

## Beijing Forum 2019 Governance and Civilization: The Origins of the State across Civilizations (I)

On the morning of November 2th, the panel session “Governance and Civilization: The Origins of the State across Civilizations” was inaugurated in the Meeting Room No. 8, Yingjie Exchange Center, Peking University. Six speakers gave speeches on the topic of “Historical Perspectives on State Origins in China”. Assistant professor Sun Ming from Peking University chaired the presentations.

Professor Yu Keping from Peking University was the first scholar to present his paper, titled “The Zhou Dynasty State as Imagined by Pre-Qin Scholar-officials: Evidence from Yi Zhou Shu”. Professor Yu Keping expressed his belief that Yizhoushu 逸周书 was one of the most important historical documents on state formation in the ancient Zhou Dynasty. It sheds light on how state formation in the Zhou Dynasty was understood by scholars in the Pre-Qin Period. According to the record of Yizhoushu 逸周书, the Zhou Dynasty had all the hallmarks of a well-developed traditional state; the cornerstone of its public order and political life was a hierarchical system, and its rules of etiquette were sophisticated and functioned as the basic criteria for political judgment. Apart from defending its hierarchical system, which was one of its fundamental functions, the Zhou regimes developed other functions, like taxation and public services. The Zhou State had a typical feudal system, which was a far cry from the autocratic system that the Qin put in place after it unified China, and this system was adopted by later dynasties. However, the etiquette rules and political values of Zhou were carried on in Chinese history and became important political legacies from China’s traditions. As Professor Yu Keping put it, studying the Zhou State and its etiquette rules is of great importance to our understanding of the political legacies of the Chinese nation today.

Professor Han Jianye from Renmin University of China was the second scholar to present his paper, titled “The Painted Pottery Road before the Silk Road”. Before the Silk Road, there was the “Painted Pottery Road” which represented early Sino-Western cultural exchanges. The Painted Pottery Road originated from the Shanxi-Gansu region, via which Chinese culture spread from the east to the west. Meanwhile, Western culture also was introduced into China. Although there were a lot specific routes, generally, these could be summarized into the north route and the south route,

the boundary between which were marked by the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau. The Painted Pottery Road was the communication passage via painted pottery between the early Chinese and early Western cultures. Dry farming achievements like painted pottery were introduced from China into the West. Exchanges also included crops, domestic animals and metal smelting from the early Western cultures. This passage also promoted deeper exchanges, including religions, arts and philosophical traditions between the early Chinese and the early Western cultures. In conclusion, the Painted Pottery Road was the primary passage of early Sino-Western cultural exchanges, and was the precursor of the Silk Road, which exerted a significant influence on the formation and development of civilization of China and the West.

Assistant professor Clair Zhuqing Yang, from University of Washington, was the third scholar to present her paper, titled “A Longevity Mechanism of Chinese Absolutism”. Economists have long been interested in universal theories based on the Western experience. Ancient China does not have a parliamentary power-sharing mechanism, but China is one of the countries with the longest autocracy. How can China achieve national stability and institutional continuity without a parliamentary power-sharing mechanism? Clair Zhuqing Yang’s paper provided a novel explanation for the stability and longevity of absolutism in historical China based on the Civil Service Examination(CSE) system. The CSE had a “political control function”. CSE widened political access to a much larger population and made existing members of the ruling elite easily substitutable with potential new recruits. Hence, CSE made it more costly for incumbents to defect and thus strengthened their loyalty to the King. By increasing social mobility, it also put a check on the channel of political reproduction for elite families and prevented the emergence of powerful contestants to the throne. In conclusion, Zhang’s paper revisited the age-old question why the imperial Chinese system was so durable and stable. The paper also uncovered the political control mechanism of CSE.

Professor Michael Szonyi, from Harvard University, was the fourth scholar to present his paper, titled “Everyday Politics and the History of the Chinese State: A Ming Dynasty Case Study”. Professor Michael expressed his belief that it is impossible to analyze the origins and development of a country from its system alone. It is necessary to explore its history from the bottom up, discuss specific thoughts and practices of the common people, and study the interactions between civilians and the state. Szonyi used the military system of the Ming Dynasty as a case study to analyze

the strategies of ordinary people to deal with their relationship with the state, including finding loopholes, budgeting, monetization and contracting. These strategies were in line with the basic logic of regulatory arbitrage: ordinary people are "playing the country." Contrary to direct resistance to state institutions, they are looking for loopholes in the state system and using the language of the state to optimize their relations with the state. Szonyi emphasized that most of the political behaviors of ordinary people in ancient China were not of binary opposition, and the interaction between the common people and the state oscillated in the space between obedience and resistance.

Associate professor Wang Wensheng, from the University of Hawaii at Mānoa, was the fifth scholar to present his paper, titled "Sustainable Politics, All-encompassing Contentious Crisis and the Reproduction of Traditional Chinese State: From the Perspective of Qianlong–Jiaqing Transition". Wang Wensheng pointed out, sustainability politics is a necessary condition for the long-term development of the country. It enables different social groups to continually interact and reach consensus within the framework of the state institutions. The late Qianlong reign was a major bottleneck in Qing sustainable political development: It was the time of a minimalist, overloaded state vs. an expanding, ungovernable society; trans-dynastic processes of population growth, commercialization, frontier expansion and so on. Two interlocking spheres of government power, the inner court and the outer court, competed with each other. Like the monarch who had to balance his routine and arbitrary authority, bureaucrats were also caught in a time-honored dilemma of formal and informal power. This unclear division of power between the emperor and the bureaucrats intensified the structural features of traditional Chinese politics, which consisted of patronage, faction-building and corruption.

Associate professor Zhang Yunqi from Peking University was the last scholar to present his paper, titled "A Further Discussion on the Origins and Archetype of Political Civilization in China". The traces of the origins of human political civilization has enabled people to gain a deeper understanding of modern politics, and re-recognize ancient genes in modern political culture. Only by jumping out of the single perspective of the modern state and the Western world and rethinking the long-term history comparatively can we grasp the ins and outs of human civilization. Therefore, the discussion of the origins and archetype of political civilization in China has the significance of world history. Through the ancients' imagination and inheritance of the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties as the secondary type of Chinese culture we can explore the origins and its archetype of

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political civilization in China. Zhang Yunqi expressed his belief that "Shenxin, jiaguo, and tianxia" 身心家国天下 was the basic feature of the archetype of political civilization in China. "Shenxin, jiaguo, and tianxia" 身心家国天下 intertwined with and maintained each other. The so-called sovereign state, world empire, theocracy, or monarchy was not enough to summarize the archetype of political civilization in China.