

# The Emergence of Noodlarianism

Zhengyuan Gao

The emperor of Qin sits at the dining-table with two bowls in front of him. One is filled with dark gravy, while the other is stacked with long doughy strips. These strips are formed by cutting the flattened dough into pieces. The way to eat this food is to pour the gravy onto those long strips, and then use chopsticks to stir the strips until all of them are evenly coated with the gravy. This way of eating started among proletarian soldiers and civil servants. They named the food noodles out of mischief. Since then, noodles spread around the empire. Not long ago, the emperor himself began to eat noodles regularly. Putting the taste aside, the emperor hopes to use this action to demonstrate a certain self-evident bond between him and the lowest class of the imperial military and intelligence agents. He wants those people to assure that the bond is just as strong and solid as when they supported him in winning Qin's throne.

There are few more people present for dinner today. Two invited generals sit on the both sides of the emperor, and not far from them, a eunuch stands by. These three have been following the emperor since he was a hostage in the Kingdom of Zhao as a child. At that time, they were regarded as proletarian entourages. Now two generals have respectively seized the imperial military power of the North and the South, and the eunuch has been in charge of manipulating political opinions in the court.

"How is the recent situation? The six kingdoms have been settled, and the next step is to pass on this centralised system for generations." The emperor posted the question to the generals.

"The situation is not optimistic," a general replied. "My secret report said that the remaining nobles of the six kingdoms are preparing to fight back. Several counterattacks are brewing." The other general adds, "The officers in the army have complained that the days are not as good as the wartime. The salary is reduced, the subordinates are demobilised and returned to the fields, and there are not enough people in the army to support them. They felt their power had been disarmed."

The emperor turns to the eunuch and asks, "How is everything in the court?"

"The backgrounds of the lately promoted civil servants are quite diverse. Most of them follow the classics of various schools of thought, and have quite critical views about the centralisation policies published by the imperial court. In addition, the various nobles and royal members who were good at diplomacy in ancient days have lost their glory; now they also complain a lot." The eunuch lowered his head and said in fear.

The emperor nodded. After the six kingdoms' pacification, the peaceful scene, which was supposed to last for a long time, seems to be only a flash in the pan. The existing centralised institutions cannot fully accommodate the surviving nobles from the vanished countries. However, the unified empire had to absorb some of the original bureaucrats and nobles to maintain the local law, which allowed "potential opponents" to slowly penetrate the central system of the empire. And this threat is more obvious in the military. For the recently incorporated legions of the annihilated kingdoms, the officers were unable to obtain military exploits because they had no battle to fight, while the soldiers at the bottom were in danger of being disbanded due to the reduction in military pay. A large part of the reason why the war of annihilation against the six kingdoms was able to proceed smoothly was attributable to the support of these countries' grassroots military groups. Such support is guided by the beautiful vision of unification proposed by the kingdom of Qin. The shattering of the current vision has shaken the voices that were originally on Qin's side. The loudest speakers with doubts are the nobles who are now in the centre of the system. Indeed, they are the main skeptics of this centralised system and perhaps the only ones who can threaten its existence. The emperor is not surprised by this feedback. It's just that he thinks some pieces are missing in the whole picture.

“These nobles just want to snatch their rights away from me. They will not give up unless this goal is achieved. They will form an intangible historical force and will endlessly entangle my massive system!” Knowing the hatred of the three people against the nobles very well, the emperor took the opportunity to express his position, and at the same time, allowed these three to elaborate their ideas further.

But everyone seems to have no intention to continue this unpleasant topic. The emperor thinks that it is the right moment to raise the question of his real concern. He asks, “What happened to the proletarian soldiers and intellectuals I asked you to promote?”

“A lot of people have grasped the actual powers, but they lack prestige. Their voices are often suppressed in the crucial meetings. Their roots are still too shallow. Without further promotion, many of them are discouraged and devoted to activities outside their careers,” said a general.

The emperor silently lit his head. *How much prestige do you have in the army? Prestige is accumulated step by step in the process. Where does the prestige come from if you don't give them a chance? Even if you are already in a high position, you still insisted on the battle's supreme command. And what did you do? You created the kind of mass graves without national morality just hoping to add more prestige to yourself. Why didn't you think about the root of Qin at that moment? But I won't argue with you in person.*

“Losing passion is at least harmless. In fact, many officers collude with businessmen to engage in various illegal activities. These people are also acting as the spokespersons of various forces in the army, and often made a meeting a mess.” The other general added.

The emperor nodded and thought. *When you were in the Kingdom of Zhao, you were the one who was most keen on getting benefits from merchants. How many of Zhao's commercial interests are behind you for supporting me as a monarch? Without those commercial interests, I seriously doubt that I would have your support. Your appearance always reminds me that you could be a profiteer. Maybe someday, you will rebel against the monarch for personal gain. But I am not going to humiliate you for your contradicted argument.*

“What about the proletarian intellectuals?” The emperor asked impatiently.

“They are absorbed in researching and improving the academic works of their predecessors, and are often shy about proposing their own views. They are basically attached to the existing school of scholarship, and they are mainly used as hatchet men for the schools to fight against differences.” The eunuch replied.

The emperor looks at the eunuch indifferently. *When you suggested using the imperial power to burn books and perish the thought of scholars for defeating this centralised system, why didn't you make the defence with your own views? No one in the court under your management can put forward arguments for defeating the system. If your view is superior, you would have the knowledge and ability to shut up those hundred scholars with opposite opinions. But these words can only be buried in my heart.*

The emperor is lost in thought. *The missing components of the picture are found! While I was competing for leadership with the aristocracy from the existing orders, I created another force, a disorderly force. I deliberately made it incompatible with the various existing orders, but I ignored the fact that the power to control such a force must come from the order itself. These three proletarian leaders are not willing to establish any sustainable order for their groups. The pool certainly doesn't lack talents. But these three will not have the incentive to develop a mechanism to select the best candidate efficiently because the selected one is either from the aristocracy whom they dislike or from the proletarian who shares similar backgrounds with them and most likely threatens their existence. In fact, they are afraid of the proletariat more than the aristocracy. They live with no support from the family reputation*

*or from the existing hierarchy, the sustainable power for their positions merely comes from the prestige of destroying the existing order. And this short-term destructive behaviour itself is surely despised by the current morality. The righteousness of the act of destroying the order can only be granted as an “order” through the supremum ruler's ideology, that is, the empowerment from the highest. In that case, if one more person shares the emperor's blessings, their support will be reduced by one portion; and once they lose their current status, they will face punishment for order disruption. So these short-sighted leaders unconsciously maintain this disorderly situation, letting the hierarchy slowly corroded by the uncontrollable forces.*

The emperor suddenly felt that he saw an absurd scene. In this scene, the old order morphed into a forest, and he called on many loggers to destroy this forest. However, the short-sighted masses were unwilling to plant new saplings after cutting down the big trees; inadvertently, the original place of the forest is full of disorderly swamps, into which he began to sink deep.

*If the trend goes on, this centralised system will sooner or later collapse. But the whole trend looks like a historical trap. Ironically, this trap was set by myself!* Thinking of this, the emperor loses his temper. He almost has blurted out. “How can we find out someone among the crowd who can sublimate to such virtuous persons as you?” Suddenly feeling that the sarcasm in this sentence was too obvious, the emperor changes his mind and asks. “This crowd can’t be relied on, but now the nobles of Qin and the survivors of the six kingdoms are all in the same vein, being attempt to destroy the system which I have worked so hard to establish. What should we do?”

“If the war continues, these problems may be covered up.” The eunuch seemed to mutter to himself.

“But the war has ended. The six kingdoms have been defeated. The whole central plains belong to Qin. Where to fight and what is fighting for? The East is the endless sea, and the West is an uninhabited desert.” The emperor then turns his head to a general.

The general understands the intention and immediately replies. “The northern grassland is severely cold. Although there are nomadic tribes, the physique of our soldiers cannot live in that cold climate.” The other general quickly follows the sentence and says. “The South is full of poisonous insects, and the food is prone to spoilage. The soldiers were hard to acclimatise to the hot climate and the diet problems worsen the army’s combat effectiveness.”

“Well, it is indeed not easy to continue the war on this land.” Without having any concrete clue to continue this conversation, the emperor suggests that the dinner can start.

But the idea of war has been entangled in the emperor’s mind. *The war seems to be the most effective means to maintain this centralised system. My huge military empire’s constitution depends on the primitive driving force derived from people’s fear of death and the desire for the fruits of victory in war, a mixture of desire for survival and hunting. Our ancestors showed that collective centralisation is the only feasible emergency system under the powerful threat. Driven by the primitive desire, people are willing to suppress their personal willingness and compromise with the system. Yes, the way to perpetuate this system is to let the war continue. It would be better to allow the war to exist forever without being aware of it.*

Looking at the noodles in the bowl, the emperor suddenly has an idea. *Perhaps it is possible to launch a self-destructive war. The occurrence, development, and termination of the war are all under the control of the centralisation system, so that the system can always take the initiative to create a new order for the recurrence of the war. This could be the ideal resolution.*

“Would you like to eat a bowl of gravy alone or a bowl of white noodles?” The emperor asked. Without waiting for the response, he continues his speech. “Of course not. Your experience tells you to mix gravy and noodles and stir

them vigorously until they appease your appetite. Because you want a bowl of delicious noodles, not the tedious doughy strips.”

“Stirring requires energy, so does war. But if this demand evokes human’s inner desire, people will spend their energies without hesitating. After eating the noodles, their desires are temporarily satisfied, and they stop stirring. But the next day, when you put other bowls of gravy and noodles in front of them, they will still stir again, involuntarily.”

“No one is willing to give his life to participate in a meaningless war, but if the war brings in a kind of satisfaction of desire, it could even be difficult to stop the emergence of the war. We should build an ideology on top of the existing centralised system. This ideology is to let the masses initiate the warfare within the centralised system spontaneously, and then let them get the rewards of the war promptly so as to prevent the system from being completely destroyed.”

Finding the confused expressions of the three people, the emperor intends to give a more detailed description.

“The gravy is black, and the noodles are white. Your appetite instinct tells you to homogenise these two to make a delicious mixture. In this world, there is evil, and there is justice. When the two forces are distributed under the right proportion by a moral standard, society will be stable. The balance of the two is like the ratio of gravy to noodles in your bowl. The moral standard is your taste. Some people love salty, while some prefer light. Everyone has different standards about righteousness and evil. Some are gentlemen and some are lawless. Therefore, a stable society must balance good and evil. This balance must meet the overall requirements of the legal system and morality. It is hard to imagine a gang full of rogues but with law-abiding gang rules, or a group of modest gentlemen living in a bandit country. These groups must dismiss in an instant, because they are unstable. Similarly, if one group worships the power of justice and the other group goes to the opposite, then war will break out as soon as the two groups meet up. At this time, the war is set in motion by a kind of moral desire, a subconscious force, just like the stirring instinct of gravy and noodles to satisfy your appetite. This is the driving force of the history which neither you nor I can intervene!”

“Guide the empire to the infinite war under the twisted moral! Make the centralised system reach eternal life under the infinite war!” The emperor said emotionally, hoping that his idea can invade the surrounding souls.

“What we have to do is to separate the gravy from the noodles and then present them separately to the public. Imagine that we open a restaurant for the general public, and the masses are customers with an endless appetite. What we have to do is to continuously supply them with noodles and gravy. When there are more noodles, we add gravy; when there is too much gravy, we just add noodles. Our dear customers will keep stirring their gourmets. After one meal, we can prepare the ingredients for the next one. We just need to make sure all the ‘gravy’ and the ‘noodles’ support our centralised system. In this case, the masses who digest the ‘food’ will become a permanent embodiment of the centralised system.” The emperor stopped the speech, waiting for the response.

The three avoid having any uncomprehending expression. Although they may have captured some general ideas, they feel that the whole concept is too bizarre to be convincing. After a while, the eunuch breaks the silence. He decides to follow the emperor’s ideas closely. “What should the specific implementation process look like?” This question is more like a demonstration by which he wants to show that he had understood the emperor’s thought.

“We need an ideology. Let’s call it **noodlarianism**. The doctrine of this ideology is to produce enough elite ‘gravy’ and ‘noodles,’ and society of gluttons. The ‘gravy’ can corrode the original aristocratic class; the ‘noodles’ can mould a bunch of proletariats into a meritocratic mirage. The majority of the society would be gourmets who worship at the fame and fortune of ‘gravy’ and ‘noodles.’ Let’s call them ‘noodle citizens.’ Noodlarianism will make the ruling class flooded with ‘gravy’ and will educate massive ‘noodles’ to climb the social ladder. The hierarchy will suffer turbulence during these reshuffles. Sooner or later, the mixture of the ‘gravy’ and ‘noodles’ would exceed the moral

balance point. At this moment, if the whole society is full of 'noodle citizens,' they will involve in the movement of redistributing 'gravy' and 'noodles,' and then the stirring, or the war, will automatically start."

The emperor stirs the noodles in the bowl and continues his speech. "There are a few things to pay attention though."

"The noodle citizens who worship 'food' as heaven shouldn't have the ability to think deeply. Otherwise, they will explore the meaning behind 'eating.' Therefore, noodlarianism must give 'eating' the highest sense of justice. Let the noodle citizens work day and night, make them exhausted. For these noodle citizens, 'eating noodles with gravy,' or chasing their fame and fortune in riots, is a matter of course and justification. They will have no intention to investigate the deeper intrigue of 'eating.' For the qualified 'noodle citizens,' namely who uphold the moral rules of noodlarianism, they should have many children and many blessings. So they will eventually occupy the whole empire."

"There is no need to put too many restrictions on 'gravy' and 'noodles.' However, since they will be 'eaten' and 'digested' by noodle citizens in the end, we must make sure that these 'gravy' and 'noodles' are the supporters of our centralised system. Therefore, noodlarianism should train their centralisation spirit under a strong moral indicator. The law of 'filial piety' can be considered. Whether they are 'black' or 'white,' they have to listen to the old. As long as they have this moral principle, they will be under the control of noodlarianism, as they are derivatives of this ideology."

"In short, noodlarianism will divide the missions of capable agents of our centralised system into 'gravy' and 'noodles' based on the code of conduct and ethics; it will use social environment, language, literature, and customary code to unconsciously guide the noodle citizens to only pay attention to their own desire of survival, diet, and reproduction. In this way, noodlarianism will enforce the people and the society on converging to the centralised system."

The eunuch nodded from time to time, indicating that he had understood the specific ideas of this doctrine. But a general seems a little tired of the endless abstract discussion. So he proposes a question in a little dissatisfied voice. "But it's all ideological work. The current empire may not have the environment to implement these ideas. You must know that not every officer can do just eating noodles."

"Those who don't eat noodles will be filtered out no matter if they are aristocrats or proletariats." The emperor quickly replied. The general seems a little scared and stops his planned talk. "But this cleaning is not now." The emperor feels that his tone was a bit too heavy, so he immediately calms down and says, "We must make sure that the cleaning will not affect the system, and at the same time we need sufficient 'noodles' and 'gravy.'"

The emperor also notices that he should give two generals more specific instructions. He talks to the general stationed in the North, "Take your troops to the farther north. If you can't get deep into the grassland, then stay on the border. Find some tasks for your men: Build a wall or harass a nomadic tribe."

Then he turns to the other general and says, "Prepare your troops to take root in the South. Make a kind of local noodles: Let them slowly blend with the local residents so that they can gradually adapt to the local climate and diet."

Without waiting for a reply from the generals, the emperor turns to the eunuch. "None of my sons is sage enough to resist the counterattack of the nobles. Don't have any hope on these mediocre guys. Separate them into two groups. Let one group rot into the 'gravy,' and let the other sublimate into 'noodles.' They will be bound to make all the surrounding forces get involved in this separation. The conflicts will be inevitable. After my death, you will design some incidents to intensify the conflict."

"The empire will be in chaos." The eunuch said worriedly.

“This is the first step in cleaning. Only in this state of chaos can the nobility’s power be suppressed. The noodlarianism ‘gravy’ can smoothly start the process of corruption. This will be a long process, a purification process. Those who don’t want to behave as noodle citizens will be washed out by the ‘gravy.’” When replying, the emperor stared into the eunuch’s eyes. The eunuch nodded in response.

The emperor immediately turns his head and talks to the generals, “You must never get involved in these conflicts. At that moment, you will be looking for suitable candidates in the North and the South to rebuild the empire. After the first step of cleaning, the central plains, which by then should be full of noodle citizens, will be unable to resist the ‘noodles’ and ‘gravy’ provided by the imperial army. The stirring will begin. After the stirring, the new empire will thoroughly refine our centralised system. The noodle citizens will take a rest, and the noodlarianism will be able to prepare for the next round of stirring under a more friendly environment provided by the new empire. Remember: we only need to build up the bricks for the noodlarianism, and the followers will add tiles to the bricks.”

After finishing his concrete plan description, the emperor eats the noodles left in the bowl in one bite.

“One more thing: To ensure that sufficient ‘noodles’ and ‘gravy’ exist in society, you must design a selection and evaluation standard that is ridiculous enough. This mechanism must prevent the elites from overly concentrating on the just side. It also can avoid the emergence of the new aristocracy. Of course, I have confidence in you. I think you have already done a good job on that.” The emperor said with a smirk. The three people seemed to be seen through their minds, and all had to smile embarrassedly in response.

The emperor is very satisfied with founding the noodlarianism. Now he finally feels that he could dispel the threat of the nobility, and at the same time, he can completely restrain the unruly proletarian leaders around him; also, he has planned their destiny. Putting down his chopsticks, he says in a conclusive tone. “Our lives have limits, and this empire will eventually fall apart, but as long as the ‘noodles’ and ‘gravy’ exist, as long as the noodle citizens exist, the centralisation system we have established will embed into noodlarianism and will get immortality. So will we!”

“Immortal noodles, eternal centralisation!” The emperor shouted. Then he signalled that the banquet is over.

When everyone is about to leave, suddenly the emperor has thought of something and immediately adds, “The tenet of noodlarianism is: Stir!”

The three people look at each other and then shout in the loudest voice, “Stir!”