

# A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Values and Their Origins: Family – Nation – World

By Gu Zhengkun

*Prof. & Dean of Institute of World Literature, Peking University*

**Abstract:** *This paper maintains that all cultures are legitimate, yet at certain levels, different cultures have corresponding degrees of superiority or inferiority. There are therefore at least eleven criteria to judge whether a culture is superior or not. The paper further maintains that, arising in direct response to their different geographic environments, the different social structures in China and the West have a flesh-and-blood correspondence with Chinese and Western cultural structures. The author discovers through his studies that the family-like social structure is one of the key factors to explain the traditional Chinese culture, while the interest-group social structure is another key factor to explain the traditional dominant Western culture. The family-like social structure, according to the author, is relatively more acceptable compared with other social structures. The paper tries to prove the point by 1) comparing Chinese and Western values such as obligations and freedom; 2) comparing Chinese and Western political and economic despotism and 3) comparing family-nation vs. state-nation and examination vs. democracy. The paper ends up concluding that human culture's highest pursuit is to awaken mankind to realize that we all human beings, as modern genetic research has increasingly convinced us, are actually members of one family. That being the case, the use of the family-oriented values in constructing the future world is inevitably a better choice.*

**Keywords:** *family-like society; interest- group society; values; worldism*

## 1. Cultures: Superiority or Inferiority?

All cultures are legitimate, yet at certain levels, different cultures have different advantages and disadvantages that relatively indicate corresponding degrees of superiority or inferiority. Culture mainly consists of its value, lifestyle, language and writing system, religion, art, political system, knowledge, and technology, etc. But the core of a culture lies in its values, especially the moral values. Some scholars have argued that there is not much difference between culture and civilization, yet most scholars tend to believe that they are different. Although it is a complicated job to define the differences, the main distinction, as the majority of scholars would believe, is this: the concept of culture is more often used to refer to the spiritual achievements, while the concept of civilization the material achievements of human beings.

All cultures are legitimate and should be respected. But the same kind of legitimacy does not mean the same degree of excellence. Some aspects of a culture can never be judged superior or inferior. For example, as far as people's aesthetic interest is concerned, it is hard to tell whether the taste for the painting of Leonardo da Vinci or for that of Qi Baishi is artistically better. But relatively speaking, many other aspects of a culture or a culture as a whole can be judged superior or inferior. For example, as regards value, it is quite evident that the advocacy for a spirit of altruism is superior to that of egoism. Or,

as regard to apparatus, it is also quite obvious that the technology of electronic computer far excels that of the ancient abacus.

## 2. The Criteria to Judge Whether a Culture Is Advanced or Not

So how to judge whether a culture is advanced? It should be noted that I choose the terms "advanced" to mean relatively superior, and "backward" to mean relatively inferior. "Backward" here does not mean bad or something completely negative. The second place winner is "backward" compared with the champion, but the second place is not so bad. There are many criteria to judge whether a culture is advanced or not. Here, eleven points are listed, emphasizing the spiritual aspects. The material aspects belong to the category of civilization. The criteria to judge whether a civilization is advanced can also be listed, but is omitted here. The eleven criteria are:

1) to see whether a culture can cultivate and edify the quality of kindness in its people. A culture which makes its people tricky (in terms of calculation), mean and bellicose is not a good culture; while a culture which renders its people righteous, honest, serene and modest is surely a good culture. The indicators may include the crime rate and the number of prisoners. The higher the crime rate is, the lower the quality of the culture is, and it is more backward. The lower the crime rate is, the higher

the quality of the culture is, and it is more advanced. A culture may suffer high crime rate either because its law enforcement organization is too harsh and inhumane, or its public are self-seeking, showing too strong a disposition to committing crimes. Both conclusions suggest that the culture is relatively low in quality.

2) to see whether a culture attaches importance to man of great craft or man of great virtue. The backward culture merely attaches importance to men of great craft but neglects men of great virtue; while the advanced culture attaches importance to both.

3) to see whether a culture stresses justice or benefit. The culture which merely stresses benefit but overlooks justice is backward; while the culture which stresses justice more than benefit is advanced.

4) to see the complexity of the laws of a culture. The culture is backward when its law system is excessively complex and pays too much attention to benefit; the culture with a law system of moderate complexity is just fine; while the culture whose law system is simple and pays enough attention to virtues is advanced.

5) to see whether the martial spirit of a culture is strong and whether the corresponding military industry is highly developed. The culture with strong martial spirit is backward, while the culture with weak martial spirit is advanced. The culture which worships military force is backward, while the culture which esteems civil cultivation is advanced.

6) to see whether a culture emphasizes freedom or obligation to others. The culture which emphasizes freedom but ignores obligation is backward; while the culture which emphasizes obligation as well as freedom is advanced.

7) to see whether a culture emphasizes egoism or altruism. The former is backward while the latter advanced. A culture that encourages people to be strict with themselves is more acceptable than a culture that encourages people to be strict with others. The former is relatively advanced while the latter is backward.

8) to see whether a culture prefers peace or war. The former is advanced while the latter is backward.

9) to see whether a culture emphasizes benevolence or truthfulness. The culture which emphasizes both benevolence and truthfulness is advanced, while the culture which emphasizes truthfulness to the detriment of benevolence is backward.

10) to see whether a culture emphasizes the force of great mobs or the authority of great sages. The former

is backward while the latter is advanced.

11) to see whether the science and technology of a culture contributes to the peaceful development or lead to the confrontation of human society. The former is advanced while the latter is backward.

### **3.The Correspondence between Geographic Environment and Social Structure: China and West**

As long as the earth furnishes the basic conditions for life, subsistence and culture, coming together in part or in entirety, these conditions will interact with and influence each other. They will regulate, adapt to, and reorganize each other, promoting the phenomenon of evolution. Thus, culture and civilization are produced and developed. As regards the driving force for cultural development, I have summarized nine factors, which are omitted in this article. Here, I only want to introduce one of them: the factor of geographic environment.

It is an old viewpoint that the geographic environment exerts influence upon the culture of man. Since the explanations of this view are extremely complicated, here I will not cite them point by point. I will only mention my new insights into the matter.

To merely emphasize that geographic environments do influence human culture is empty talk. The key point is to decide how geographic environments influence human culture in specific conditions. First, among the many factors of geographic environments, I see three of them — terrain, climate, and natural resources — as the primordial factors which are most essential for the development of human culture. Second, according to my research, the influence of environments can be classified into two categories: vertical and horizontal. Generally speaking, human culture as a whole is more frequently subject to the horizontal influence. It is called horizontal because it exerts strong impact in certain phases of historical development. But viewed from the overall or vertical phases of historical development, the influence is gradually decreasing. That is to say, the influence is inversely proportionate to the historical development of time. The earlier the time is traced back toward antiquity, the stronger the influence of environments is found. The later the time comes toward modern and contemporary periods, the weaker the influence of environments is found. Of course, the ever-decreasing influence of the environment does not mean it will totally disappear eventually. Rather, it just means the degree of the influence is decreasing with a general tendency. Third, more specifically speaking, in the representative birthplaces of both Chinese and Western cultures (like the Central China area, cradle of traditional Chinese culture and the Mediterranean area, cradle of ancient Greco-Roman culture), different

geographic environments have brought about different social structures and cultural styles. The terrain, climate, and natural resource in Central China area inevitably encourage and promote the agricultural mode of production and the family-like social structure. And the terrain, climate, and natural resources in Greco-Roman culture — the representative ancestor of modern Western cultures — have unavoidably encouraged and promoted the commercial mode of production and the related social structure of interest-groups (military groups, economic groups and political groups.)

#### **4.The Family-Like Social Structure: the Greatest and Most Ideal Social Structure for Human Beings**

Arising in direct response to their different geographic environments, the different social structures in China and West have a flesh-and-blood correspondence with Chinese and Western cultural structures. Therefore, the family-like social structure is one of the key factors to explain the traditional mainstream Chinese culture, and the interest-group (military-group) social structure is also one of the key factors to explain the traditional dominant western culture. In other words, the family-like social structure in China has a complex and pervasive connection with traditional Chinese philosophy, politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, law, architecture, medicine, sport, etiquette, and even military affairs. For instance, the doctrines of Confucianism and Daoism are the necessary outcome of the family-like social structure in China. This holds true even for some doctrines that entered China from outside, like Buddhism (especially the Mahayana branch). The reason why it is widely accepted in traditional Chinese society is that its doctrines profoundly conform to the family-like social structure and the cultural structure of China. Likewise, the interest-group social structure in the West also has a complex and pervasive connection with Western philosophy, politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, law, architecture, medicine, sport, etiquette, and even military affairs. For instance, the doctrine of rationalism and the admiration for science and technology are the necessary choice of the Western interest-group social structure. This holds true even for some foreign doctrines, like Christianity, which has its origin in the Middle East. The reason why it is widely accepted in traditional Western society is also that its basic principles, upon slight modification, agree with the interest-group social structure and the cultural structure of the West.

There is also another viewpoint on which I radically differ from other scholars. Although many scholars have discussed to varying degrees about the matter of the family-like social structure in China, they often see it as a backward social structure and criticize it negatively. I see quite the opposite. According to me, the traditional family-like social structure in ancient China is an extremely great social structure in the ancient world. And

also, among all the social structures of human beings, the family-like social structure is the greatest and most ideal. As a matter of fact, the reason why Marx identifies the primitive society as communist society is that it is almost unexceptionally structured in the way of a family.

#### **5.The Family-Like Social Structure: the Most Crucial Factor to Explain Whether a Culture Is Advanced or Backward**

Of all human relations, kinship is the most intimate. Therefore, in the kinship-based family, there is the most reasonable and natural human relation. Although there are also unavoidable conflicts for benefit, the intimacy, the love and the devotion between family members are undoubtedly unrivaled by any other human relation. Therefore, the values generated within a family are the most natural, reasonable, moral, virtuous and also most ideal. A logical inference is that the family-like social structure will definitely give rise to the most ideal value system. Therefore, we can say that the value system derived from the family-like social structure is the most ideal value system, and it is the highest pursuit and ultimate destination of human kind. Such an ideal is more commonly put as “a world family” or “as intimate as a family”.

Righteousness and justice can also be achieved to some degree in other kind of human relation. But it is only in the family-like social structure that the maximum degree of righteousness and justice could be obtained, because in light of morality and obligation, every member in the family-like society should recognize other members as his relatives or his family members. In normal cases, the distribution of benefits among relatives or family members is fair. Moreover, the highest authority within a family structure is always held by the parents, the oldest, or the most prestigious. In most cases, compared with other members in the family or the members in other social structure, they show a greater degree of impartiality in dividing property, distributing power, or mediating conflict between family or clan members.

It should be noted that with the sophistication of social situations, when the rights and benefits are being distributed within the ever-expanding family-like society, the fairness will definitely be reduced gradually. However, as long as the members acknowledge themselves to belong to the same big family, the advanced values originated from family relationship can be spread and further developed in the society. It is only within the family-like social structure that there is the highest possibility to appear such results as harmony, obedience, rapprochement, collaboration, loyalty, peace, gentility, accommodation, auspiciousness, reconciliation, and moderation.

The traditional Chinese society is a typical family-

structured society, so it necessarily gives birth to the unparalleled value system which comprises such virtues as benevolence, righteousness, politeness, wisdom, honesty, mildness, kindness, humility, frugality, moderation, loyalty, filial piety, incorruptibility, sense of shamefulness, and courage. This value system is not solely established by Confucius. It is the crystallization of various strategies employed by the family-like society of China when it is faced up with such problems as dividing benefits, distributing power, and mediating conflicts over at least five thousand years of its history.

On the contrary, the interest-group social structure in the Western world has its characteristics and limitations. In a society controlled by different interest groups and governed by the majority (democracy), justice is determined only by the strength of interest groups. The most powerful (militarily, politically and financially) is able to decide the basic standard of justice. In the interest-group social structure, different interest groups will invariably stress their different interests, and their conflicts naturally call for solutions. The most common solution is to acquire ruling status by means of war or election, and then make law to promote or at least protect one's own interests. The sanctification of law is the necessary cultural consequence when interests groups encounter, conflict and conciliate with each other in order to snatch and protect benefits. For the same reason, it is inevitable for such social structure to give birth to the value system which attaches great emphasis to bravery, intelligence, abstinence, righteousness, cautiousness, freedom, democracy, self-reliance, and individualism.

It should be admitted that when taken alone, the two great value systems – of China and West-- are both reasonable and nice, because they are both the strategic values the two societies produce in response to their concrete environments. However, if we compare them point by point, there is a difference between good and bad. Above all, among all the value items, the two societies have different emphasis. In the Chinese family-like society, benevolence (or love) is taken as the top priority and all the other values are governed under it. The original meaning of benevolence is: 1) a person and 2) the love. So benevolence means a person and his love. Hence the proverbs like “The widespread love is benevolence” , “A benevolent man loves his fellow men” , and “Benevolence is in man”. Therefore, “benevolence as a basis” is actually “people-oriented” and “love-based”. This is the real idea of Chinese humanism. Benevolence, as the supreme guideline to govern a country is without doubt the most humanitarian principle. It is undoubtedly the most reasonable and ideal principle no matter whether the rulers can thoroughly stick to it or not. It is precisely because the Chinese nation is structured like a big family that this principle can be accentuated in the political system of China. The family is the miniature of the nation; while the nation is the expansion of the family. Therefore, the love between

family members, such as parents, brothers and sisters, naturally evolves or sublimates into the love between the members of the whole society. Thus, it is natural for Confucius to appeal the social members to “love the populace extensively and stick closely to the principle of benevolence”.

We now turn to the value system esteemed in the interest-group social structure in the West. The Western world has been dominated by four most important moral values, or the four cardinal virtues like “Wisdom”(Prudence), “Courage (or Fortitude)”, “Temperance”, and “Justice”. The Christian Church later added “faith”, “hope”, and “charity”, expanding the system into “Seven Cardinal Virtues”. Taking any of these virtues alone, each of them is good. However, when they are compared with the traditional values in China as is mentioned above, we have to admit that the values in China are better. For example, in the West, wisdom and courage are always regarded as the most important virtues, thus being prioritized; while in the Chinese culture, the most important values are benevolence and justice. As is mentioned earlier, compared with wisdom and courage -- the most important moral standard in the West, the values of benevolence and love in China when they are extended from family to the whole society are undoubtedly a better moral pursuit for human beings. Of course, the Western virtue of wisdom is also important, but it is desirable only under the guideline of the good will. Besides, courage, without proper restriction, is not desirable. In China, foolhardiness is even derided. In the Daoist doctrine of China, the quality of bravery is dismissed. Laozi has alleged that those who are excessively rash and reckless always end up miserable. In his opinion, “courage, when extended over a reasonable degree, induces death” . Of course, the quality of courage is not altogether excluded from the traditional values of China. It is one of the five qualities in Confucianism, that is, loyalty, filial piety, incorruptibility, sense of shamefulness, and courage. But courage is only desirable when it is based on justice. It should be noted that unlike the Westerners who put courage first or second among the Four Cardinal Virtues, in Confucianism, courage is placed last among the five qualities. The three additional values in the Christian Church — faith, hope and charity — are good as well, but unfortunately they are by and large not fully emphasized. The “charity” is very similar to Chinese “benevolence”, but it never seems to take the dominance in the Western world. There was even a period when the value of charity was criticized by some conservative Western scholars and it shocks the Chinese mind to hear them say that alms-giving or charitable conduct simply encourage laziness in society.

Likewise, in China, altruism is pervasively esteemed as the first principle, and one's own benefit only comes second. When this kind of other-centered principle is compared with the self-centered individualism in the West, it is without doubt superior. Although, at some

early stages of China's reform, in order to conform to the opening-up policy and especially to establish the socialist market economy, some people in the academia of China have taken great pains to propagate the Western individualism and derided the selfless spirit preached by traditional Marxists. Their proposal is understandable and acceptable, since it is strategic in that particular period of time. However, if a conscientious intellectual really takes the self-centered moral value as superior to the selfless moral value, he is as good as advocating that Chinese people should degenerate into a baser species. The traditional Chinese values advocate a world family, peace, and conciliation. According to the moral standard, the strong should be restrained a little bit and the weak be helped a little bit; the aggression should be inhibited and war opposed. On the contrary, in traditional Western values, competition is advocated; the principle of natural selection and survival of the fittest is profusely propagated; and bellicosity has become common. If we compared the two systems of values, it goes without saying that the traditional Chinese culture at this level is relatively superior.

Thus, the traditional Chinese value system — despite some elements in it that call for further refinement and improvement in the new era — is up to now the world's most advanced value system. Therefore, to some extent, we may conclude that as far as its general orientation is concerned, the moral and value system from the traditional Chinese society is now the most ideal value pursuit and destination for all mankind. As is mentioned above, the reason why Marx identifies the primitive society as communist society is that it is almost unexceptionally structured in the way of a family. In such a social structure, members of a big family produce food together, manage the work together, and consume the goods together, without possessing any personal property. The only drawback is that the communist society in the primitive stage, due to its low productivity, is unable to yield ample material wealth. Reasoned in this way, when a society has the enough capacity to produce ample material wealth and make the wealth circulate, mankind should reconsider returning to family-like communism. That is also a social style of a world family and universal prosperity.

## 6. Case Study: Comparing Chinese and Western Values on Obligations and Freedom

The emphasis of Western value system gradually came to the concept of freedom. Almost everyone in the West is familiar with Rousseau's dramatic line: "Human beings are born free, but everywhere they are in chains." After Rousseau put forward this concept in his renowned *The Social Contract*, thousands of scholars cited it without proper analysis. Freedom in today's world has almost become a sacred creed. The pursuit of freedom itself as an ideal is of course a good thing. However, people tend to forget that ideal is just an ideal.

And as Rousseau asserts that the reality in human life is confined by freedom. If freedom is only emphasized without stating the relevant conditions, it becomes an empty, meaningless and misleading slogan. By relevant conditions I mean certain aspects: For example, how can a society protect its citizens under various circumstances, and how can it ensure the people's well-being and provide the basic needs for their survival. If a person constantly faces the risk of unemployment, the risk of illness without being able to afford the hospital; or if a person is of average intelligence but is deprived of all opportunities for a better education; or if a person with a big family cannot afford an apartment to live in. So even though he or she has freedom to curse and swear in the streets, to criticize the authorities in the media, what benefit is to him or her? For the empty stomach, bread is more important than freedom. Of course, some aspects of freedom in association with other values, such as many initiatives regarding human rights in modern Western society, are worth learning from.

Traditional Western values take freedom as an end in itself: an abstract individual sort of freedom, while Chinese traditional values emphasize more on obligations in one's everyday life. Obligations and freedom do not totally contradict each other, but it is very difficult to get them balanced in reality. In other words, man must take on duties and responsibilities, but would rather prefer to indulge in carefree life without any obligations. Rousseau's proposition is too loose and we can simply understand that man is actually not "born free". In my opinion, even before people are born they are unable to choose their place and time of birth, and they are destined to be un-free. If he is born in an aristocratic and official family, for instance, he stands a chance of being lucky all his life, whereas if he is born in a poor and common family, it is likely that hunger and misery will go with him all his life. In rural China, when a child is born, he or she is almost destined to become a farmer; only a small percentage of the rural population may be offered the opportunity not to become a peasant. And a man born in America or the developing countries will obviously share different opportunities, better or worse, in his career. Thus, it is useless to talk about freedom without any specification. People are not born free; they are born without freedom, but are burdened with the fulfillment of their obligations! People have the obligations to adjust themselves to the environment they are born into. They are born with necessary obligations imposed by the environment and they must carry out them in their life. For instance, they have to support their parents, obey the elders, care for the young and the old, fulfill all the duties they were instructed to do by society, and they must become so self-reliant as to be able to contribute to their own brothers and sisters' livelihoods, and so on. Only a complete selfish person would consider the essential obligations to be their ubiquitous shackles and always want to indulge in a carefree lifestyle without any responsibilities. In fact, they think of freedom as

an escape from one's obligations for the world. True, freedom is a kind of enjoyment, but it is conditional, and conditions are always limitations. It is – I would rather say --- the very limitations that give the true meaning to freedom. Only when we understand this point, can we understand why the ancient Chinese had a set of rituals to regulate their behavior. Each individual's obligations and duties were systematically regulated. All this sort of things are carefully prescribed in the Chinese *li* (rites, or the norms of social conduct). People's exercise of freedom can be carried out only in accordance with the regulations set up in *li*; it is under such a condition that freedom gets its particular value and significance. Many Western literary works, poetry in particular, singing the praises of shaking off the yoke of freedom, are very much like a naughty and perverted child who desperately tries to obtain everything they like such as toys and food. Yet, only modest obligations and modest freedom are desirable; indulgence in freedom will harm others and lead to one's self-destruction. Even the beasts and birds of the jungle know that they have to care for their offspring! Of course, we should also prevent ourselves from going to extremes, for extremes are dangerous. If a society over-emphasizes the obligations, it will become too rigid and harsh—intentionally or unintentionally—the basic human rights will be deprived of in one way or another. This is where we should stop to ponder and something we should take into consideration.

### **7.Chinese and Western Political and Economic Despotism: Coaxial Reverse Mutual Influence**

Democratic tendencies in the construction of Western political power systems, whether in the past or at present, are undeniable; yet people tend to overlook a key problem, that is, the tendency of political democratization has not brought the same degree of democratization in the possession of economic wealth; on the contrary, the emphasis on the sanctity of private property, strengthens individual economic dictatorship in the distribution and possession of economic wealth. This has stirred Western society into a very peculiar situation: within the framework of democracy is now embedded an economic dictatorship. The symbiosis of dictatorship and democracy is a yoke structure of complementariness, mutual interaction, mutual influence, mutual protection, and co-existence. The superficial political democracy ensures economic despotism rising to a critical value. The democratic nature of economic competition is a cover-up for the tyranny of economic property.

Likewise, in traditional China and even modern China, we just see the opposite of the problem. For thousands of years, the Chinese government has authoritarian tendencies on the surface, but this tendency of political despotism did not bring about the same degree of economic monopoly in the possession of economic wealth. On the contrary, the family-like

farming society emphasized on the necessity of the equal-field system. As a result, the superficial political despotism, instead, often contributed to the relative democratization in the distribution of economic wealth. Thus a very peculiar pattern emerges: China and the West developed dual political and economic yoke structures of autocracy and democracy. The symbiosis of autocracy and democracy is reversed in China and the West, yet in both cases autocracy and democracy complement each other: mutual interaction, mutual influence, mutual protection, and co-existence.

In the contemporary Western political field, though there are still powers of interest groups (such as power of political parties) that have hereditary tendencies, the personal power is now basically non-hereditary because political campaigns break the likelihood of the hereditary form. However, in the contemporary Western economic field, the individual economic autocracy and sanctity of private property are still strengthened. The protection of private property combined with unrestricted free economic competition has led to an economy controlled by a few very natural, despotic bosses (such as those who can hire and fire anybody anytime at will). And thus every employee feels increasingly insecure about the way the world is heading.

Therefore, which is the more important issue to be dealt with: the economic monopoly or the freedom of economic competition? Obviously, the former is the more critical problem to be tackled. However, people tend to ignore the existing economic monopoly, and instead only think of the freedom of economic competition. In other words, the freedom of economic competition covers up a key problem: the economic monopoly. During the last three decades, when Chinese scholars who specialized in the study of economics frequently talked about the advantages of Western economic liberalism, they hardly mentioned the despotic nature of Western property ownership behind the veil of economic liberalism. The so-called free economic competition does not mean real freedom. To give an allusion: It is like ordering Spartacus to fight against a wild beast for freedom: the winner is to survive, the loser dies. This is called survival of the fittest, and it seems very fair and free in nature. However, people easily overlook the fact that Spartacus is considered to be a slave and is forced to risk killing his opponent is itself a great injustice. Letting a man fight against a beast is cruel and unjust. Likewise, we have the rich and the poor compete with one another on the fighting ground of economic competition. It seems to be a fair match, but from the very start it is very unequal because the key problem is that how much start-up capital the poor can afford to participate in that competition. And this is the well-cooked theory of free competition that the Western scholars born out of a privileged and rich class have thought up for us, an economic theory which makes the act of fighting a just form that justifies the great injustices at the root of all

the fighting. Though there indeed are some individual economic geniuses who succeed in winning a very large profit with a very small amount of capital, it is just a few examples in the economic field. It is just the exception, not the norm. In this kind of economic competition, most members of the society stand a slim chance of winning the first or second place in this so-called free economic competition.

## 8. Comparison and Contrast: Family-Nation vs. State-Nation; Examination vs. Democracy

While I take notice of the fact that the dominating mode of the farming culture of China inevitably restrains commerce and emphasizes agriculture, and sets great store by peaceful values – living and working in peace and contentment – I also take notice of the fact that the dominating mode of the trade and business culture in the West inevitably suppresses agriculture and emphasizes commerce, and puts an emphasis on aggressive values, advocating military forces and plundering others. In an agricultural-based society, living and working in peace and contentment, will inevitably develop small families into big families, big families into extended families, and then into the establishment of a country, and later into 家国, family-nation, which will inevitably have its corresponding political systems and governments. Similarly, regular mobility and commercial risk will inevitably lead to the disintegration of the primitive family-tribes, and then it will be replaced by interest factions, and at last will foster bigger interest factions, and leads to the formation of a country, the 邦国 (*bangguo*), nation-state, which will inevitably have its corresponding political systems and governments.

The family-nation political system embodies the values of clans or tribes. This form of government is incompatible with the Western government based on political party system. Confucius once said: “Gentlemen unite the masses without forming a clique (Party) to pursue selfish interests”, hinting that villains form a clique to pursue selfish interests without uniting the masses. This thinking actually reflects the family-nation political system in ancient China.

In a large family, members will be nurtured by the values of *Ren* (仁 benevolence) and *Ai* (爱 love) as the guiding principles of behavior. As time goes on, their behavior gradually evolves into a set of ethics and rituals known as the rites. Thus the traditional political system in China is a family-nation system guided by ethics and rites. The family-oriented values under different circumstances will show two characteristics: First, since every member of the society will universally identify themselves with one family and they share ancient genetic relationships, under the government of family-nation system guided by ethnics and rites, naturally, they will have a strong sense of equality. Too much sense of

equality in turn makes people prone to a mentality of self-righteousness. And this self-righteous attitude under certain conditions will weaken the cohesive force of the government, and make the government utterly lack cohesion in times of peace.

Second, in times of crisis, will show the same high degree of national unity like a big family does. And this will result in a strong nationalism. To prevent such a messy situation, this form of government needs to strengthen its cohesion, to become stronger and legitimate. Moreover, since the government subordinates to the family characteristics, in order to prevent an over-concentration of feudal power, the society must self-regulate itself by the strong moral ethics among its family members (the people). Hence the idea that “since the people are the foundation of the nation, if the people live and work in peace and contentment, the nation will stand firm” will be propagated by traditional elite group of intellectuals. This is in accord with Mencius’ idea of government for the people (民本 *minben*). The idea of government for the people in this respect is a Chinese-style democracy. It is not organized and implemented by competitive elections but by relying on the higher degree of virtues on the part of the ruling group. The persons of the ruling group must go through a very strict imperial examination to test the capabilities as well as the moral quality of all the candidates. Every citizen of the country has the right to take part in the fair examination. Only those who are both morally intelligently perfect can enjoy the power at the imperial court. One may call this Chinese-style democracy “a government mainly ruled by virtue” (德主政体 *dezhu zhengti*).

The traditional political system in the West is a nation-state system armed with religion (God) and laws. It is quite different from the traditional Chinese political system based on family values. The political system of the nation state is the embodiment of the values put forward by its various interest groups. In this form of government, different interest groups reconcile with one another to govern the nation. As time goes on, the values of individualism (individual-orientedness) will gradually form a set of rules and regulations, guiding and protecting the interests of the individuals, this is called the “law”. Hence the traditional Western political system can also be called nation-state that rules by law. The individual-oriented values under different circumstances will show different characteristics: in the nation state system, large family structures have long been disintegrated. The sense of family has been weakened, and the members of the society no longer possess a strong sense of belonging to family. Thus, each member now emphasizes his or her autonomy and independency. When this goes to the extreme selfishness will be seen as a natural value. This selfish attitude will again rationalize the competition among the different people. And at last, it becomes legalized. Legalization requires a sound set of regulations to ensure the fairness in competition. Thus, the nation

state is forced to govern by law, rather than by virtue. Meanwhile, the universal competition, in particular the commercial competition, builds up intense interpersonal relation between individuals in the society. The loss of family-oriented values that all members of the society are relatives leads the Westerners to invite the introduction of religion as a substitute for the loss of family-based ethics in order to relieve the tensions coming from the conflict between individuals. For instance, the Christian idea of “brotherhood” is a religious technique to form an artificial bond among the members of any group in the nation state’s society. To a certain extent, it regulates interpersonal relationships. Therefore, it is an inevitable choice for Westerners to appeal to Christianity. To a certain extent, individual-oriented values inevitably form interest groups or factionalism, and encourage the formation of various parties. The competition among individuals reflects the competition between different groups and parties. This sort of competition will cause decentralization of power by contracts. Decentralization by contract aims at protecting various interest groups (including royal interests), while it also limits the royal power. The conflict of interests within the government plays a crucial role in bridging the interests among different nations. The ruling party is in fact not all of the people but just some people, or majority of the people at the best, that is 帮 (*bang*, a clique, a party, or parties and groups). The leader of a political party or group could be the leader, president of a government if the party comes into power. The Chinese word 民主 (*minzhu*), meant to be the translation for the English term “democracy”, is a mistranslation of the foreign term. Since in Chinese, 民 (*min*) means all of the people, 主 means to rule or to be the leader/master. 民主 thus means “the people are the ruler” or “ruling by all the people”; it does not correctly mean that the head of the majorities or a certain party having won the election in the West is to be the ruler (president, for example). To rule by all of the people (民主) in Chinese sounds very attractive, and few realize that it is self-contradictory both in logic and Chinese wording. The people are in no way to be a ruler. The ruler has to be just one single person or a small group of people. The people or the majority of the people usually are the ruled. Thus the Chinese term 民主 is as ridiculous as saying that “the ruled is the ruler”. In contrast, the family-like government in ancient China had an emperor from one family, but its officials in thousands were mostly from common people through fair examinations; there even was a prime minister who had been a beggar before he went through the imperial exam and turned out a doctor (进士). I am inclined to think this way of selecting officials widely and fairly from all of the people through strict examinations designed to test the moral quality and wisdom of each candidate is superior to Western democracy which as is known, is mainly carried out by voting results coming from various interest parties or groups. The Chinese Imperial Examination System of selecting officials from the common people was performed for about 1300 years in China. The system

was the realization of the Confucian value that “The one who is both morally and intelligently superior should be an official.”

## 9. Human Culture’s Highest Pursuit (the Highest Form of Culture) and Realization

The famous British scholar, Arnold Toynbee had a clear idea of the excellent qualifications of the spiritual legacy of the Chinese civilization. He predicted that China would be the core to integrate all of the mankind in the future. He once said: “the unity of the world is a way to avoid human beings’ committing mass-suicide. And now the nation that gets prepared well in this respect is China since it has cultivated its unique way of thinking for more than two thousand years.” Again he argued that: “China has maintained a unity for almost two thousand years and thus is qualified for the leader of the future world.” “And China will play a very significant role in unifying the whole world in the future.” He thus further alleges that “in the future it is China rather than European countries that will possibly unify the world.” He also stated that we need not feel surprised that “Nobel prize winners have suggested that if mankind is to survive it must go back 25 centuries in time to tap the wisdom of Confucius.”

Toynbee’s viewpoint is undoubtedly very important. And I would further note that the origin of the so-called excellent qualifications of the spiritual legacy of the Chinese civilization is actually closely related to the family-like social structure of the ancient Chinese. In accordance with what has been said earlier, a series of values born out of the social structure of the large Chinese family are destined to play an important part in pursuing the highest form of culture in the future.

All humanity should be members of one family. And modern genetic research has increasingly convinced us that human beings actually are members of one genetic family. If all humanity should be members of one family, the use of the family-oriented values in the society are inevitable a good choice. Contemporary Chinese should embrace the ancient Chinese notion of cosmopolitanism, the so-called worldism. The Chinese should combine the concept of the descendants of the Yan and Huang Emperors, with the story of Adam and Eve, and human genes in the modern science to expand the traditional Chinese view of the all the Chinese nation being members of a family to the view of all human beings being members of a family.

At least for now, the world should replace the fractional culture of interest groups with the concept of *tian xia yi jia*, the world is a family. And going back to the ancient family-like society and the family-oriented values refresh our understanding of Marx’s ideas on primitive communist society. Moreover, communist values and the primitive family-oriented values are

closely related each other. And the traditional Chinese value system provides the most valuable experiences and serves for human beings returning to the excellent social structure and value system. This excellent social structure and value system can be summarized in three words: family—nation—world.

<sup>1</sup> 韓愈,《韓昌黎集·原道》:博愛之謂仁。

<sup>2</sup> 《孟子·離婁》仁者愛人。

<sup>3</sup> 《中庸·第二十章》:“仁者人也,親親為大。

<sup>4</sup> 以仁為本。

<sup>5</sup> 以人為本。

<sup>6</sup> 以愛為本

<sup>7</sup> 《論語學而第一》:泛愛眾而親仁。

<sup>8</sup> 《老子第七十三章》:勇于敢則殺。

<sup>9</sup> 忠、孝、廉、耻、勇。

<sup>10</sup> See the English Statute of Artificers of 1563 and the Scottish Act of 1663. Also, the ruling of Stinchill baron court in 1698, forbidding the giving of alms or house-room by any in the barony except to “those allenerly that shall be listed.” (Cited in: Gunn, 1905, p.135)

<sup>11</sup> 《論語·衛靈公》:“子曰:君子矜而不爭,群而不黨。”

<sup>12</sup> 《尚書·五子之歌》:“民惟邦本,本固邦寧” ..

<sup>13</sup> While selfishness has always been severely attacked by the mainstream of traditional Chinese ideologies, it seems often defended in one way or another in the West as more positive. Naturally if one is over-egocentric, one has to be estranged from other people. In the end, an extremely selfish person tends to find in others only enemies.

<sup>14</sup> As is known, the idea of “laissez-faire” and the sense of competition based on selfish greediness was highly justified and popularized by Adam Smith, the great Scottish philosopher and economist. See Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776, VI, ii: 456).

<sup>15</sup> The Chinese Imperial Examination System of selecting officials was usually considered to begin from 598 AD in the Sui Dynasty till the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1905 with a history of 1307 years.

<sup>16</sup> 《論語·子張》:“子夏曰:仕而優則學;學而優則仕。”

<sup>17</sup> Toynebee, Arnold, Daisaku, Ikeda [1985], *Looking Ahead the 21st Century*, p. 277

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*: 278.

<sup>19</sup> see *Canberra Times*, 24, January, 1988.

#### Works Cited

- Smith, Adam, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the wealth of Nations*, 1776.
- Bury, John Bagnell, *A History of Freedom of Thought*. Changchun: Jilin People's Press, 1999, p.9.
- Ban, Gu, *Han Shu*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2007. (班固:《漢書》,北京:中華書局,2007年。)
- Canberra Times*, Canberra, Australia, 24, January, 1988.
- Confucius, *Confucian Analects*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2007. (劉勝利:《論語》,北京:中華書局,2007年。)
- Gu, Zhengkun, *A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Cultures*. Beijing: Peking University Press, 2004. (辜正坤:《中西文化比較導論》,北京:北京大學出版社,2004年。)
- Gunn, Clement B., *Records of the Baron Court of Stinchill*, Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1905.
- Han, Yu, “Yuan Dao”, in *An Annotated Anthology of Han Changli*. Shanghai: Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House, 1988. (韓愈:《原道》,《韓昌黎文集校注》,上海:上海古籍出版社,1988年。)
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte*, XYZ, 1837.
- Kong Yinda, *Shang Shu*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1999. (

孔穎達:《尚書》,北京:中華書局,1999年。)

Laozi, *Dao De Jing*, trans. Gu Zhengkun. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1995. (辜正坤:《老子道德經》(漢英對照),北京:北京大學出版社,1995年。)

Liu, Baonan, *An Annotation to the Confucian Analects*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1990. (劉寶楠:《論語正義》,北京:中華書局,1990年。)

Lu, Xun, *Miscellaneous Essays from Qiejie Pavilions: Second Series*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1973. (魯迅:《且介亭雜文二集》,北京:人民文學出版社,1973年。)

Lu, Xun, *A Complete Anthology of China's New Literature: Novel Second Series*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature & Art Publishing House, 2003. 魯迅:《中國新文學大系·小說二集》,上海:上海文藝出版社,2003年。

Lu, Xun, *A Madman's Diary*. Beijing: People's Literature Publishing House, 1918. (魯迅:《狂人日記》,北京:人民文學出版社,2002年。)

Mencius, *Meng Zi*. Beijing: Beijing Yanshan Press, 1995. 孟軻:《孟子》,北京:北京燕山出版社,1995年。

Rousseau, Jean Jacques, *The Social Contract*. Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Rey, 1762.

Sun, Xidan, *Annotations to the Rites*. rev. Wang Xingxian, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2007. (孫希旦:《禮記集解》,沈嘯寰、王星賢點校,北京:中華書局,2007年。)

【日】池田大作,【英】阿·湯因比:《展望21世紀》,苟春生、朱繼征、陳國梁譯,北京:國際文化出版公司,1985。

(Toynbee, Arnold; Daisaku, Ikeda, *Forecast the 21st Century*. Beijing: International Cultural Publishing Company, 1985, p. 280: 中國人的民族主義是對鴉片戰爭以來,包括日本在內的外國侵略勢力,作出的不得已的反應。

アーノルド J トインビー:《二十一世紀への對話》,載《文芸春秋》,1975.3.20。

アーノルド トインビー(イギリス)/池田大作:《二十一世紀への對話》,聖教新聞社,1984。

Toynbee/Daisaku, *Choose Life. A Dialogue*. ed. Richard L. Gage, London: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Zhao Yafeng, *Deutsche Philosophen*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2008.

Zhu, Xi, *An Annotation to the Confucian Analects*. Jinan: Qilu Publishing House, 1992. (朱熹:《論語集注》,濟南:齊魯書社,1992年。)

Zi, Si, *Doctrine of the Mean*. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2006. (王國軒:《大學中庸》,北京:中華書局,2006年。)

#### About the author:

Gu Zhengkun, IACSCW co-president for China, is Professor of Comparative Culture and Translation at Peking University, director of PKU Institute of World Literature, President of Shakespeare Association of China. He is the author and translator of about 50 books. *Among them the best known are A Companion to Masterpieces in World poetry (1990), Lao Tzu: The Book of Tao and Teh (in English, 1993), China and West: Comparative Poetics and Translatology (2003), Linguistic Culturology (2004) and A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Cultures (2007)*. He has published more than 150 articles either in English or in Chinese. He has been engaged in the comparative study of Chinese and Western cultures for more than 40 years and taught the course “A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Cultures” at Peking University for 18 years running, advancing many startling ideas in the field.