The world is ruled by letting things take their course. It cannot be ruled by interfering.”

**CONFUCIANISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL HARMONY**

Central to the Mandarin worldview was the Confucian emphasis on harmony between humanity (ren) and the cosmos (tian). The concept of the **"MANDATE OF HEAVEN" (TIANMING)** linked environmental factors, such as droughts, floods, or natural disasters, to the moral conduct of rulers. A harmonious environment was seen as evidence of virtuous leadership, while environmental upheavals were interpreted as signs of moral decay or the need for political change. The Mandarin perspective adopted a cyclical view of history, where environmental and social factors interacted to cause the rise and fall of dynasties. [[6]](#footnote-6)

The "Dynastic Cycle" theory reflects this: periods of peace and prosperity (often linked to environmental stability) were followed by corruption, ecological degradation, and eventual collapse.

**CRITIQUES OF THE MANDARIN PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY**

Critics argue that the Taoist perspective underestimates the role of human agency and ignores the structural and systemic forces that shape history, such as economic or political systems. The primary critiques of the Mandarin’s philosophy of history are its tendency to idealize the past and emphasize continuity at the expense of radical change. The environmental view of the Mandarins often overemphasized the moral dimension of environmental events, attributing natural disasters to the ethical failings of rulers. This moralistic interpretation sometimes obscured more complex, systemic factors, such as technological limitations or population pressures.

Conclusively, The Mandarin’s philosophy of history is a product of centuries of Confucian thought, emphasizing moral continuity, cyclical patterns, the Taoist view like the wu wei and yin yan, and the role of the state in maintaining order. However, the limitations of this view, including its resistance to radical change and overemphasis on historical models, became evident in the later stages of imperial China. Despite these limitations, the Mandarin’s approach to history continues to influence Chinese thought today, particularly in the emphasis on historical continuity and the moral legitimacy of the state.

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1. Confucius, *Analects.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Confucius, *Analects* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Sima Qian, *Records of the Grand Historian.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Li, Minqi. *The Rise of China and the Demise of the Capitalist World-Economy.* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mote, F. W. *Imperial China.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Marks, R. B. *China: Its Environment and History.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)