1. The Muqaddimah, Chapter 3, Section 11

*The Muqaddimah* is one of the most important Islamic pieces of the medieval world. Written by Arab scholar Ibn Khaldûn in 1377, it explores ideas from socio-political theory to philosophical theory as well as some knowledge of history. Ibn Khaldun wrote this masterpiece out of boredom of politics. It is first written as an introduction to his planned record of universal history, but is later adopted as an individual work. He changed his mind as he finds it necessary to first address the historical method and criteria for examining the veracity of history. Throughout the book, Ibn Khaldun uses various arguments to connect the rise and downfall of civilizations. He argues that when one dynasty declines, another rises up and takes its place. Every civilization is destined to fall at the rise of itself. Such cycles of power shifts never ceases to play out and take turns. Ibn Khaldun uses details to explain the complete process.

“When the natural tendencies of royal authority to claim all glory for itself and to acquire luxury and tranquillity have been firmly established, the dynasty approaches senility”(p. 223). Ibn Khaldun brings up the conclusion at the beginning of the chapter. He argues that, after the royal authority takes control of the new empire, they will try to consolidate their power. Usually, they achieve this by doing two things: claiming all glory for itself and acquiring luxury and tranquillity. Ibn Khaldun then discusses how exactly the dynasty “approaches senility” from several different angles. First, at the beginning of the dynasty, glory was shared among people as a common property. Everyone in the group shared a common sense of glory and aspiration to defend their glory. Together, they are fearless. They would rather die fighting for glory. However, when the royal authority tries to consolidate their power, glory is no longer a shared property. They take glory away from others in favor of control. Generations later in the long term, people become lazy and submissive and will no longer sacrifice themselves for anything, including servitude for the dynasty. As a result, this is one way how the dynasty “approches senility”.

The dynasty can also die in luxury and tranquillity. According to the author, royal authority by its nature requires luxury. When luxury increases in a dynasty, the dynasty will run into a financial deficit. First, the people’s income will no longer be able to pay for the goods, requiring the government to issue bills to help them. This causes higher taxes and worsens government spending. Military spending will be lowered and the military decreases in size. In the mean time, when tranquillity spreads across the dynasty, people lose their iron will and strength to fight as they become accustomed to the luxury, peaceful life. Therefore, the military is further weakened. The royal authority loses the good qualities and virtues that should be the representative of themselves. Such a dynasty will slowly die. In this chapter, the author uses reason and logic to explain how an empire falls to an end. Although such a downfall is unavoidable, according to the author, the process can be elongated and delayed if the leader is familiar with this knowledge and practice good leadership. In this case, the leader should preserve glory for all and restrain the luxury and tranquillity that may incurably harm the dynasty.

2. The Perfect State, Chapter 15, Section 4

*The Perfect State*, written by the renowned Islamic philosopher Al Farabi, addresses substantially on the political philosophy and the way how the society works.There does not exist much record about Al Farabi, but in Islamic philosophical tradition, Al Farabi is usually known as “the Second Teacher”, with “the First Teacher” being Aristotle. In his work *On the Perfect State*, Al Farabi Perfect argues that societies are human communities with the minimal size of a city, with the aim to help their members to reach their ultimate end - true felicity. And perfect (virtuous) cities have a religion that lays the foundation of the true felicity of their citizens. Within the society, the social classes and the ruler of the perfect city work together like the organs of a living body.

In Chapter 15, Al Farabi discusses men’s need for association and cooperation. In Section 4, he compares the functioning of a city to the anatomy of human body. More specifically, “the perfect city resembles the perfect and healthy body”(p. 240). Al Farabi considers the heart to be the ruling organ, equivalent to the ruler of the perfect city. And organs close to the heart that perform unique functions are considered the first rank in the ruling organs. Other organs that perform their functions according to the ones in the first rank are considered the second rank, and so on. Finally, some organs barely just perform their functions and does nothing else (ruling). Al Farabi points out the perfectly matching analogy between the ruling of the city to such a ranking of organs.

“But they are not parts of the city by their inborn nature alone but rather by the voluntary habits which they acquire such as the arts and their likes; to the natural faculties which exist in the organs and limbs of the body correspond the voluntary habits and dispositions in the parts of the city”(p. 244). Towards the end of Section 4, Al Farabi suggests the difference between the city-organ analogy. In the human body, the different functioning of limbs and organs are natural. Different organs are set to perform different functions of the human body. However, the city does not necessarily work in the same way. Although people are born with talents that distinguish them as experts of different fields, technically, people voluntarily participate in different positions and choose to perform different actions in the city. The sole purpose of this section is to persuade the reader that government of a city, especially a perfect one, is not as simple as the ranking of organs. However, such a ranking system clearly helps the ruler organize the city, as long as it does not infringe upon individual rights.

3. “Buddhism in the Household” and “Buddhism Outside the Household” in Sources of Chinese Tradition (pp. 427-428; 456-457 in the PDF)

*Sources of Chinese Tradition* is a collection of primary readings on the social, philosophical and religious traditions and history of China. Written by Wm. Theodore de Bary in 1999, it has been widely used as an authoritative resource for Chinese civilization studies. It is divided chronologically into four volumes. The first volume focuses on the early development of Chinese civilization and ideology, including the development of Buddhism. Buddhism plays a significant role in the development of Chinese thought and culture. After a long and difficult period of assimilation, Buddhism manages to establish itself as a major system of thought, contributing greatly to the enrichment of Chinese philosophy. As a major system of religious practice, Buddism has various forms and also has an enduring influence on Chinese religious beliefs.

In the introduction of Buddhism section, the author discusses Buddhism both in the household and outside the household. He separates the influence of Buddhism from household inside out. “Their feelings have not changed from the customary, and their course of conduct conforms to the secular world”(p. 456). The author proposes one type of people who respect Buddhism and may believe in it but at the same time are relatively reserved in their homes, keeping their obedience to the ruler. Their life consists both religion and secular reverence. For them, religion teaches them love and kindness on one hand and veneration and respect on the other. Such respect not only applies to rulers but also parents and lords. This is the positive side of Budda’s teaching for government. A good ruler should be able to promote such practices of buddhism. Both the ruler and the people will benefit from it.

Outside the household, the monk completely banishes himself from the secular world by stepping outisde. He intentionally cut off from everything in lay life. Therefore, he lives by himself’s own doctrine and does not necessarily follow the secular world’s ruling. “Since they have changed their way of life, their garb and distinguishing marks cannot conform to the secular pattern”(p. 457). As a result, in the eyes of the rulers, the monk has no respect and does not follow the orders. However, he still follows his virtue by not violating filial piety, holding reverence for whom his virtue requires him to. Arguably, this kind of Buddhism may not be seen as the perfect form for some rulers, but when the monk steps outisde the household, it makes a big difference for the teaching of Buddhism, as it symbolizes a wider religious freedom.