

Utilitarian Thinkers in Two Worlds

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Abstract:

This study investigates the political thoughts of two thinkers, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) from Renaissance Italy and Chen Liang (1143-1194) from Song China. Both thinkers argue against the popular of moral philosophy in state politics. They tried to use the idea of consequentialism, statecraft, and public interest to create their own utilitarian philosophy. This micro-comparison study will parallel two thinkers' views on history, politics, and military in a similar historical context. These views are essential to the modernization of two civilizations.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Song China and Renaissance Italy were two “golden ages” of literati. Shifts in traditional social hierarchies, reformed education systems, and the blooming of print manufacture pushed the cultures of both these civilizations onto a new stage. This essay will do a “micro-comparison”, focusing on the political philosophy on two unconventional thinkers, Niccolò Machiavelli and Chen Liang.¹ Both figures used utilitarian ideas to critique the use of moral philosophy in state politics, challenging in powerful ways the prevalent views of sixteenth-century Italian humanists and twelfth-century Chinese Confucian scholars, respectively.

The term “utilitarian” in this essay refers particularly to the Chinese term *gongli* (or *shigong*). In *Utilitarian Confucianism*, Hoyt Tillman first used this term to depicted Chen Liang’s challenge to Zhu Xi (1130-1200), a leading Confucian scholar of in the late twelfth century. Tillman characterized Chen Liang’s utilitarian Confucianism as an “ethics of social orientations or end results” instead of the traditional value of “ethics of absolute ends or personal virtue”.² Adding to Tillman’s definition, I contend that Chen Liang’s utilitarian Confucianism had two addition features: a primary commitment to the question of statecraft instead of personal cultivation of virtue, and the explicit promotion of public interest (*gong*). Admittedly, this conception of utilitarian thought differs from modern British Utilitarianism theorized by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Chen Liang and

¹ Hilde De Weerd and Franz-Julius Morche (eds.), *Political Communication in Chinese and European History, 800-1600* (Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

² Hoyt Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism: Ch'en Liang's Challenge to Chu Hsi*, (Cambridge, MA: Havard University Press, 1982), 1.

British philosophers both rooted their frameworks in theological ethics and a concern with the public interest, their notions of “the public” were entirely different. In Chen Liang’s utilitarian philosophy, the well-being of individuals should serve the state and the society. Such a collectivist notion differs fundamentally with the individualism envisioned by British thinkers. While not utilitarian in the British way, Chen Liang’s collective utilitarianism nonetheless needs to be situated in what we might term a global genealogy of utilitarian thought; leaving Liang’s vision out of our analysis effaces a vital and influential part of this lineage.

In sixteenth-century Italy, the Florentine philosopher Machiavelli posited remarkably similar ideas to Chen Liang’s. Although he probably never heard of this Chinese thinker, let alone read any of his works, nonetheless the Italian political philosopher created a utilitarian philosophy strikingly analogous to his predecessor’s. Machiavelli also privileged teleological ethics, the study of statecraft, and the promotion of the public interest in the project of his political philosophy. He rejected aspects of moral philosophy shared by most humanist and scholastic thinkers, redefining moral virtue with his unabashedly political concept of *virtù*, individual initiative in state politics.

While no case can be made for direct influence, a close comparative analysis of these two thinkers accomplishes two important objectives. First, attending to Chen Liang as a predecessor for Machiavelli, even if not a model, we productively disrupt the traditional Eurocentric conception of the Italian writer as the “father of modern political philosophy.” Beyond this, we open up fruitful questions about the social and political contexts in which new forms of political thought can emerge.

Despite their different chronologies and geopolitical worlds, Chen Liang and Machiavelli emerge here as remarkably similar in almost every respect, not least in the melancholy disjuncture between their capacity to think and their ability to act. And we should address that bit of background before proceeding. Neither Chen Liang nor Machiavelli succeeded in putting their utilitarian political views into practice. Machiavelli initially worked under Piero Soderini's (r. 1498-1512) republican government. Even though he had some successful diplomatic and military missions, Soderini did not take much notice of Machiavelli's advice. The Medici restoration in 1512 was a disaster for Machiavelli's political career. After the downfall of Soderini's government, Machiavelli was accused of conspiring against the Medici family. After enduring three weeks of torture, he was exiled and effectively barred from playing an active role in Florentine politics for the better part of a decade. Even if he was appointed as an official historian in 1520, Machiavelli's position was still far from the political center. In June 1527, one month after the Sack of Rome, Machiavelli passed away. His great ambition to unite Italy and at last expel foreign invaders (French, German and Spanish) did not materialize.

Similar to Machiavelli, Chen Liang had an unsuccessful political career in terms of results. He failed to pass his first two civil service examinations in 1169 and 1177.³ During his preparation of the examination, Chen Liang also sent several memoranda to the Emperor Xiaozong of Song (1127-1194, r. 1162-1189). Xiaozong agreed with Chen Liang's advice and awarded him a job, but Liang ultimately rejected it because the young Confucian scholar believed that he need a more important position in order to put his political ideas into practice. Chen Liang's perceived disrespect for the emperor's

³ Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism*, 70-99.

benevolence gave his political enemies ammunition against him. Liang, like Machiavelli, was imprisoned and tortured. Even though he was released due to his friends' efforts and the emperor's order, Chen Liang missed the civil service examinations and therefore could not receive any official positions. In 1193, the "student," now fifty-one years old, finally passed the examination – and even got first place. However, his poor health did not allow him to be active in state politics.⁴ After Chen Liang's death in 1194, the Song court made unsuccessful expeditions and was finally eliminated by the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) of the Mongols in 1279.

In addition to their similar philosophical views and unsuccessful political careers, the broader political environment in twelfth-century China and sixteenth-century Italy were also strikingly similar. Both Italy and China had highly developed economies and technological infrastructures in these respective historical moments.⁵ Internal conflict and factionalism, however, made both states prey to serious crises of foreign invasion. This similarly grim and violent political background contributed materially to the realist and pragmatic dimensions of the political philosophy articulated by Machiavelli and Chen Liang.

Despite all these similarities between the two thinkers, we still lack a comparative study of them. In traditional intellectual history, comparing two thinkers across time and geopolitical space seemed "dangerous," given the differences in their cultures and traditions. Comparative historians, by contrast, typically engaged not on granular but in macro-comparisons, analyzing the similarities and differences of "whole societies, whole

⁴ Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism*, 113.

⁵ Chu Ming Kin and Franz-Julius Morche, "The Printers' Networks of Chen Qi (1186-1256) and Robert Estienne (1503-1559)", in De Weerd and Morche, *Political Communication*, 384-385

economies, whole political systems, or whole class structures”.⁶ Such macro-comparisons helpfully inspired historians to reconsider the political and social history of one region by situating it in a broader context. However, recent scholarship finds that making these macro-comparisons can be too sweeping to make more than very general parallels. In addition to comparison of societies as larger entities, we need granular treatments focused on individuals; granted the dangers of generalization, we sometimes find (as in this comparison) two surprisingly comparable contexts and sets of experience. In proceeding as I do, I follow Hilde De Weerdt and Franz-Julius Morche’s *Political Communication in Chinese and European History, 800-1600*, a foundational work in which comparative historians introduced the idea of micro-comparison, the juxtaposition of two specific figures from different traditions, into the field of political and social history. I am inspired by this new idea of micro-comparison; and I want to transpose it to the domain of intellectual history.

In the following sections, I will first introduce the similar political and intellectual background of the two salient figures. As political philosophers, both Machiavelli and Chen Liang believed that there was a political and cultural crisis, which they aimed to solve in their writings. Then I will make comparisons with the political ideas of two thinkers. As we will see, both of them innovated by using historical events to craft practical lessons for their audiences. Subsequently, we turn to the military views of these two thinkers, considering their attempts to connect politics and military affairs in ways that fundamentally challenged all previous intellectual and philosophical traditions in their worlds. Finally, I will offer a conclusion that encapsulates the parallels and differences of

⁶ Robert Hymes, “Thoughts on the Problem of Historical Comparison between Europe and China”, in De Weerdt and Morche, 599.

intellectual traditions we see in new ways through our intriguing and surprisingly analogous protagonists.

2.0 CRISIS IN THE STATE

Both Machiavelli and Chen Liang lived in chaotic times. In twelfth-century China and sixteenth-century Italy, despite the economic prosperity stemming from advanced trading systems, a series of political and military clashes wreaked havoc on society and culture. These two talented ministers were painfully aware of the problems, and that awareness motivated them to pursue political philosophy and commit their ideas to writing.

As a foundation for our comparison, however, it is necessary to understand their eras and the problems their states met in a bit more detail. Accordingly, this section will pursue two questions. First, what common factors contributed their utilitarian theories? Second, how were their theories different from the prevalent political philosophies of their respective ages?

As is well known but still important to stress, Song China and Renaissance Italy both evinced a remarkable cultural efflorescence. Artists and intellectuals regularly enjoyed patronage from important political figures. In the case of Renaissance Italy, one thinks immediately of famous artists patronized by princes, such as Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) and Michelangelo (1475-1564). In China, coterie of artists and other cultural producers received imperial patronage. A figure directly comparable to da Vinci or Michelangelo would be Zhang Zeduan (1085-1145), whose painting *Along the River During the Qingming Festival* still enjoys the status of a national treasure in China.⁷

⁷ “The Scroll of *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, by Zhang Zeduan”, The Palace Museum, <https://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/paint/228226.html>

In addition to art, the development of print technology also happened both in Song China and Renaissance Italy. Bi Sheng (972-1051), a Chinese artisan, invented the process of print with movable type. After that, Chinese artisans continued to develop and refine this technology, devising ever more effective and cost-efficient ways to print. Similarly, and likely as heir to these developments in China, we have the advent of print with moveable type in fifteenth-century Europe. Johannes Gutenberg and his collaborators introduced their own iteration of a printing press, allowing for what would in time become the mass production of the printed books in the European context. Both Machiavelli and Chen Liang thus lived in an information age, which allowed their writings to be read by more people, and their thinking to spread faster.

Fifteenth-century Italian city-states and Song China also shared a focus on maritime trading, which helped them accumulate vast wealth. In Song China, due to the loss of the important trading posts on the Silk Road, the Chinese government turned to trade with Southeast Asia. They expanded many ports and encouraged trading with foreigners. China had hitherto been a predominantly rural society, and merchants occupied a low social position. During the Song dynasty, however, the position of merchants increased, and the government considered commerce as an important part of state building. Due to these new trading policies and the development of a complex commercial system, the Song dynasty became one of the wealthiest periods in Chinese history. Similarly, Italian city-states of the fifteenth century also had a well-organized trading system. Two city states that exemplify that orientation particularly well were Venice and Genoa, merchant republics that early on established multiple trading posts in the eastern Mediterranean. Italy retained its place as the economic heartland of Europe until new Atlantic trade routes entrenched in the later

sixteenth century, when the growing Ottoman strength also finally broke the Venetians' longstanding power in the Adriatic and Mediterranean worlds.

Despite flourishing art, technological dynamism, and prospering economies, twelfth-century China and fifteenth-century Italy faced a series of profound political and military struggles that directly impacted Machiavelli's and Chen Liang's political careers – and their political philosophies.

The Song dynasty, founded in 960, made a series of policies to restrict the power of the generals. While strengthening the authority of Song monarchs, the military power of the Song dynasty became considerably weaker than that of their enemies. Although the Song Dynasty has usually been considered a unified dynasty by historians, their legitimacy faced consistent challenge from the Liao dynasty (916-1125). Founded by the Khitans, the Liao were considered as a group of northern “barbarians” by the Han Chinese. In the early twelfth century, the Jurchens, a former subject tribe of the Liao dynasty, defeated the Khitan regime and gained control of Northern China. In 1125, the Jurchens invaded the Song territories. The Song army failed to make any effective defense. In 1127, the Jurchen army sacked Song's capital, Kaifeng. Emperor Qinzong was imprisoned by the Jurchens for his entire life. Women in the royal family were forced to become the concubines or even prostitutes of the Jurchens. The Song dynasty had to cede large territories in Northern China to the Jurchens. Chen Liang's great-grandfather died in this war; his grandfather led the family south to settle in Yongkang.⁸ The Han Chinese naturally considered this war a great humiliation.

⁸ Deng Guanming, *The Biography of Chen Longchuan*, (Sanlian Shudian, 2007).

After 1127, the wars between Jurchens and Song did not stop. Between 1127 and 1141, the Jurchens raised several expeditions to South China. The new emperor, Gaozong, had to flee onto the sea to escape the attack from the Jurchens. In 1141, the Song dynasty and the Jurchens negotiated a peace treaty. The Emperor Gaozong became the subject of the Jurchen Emperor. The Song dynasty had to pay vast sums of money as tribute to the Jurchens. The Shaoxing Treaty, formally signed in 1142, brought the Song dynasty a twenty-year peace. However, at the same time, the demands of new consumption and heavy tribute placed burdens on the government as well as ordinary people.

In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, city-states faced similar problems with respect to their weak military power. Starting in the 1420s, persistent and deadly conflicts arose between city-states in the northern Italy in particular. These city-states heavily relied on *condottieri*, or mercenary soldiers. Machiavelli commented these military struggles in his *Florentine Histories*, observing, “If from the virtue of these new principalities times did not arise that were quiet through a long peace, neither were they dangerous because of the harshness of war.”⁹ The battles fought by mercenaries typically did not bring winners much tangible gain, for mercenaries took most of the booty for themselves. Battle also did not hurt the losers in any totalizing way; their soldiers typically remained alive, held for ransom. With a strange equilibrium of gains and losses, tussles became more or less constant from the 1420s to the 1450s, gradually weakening both the military and the economic power of the Italian states. The mercenary leaders gained most in these wars. One prime example was Francesco Sforza, who became the ruler of Milan after the

⁹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. by Laura F Banfield and Harvey C. Mansfield Jr., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), Book V, 186.

succession wars. In 1454, leading combatant city-states signed the Treaty of Lodi, ensuring an uneasy peace on the Italian Peninsula for the next forty years.

The real misery of the city-states started in 1494, when Charles VIII of France invaded Italy to seize what he believed were his ancestral rights in Milan and Naples, weakened by inheritance disputes. This invasion contributed to the political struggles in Florence, and the increasingly influential Medici clan were ultimately exiled the city. After the initial struggles, most of the major European powers, including England, Spain, and Austria, joined in the war. The “Italian Wars” had catastrophic effects on Italian city-states. These rich but militarily weak polities suffered heavy losses of all kinds during the wars, and many lost their independence. In Florence, the republic did not last long due to the military intervention of the Papal State and Spain; nor were the positions of Medici princes stable. In 1527, mercenaries hired by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V sacked Rome and forced the Medicean pope, Clement VII, to escape. The sack of Rome, not unlike the treatment of Han Chinese by the Jurchens, constituted a great humiliation for the Holy See. Despite Clement VII’s unfortunate position, the Medici clan continued their ultimately successful bids for rulership of Florence for the next decades. Florence remained important culturally, but never recovered the republican structure that had been the basis for its self-conception and reputation in the fifteenth century.

As we have seen, then, many similarities exist between twelfth-century China and the Renaissance Italy. The states in both cases were rich, but the government failed to form a strong military power. Therefore, foreign enemies with stronger forces, coveting wealth, invaded. Both Machiavelli and Chen Liang were aware of this problem, and their primary focus was to create a strong government and reform the military system. Even if both

thinkers privileged pragmatic aspects of statecraft over abstract ethics, they both maintained great personal loyalty to their states. One of their primary aims was to help their states keep, or recover, political independence.

When Machiavelli and Chen Liang turned to political philosophy, they continued to engage the dynamic literary cultures around them as well. For these two utilitarian thinkers, literature also became a genre in which to express political ideas or ambitions. Chen Liang was known for his poetry no less than for his philosophy. He used unabashedly bold statements to show his ambition to recover the lost lands. “In the capital of Yao, the land of Shun, and the territories of Yu, there has to be one or a half [Han Chinese] who was shamed to be the subject of the barbarians!”¹⁰ Chen Liang’s poetry was quite different from other poets. He avoided the rhetorical flourishes that other poets used to sound polite. Instead, he explicitly voiced his hatred for the Jurchens, who ruined his state and almost destroyed his family. Through his poems, Chen Liang wanted to arouse his audience’s passion to recover their state and rebuild the Chinese nation.

Machiavelli did not express his emotion quite so directly in his plays and poems. Instead, he more subtly interwove political ideas into, especially, his dramatic works. “If in the world the same men should return, never would a hundred years pass by without our finding ourselves together here once again to do the same thing as now.”¹¹ In the preface of *Clizia*, Machiavelli described his idea that history repeats itself. Through two stories in ancient Athens and early modern Florence, Machiavelli hinted his audience that the destruction of the city might happen also happen in Florence when facing foreign invasion.

¹⁰ Chen Liang, *The Collection of Chen Liang*, ed. by Deng Guanming (Zhonghua Shuju, 1987), 310. Yao, Shun, and Yu were three sage rulers in Chinese legends.

¹¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Clizia*, trans. By Daniel T. Gallagher, (IL: Waveland Press, 1996), 3.

Throughout his plays, Machiavelli expressed his political philosophy in such an indirect way. Even though these two thinkers used different ways, they both used literature to express their political ideas. For all their literary interest and talent, however, both believed that the solution of the crisis of the state did not lay in poetry or plays.

2.1 INTELLECTUAL WORLDS

Now that we surveyed the broad sociocultural and political situations of the states in which our two thinkers found themselves, we turn now to comparison of their intellectual worlds. In Song China and Renaissance Europe, intellectuals undertook a broad revival of classical studies. Starting in medieval Europe, Christian scholars were interested in Greek philosophy, especially its dialectical reasoning. Scholars tried to reconcile this classical method of learning with Christian traditions and theology. A primary example of this would be Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), among the most influential scholastic theologians of his day. Aquinas made a series of commentaries on Aristotle and the Scripture that ultimately funded what would become his novel form of natural philosophy, Thomism. Honored as a saint by the Roman Catholic Church, his philosophy remained influential in early modern (and modern) intellectual history.

In late eleventh-century China, we also find a new school of philosophy that aimed to revive the traditional sources and methods. Cheng Yi (1033-1107) and Cheng Hao (1032-1085) founded the school of *Daoxue* (The learning of the Way), believing there were heavenly principles that guide everything in the world. In the twelfth century, Zhu Xi build upon Cheng Yi's ideas and developed them into what would become orthodox "Confucian

Learning.” One of his major achievements was to edit and comment on classic Confucian texts, distilling the results into the so-called *Four Books*¹² He became a sage of Confucianism and was venerated in the Temple of Confucius after his death. His new edition of Confucian classics became in a part of Chinese civil service examination in early fourteenth century.¹³

There were many similarities between European scholasticism and Chinese *Daoxue*. First, both intellectual movements encouraged renewed attention to and reinterpretations of traditional philosophies, inspiring other scholars to focus on classical traditions. Second, both scholasticism and *Daoxue* emphasized natural law, believing that there was a fixed theory of nature which applied in every circumstance. Third, these schools of thought had become virtual orthodoxies by the time Machiavelli and Chen Liang entered the scene.

Machiavelli and Chen Liang disagreed with the whole enterprise of natural philosophy. For both our protagonists, the fundamental principle they brought to political philosophy was the conviction that no fixed value or theory applied in every circumstance. Positive laws created by human beings in response to particular situations, in their view, proved more beneficial for the growth of the state than any natural law. In Machiavelli’s works, he chose to be silent on Thomist ideas, an unconventional if not unique approach for a writer to take in the sixteenth century; even humanists, who positioned themselves in many ways as anti-scholastic, still engaged the Thomistic corpus regularly.

Chen Liang’s rivalry against *Daoxue* was even fiercer than Machiavelli’s disregard for scholasticism. Though he received some *Daoxue* training in his young age, he gradually

¹² Unlike the traditional Confucian Five Classics, which discuss various aspects about politics, religion, history and art, Zhu Xi’s Four Books emphasized on the moral teaching and self-cultivation.

¹³ Daniel Gardner, *Chu Hsi and Tao-hsueh: Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 9.

rejected its core values. During his unsuccessful political career, Chen Liang spent much time on his debate with the *Daoxue* leaders, especially Zhu Xi. Indeed, many of his writings should be understood as direct and innovative answers to the core questions of *Daoxue*.

In addition to the revival of classical philosophy, in both cultural worlds we find movements to restore classical literature. In Europe, beginning in the fourteenth century, Renaissance humanists paid renewed attention to classical (especially Latin) grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy. These studies gradually coalesced into a form of education that many elite and middle-class children enjoyed.¹⁴ Machiavelli also received precisely this type of humanist training when he was young, and his compositions betray the enduring influence humanism had upon him.

In China, there was also a movement to revive classical literature styles. Starting by Han Yu (768-824), Confucian scholars initiated the The Ancient Prose Movement.¹⁵ They replaced the modern parallel prose style with the classical direct prose style. One essential idea that these Confucian scholars raised was that human beings could encounter life's true principles by engaging literature. The movement lasted until early twelfth century, when scholars started to pursue fundamental principles directly instead of using literature as a way to connect human beings and the operational framework of nature in the way classical sages had envisioned. However, even if the movement ended after the rise of *Daoxue*, the legacy of Ancient Prose scholars still influenced on the civil service exam throughout the Song dynasty.¹⁶

¹⁴ See more in James Hankins, *Virtue Politics: Soulcraft and Statecraft in Renaissance Italy*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2019), 36-43.

¹⁵ It could also be called Neo-Confucianism. However, "Neo-Confucianism" was always a controversial world in Chinese studies. See more in Tillman, *Confucian Discourses*, Chapter 1; and Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, (Stanford University Press, 1992), Chapter 1.

¹⁶ Peter Bol, *This Culture of Ours*, Chapter 5 and 6.

In these movements of the revival of the antiquity, two groups, humanists and Confucian scholars became an important group in the society. The emergence of these two groups challenged the original hierarchical system. In the European context, stark wealth and status gaps between middling-sort people and the nobility had gradually narrowed. Accordingly, by the later fifteenth century, even if Machiavelli did not belong to the group known as the *Ottimati* (the Florentine patriciate), he still had many private connections with members of those elites. One famous example was the friendship between Machiavelli and Francesco Vettori (1474-1539), a Florentine patrician who served in Soderini's government and then the Medici regime. Despite their different social positions, the two men engaged throughout their adult lives in a lively discussion of politics through letters, and Machiavelli also shared his draft of *The Prince* with Vettori. This change in Italian society brought Machiavelli and other middle-class humanists' greater opportunity to get involved directly in state politics.

Similarly, Confucian scholars also gained a higher social status in Song China. Starting in the late ninth century, the traditional Chinese aristocracy, including the clan of Chen, lost their original social status due to the massacres during the Huang Chao Rebellion (874-884). After the foundation of the Song dynasty, the civil service exam, which selected officials based on their knowledge of Confucian texts, was reformed and expanded. In the early eleventh century, respected Confucian scholars who promoted the Ancient Prose movement occupied most of the important positions of the government. Neo-Confucian scholars, not unlike Italian humanists though in a more direct and tangible way, became the new elite in the Song society. Even if Chen Liang was not successful in the civil service exam, his achievement in Confucian studies was still acknowledged by other scholars.

During his preparation for the exam, Chen Liang made friends with Xin Qiji (1140-1207), a Confucian scholar who also had great military talent. They discussed their plans for military reform and the recovery of lost territories. His friendship with other Confucian scholars helped ensure the survival of Chen Liang's works on political philosophy, particularly after his failure in the exam frustrated his political career.

One common idea that humanist and Confucian scholars shared was personal cultivation. James Hankins summarized the humanist political philosophy as “virtue politics”, a notion that “focuses on improving the character and wisdom of the ruling class with a view to bringing about a happy and flourishing commonwealth.”¹⁷ Most humanists agreed that the state would prosper as long as the rulers embodied good morals. In practice, children from non-elite classes also owned such “noble virtue” through the new education system introduced in the age of Renaissance.¹⁸ At least in Hankins's vision, a core group of Italian humanists idealistically hoped that moral philosophy would save Italy from chaos and foreign occupation. Similarly, in China, this faith in moral philosophy also formed part of the Confucian tradition. In *The Great Learning*, Confucius's disciple, Zengzi, had claimed that “Those in antiquity who wished clearly to manifest luminous virtue to all-under-Heaven, first put in order their own states. Wishing to put in order their own states, they first regulated their families. Wishing to regulate their families, they first cultivated their own persons.”¹⁹ Confucian scholars often cited this passage to the ruling class in order to encourage them to adopt particular Confucian virtues, especially humane conduct (*ren*) and filiality (*xiao*), as well as to follow Confucian rituals. In the Song dynasty, when Zhu

¹⁷ James Hankins, *Virtue Politics*, 37.

¹⁸ James Hankins, *Virtue Politics*, 42-43

¹⁹ Zhu Xi, *Commentaries on the Four Books*, (Zhonghua Shuju, 2016), 1-2

Xi edited Confucian texts, he put this passage at the beginning of the whole collection. He also sent a series of memoranda to Emperor Xiaozong which emphasized this conception of personal cultivation. In this way, the idea of “virtue politics” also seems to have applied in Song China. Through the reform of the educational system, the expansion of civil service exam, and the rise of *Daoxue*, this idea of personal cultivation was also gradually spread among non-elites in the Song China.

Machiavelli and Chen Liang were deeply suspicious of virtue politics. To them, this idea seemed naïve and, worse still, dangerous in the context of political conflicts in which combatants regularly engaged in the most amoral behavior. Their shared distrust in human nature raised several questions: Could the human being, including the ruling class, cultivate these virtues through education? How could a virtuous ruler govern a group of selfish people? Could a virtuous ruler bring political stability to a state when they faced very real problems? Ultimately, pursuing these questions, both scholars rejected the idea of moral philosophy as a solution to the problems of their states.

After rejecting natural philosophy and moral philosophy, the utilitarian thinkers searched for a third solution to solve the crisis in their states. Due to their (respective) humanist and Confucian educations, Machiavelli and Chen Liang had gained a deep understanding of history as well. And both began an archaeological recovery of historical figures with the idea of crafting a new interpretive model for the salvation of their present states.

3.0 LESSONS FROM HISTORY

Through their reflections on moral philosophy and natural philosophy, both Machiavelli and Chen Liang concluded that there was no universal truth that applied in every time period and all types of state. In order to find the particular remedies that would actually prove effective for the ills suffered by their states, both political thinkers began to reflect on historical texts. Machiavelli's two major works of political philosophy, *The Prince* and *Discourses on Livy*, brought into intense conversation examples drawn both from the ancient Roman period and 15th century Italy. Through the analysis of historical figures and important events, Machiavelli derived a series of political theories and strategies that would be helpful for the development of the state in certain circumstances. Started in 1520, Machiavelli started to compose an official history text, due to the sponsorship of Giulio de Medici, the future Pope Clement VII. In this eight-volume history, Machiavelli explored the problems rooted in Florentine politics and possible solutions to make the state healthy.

Machiavelli's intention to write history was to teach his audience to learn lessons from history. In his *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli told his readers, especially Giulio de Medici, to understand the political theories from Roman antiquity and avoid repeating errors made by Italian rulers in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. "It may, perhaps, be no less useful to know these things (the poor governance of Italian princes)," he wrote, "than to know the ancient ones, because, if the latter excite liberal spirits to follow them,

the former will excite such spirits to avoid and eliminate them.”²⁰ Machiavelli used a utilitarian interpretation of the history composition, believing that the goal of the history writing was to help the modern ruling class to govern better. This idea was similar to Chinese tradition that “history is a mirror”. In Chinese context, the emperor would select certain minister to write history in order to help their own governance. The idea that history could help politics was a shared idea between Machiavelli and Chinese historians.²¹

Unlike Machiavelli, Chen Liang never had any chance to compose any official histories. In pre-modern China, the composition of official history had a concrete tradition which traced back to 1st century BCE.²² Due to the failure of the civil service examination, Chen Liang did not have the chance to have a job of royal historian. Therefore, his historical materials were lesser than those Machiavelli read. Despite the lack of materials, Chen Liang still showed great interest in commenting history. At the age of 19, Chen Liang wrote his first essay, *Discourses on the Antiquity*, analyzing twenty historical figures, most of whom were emperors or famous military commanders. During his studies on the civil service examination, Chen continued to write comments about the old Chinese regimes. History was also a central topic in his debate with Zhu Xi. The leader of *Daoxue* offered harsh criticism of Chen Liang’s utilitarian view of history: “Reading history is similar to watch fighting with each other. Is there any fun to watch fighting? The entire career of

²⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, Book V, 185.

²¹ Thomas H. C. Lee, *The New and the Multiple: Sung Senses of the Past*, (Hongkong: Chinese University Press, 2004), 2

²² Denis Twitchett, *The Writing of Official History Under the T'ang*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Chen Tongfu (Chen Liang) was destroyed by history.”²³ This critique from his rivals in its own way helps to underscore Chen Liang’s interest in historical affairs.

In this section, I will first introduce Machiavelli and Chen Liang’s understanding of domestic history. Two thinkers agreed that the history of the antiquity was quite successful. However, due to the change of situations, the successful experience was not useful in the eyes of later people. Then Machiavelli and Chen Liang found different roots in political philosophy that worsen the stability of the state. After summarizing their overall idea of history, I am going to pick two examples that Machiavelli and Chen Liang praised. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli created a wicked hero, Cesare Borgia (1475-1507), who was known as a merciless military leader. In Chen Liang’s letter to Zhu Xi, he also praised Emperor Taizong of Tang (598-649, r. 626-649), who was often criticized by *Daoxue* leaders due to the murder of his brothers. These two examples showed the teleological ideas in commenting history.

As a historian, Machiavelli never hid his affection to the Roman antiquity. In his *Discourses*, Machiavelli depicted his ideal mixed government, in which the kingly power, the aristocracy, and the rule of people coexisted.²⁴ He pointed out that the Roman government, which included those three authorities, prevented the corruption of the state. In addition to its politics, Machiavelli also showed the superiority of the Roman religion, military, and laws in *Discourses*. Like many Renaissance humanists, Machiavelli made antiquity his principle intellectual commitment, and he believed that his contemporaries should likewise excavate instructive examples from the history of Rome in particular.

²³ 看史只如看人相打，相打有甚好看處？陳同父一生被史壞了。Zhu Xi, *A Collection of Conversation of Master Zhu*, (Zhonghua Shuju, 2016), chapter 124..

²⁴ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 25-27.

Machiavelli would have been a mediocre humanist if he had just repeated Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) praise for the Roman Empire in *De Monarchia*. Unlike Dante's focus on the abstract "righteousness" of the Roman Empire, Machiavelli determined to use the history of Rome to solve pragmatic problems.²⁵ The talented political philosopher found that it was essential for contemporary Italians to restore the *virtù* of their Roman antecedents:

Nevertheless, in organizing republics, maintaining states, governing kingdoms, in instituting a militia and conducting a war, in executing legal decisions among subjects, and in expanding an empire, no prince, republic, or military leader can be found who has recourse to the examples of the ancients. I believe this arises not so much from the state of weakness into which today's religion has led the world, or from the harm done to many Christian provinces and cities by an ambitious idleness, as from not possessing a true understanding of the histories, so that in reading them, we fail to draw out of them that sense or to taste that flavour they intrinsically possess. As a result, it happens that countless people who read them take pleasure in hearing about the variety of incidents they contain without otherwise thinking about imitating them, since they believe that imitation is not only difficult but impossible, as if the sky, the sun, the elements, or human beings had changed in their motions, order, and power from what they were in antiquity.²⁶

In the Preface of *Discourses*, Machiavelli pointed out two false conceptions of history common in his day. First, he criticized the idea that ancient examples could not be imitated by modern people. Machiavelli conceded that the humanists read ancient history thoroughly; but he believed that they failed to apply the outstanding models for political conduct evident there to their own political situation. Second, Machiavelli argued that Italian historians failed to possess a true or unmediated understanding of history. He felt that other historians, influenced by the culture of Christian Church, did not see the real virtue in Roman politics. This argument set Machiavelli apart from the Dante and other

²⁵ Dante Alighieri, *De Monarchia of Dante Alighieri*, translated by Aurelia Henry, (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), 67-68.

²⁶ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 16.

thinkers who, influenced by scholasticism, used history largely with reference to religious issues. In Machiavelli's mind, history offered pragmatic lessons for real-time politics. He wanted to interpret and re-direct historical studies in ways that would assist rulers in stabilizing the state and thereby solving the deepening crisis in Italy.

Although Machiavelli highlighted the idea that history echoed itself, he did not believe that imitating Roman virtues unconditionally would be helpful to Italian politics. In order to find the origin of the crisis, Machiavelli explored the history of Florence through antiquity to the fifteenth century in his *Florentine Histories*. In Book III, Machiavelli compared the political tradition of Roman antiquity and Renaissance Florence. He pointed out that the competition between factions changed during these hundreds of years:

For the enmities between the people and the nobles at the beginning of Rome that were resolved by disputing were resolved in Florence by fighting. Those in Rome ended with a law, those in Florence with the exile and death of many citizens; those in Rome always increased military virtue, those in Florence eliminated it altogether; those in Rome brought the city from equality in the citizens to a very great inequality, those in Florence reduced it from inequality to a wonderful equality. This diversity of effects may have been caused by the diverse ends these two peoples had, for the people of Rome desired to enjoy the highest honors together with the nobles, while the people of Florence fought to be alone in the government without the participation of the nobles.²⁷

In the *Discourses* and *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli argued that the institutions of Roman Senate and Plebeians were essential for the success of Roman Republic. The divisions between people and nobles ensured that political authority was distributed across different classes, creating a tension that ultimately protected civil liberty. It could also protect the state from the rule of unwise people, since the worthy man would make speeches and correct the ideas of people.²⁸

²⁷ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, Book III, 105

²⁸ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 1.2, 29-31.

While he admired this system as a Roman institution, Machiavelli believed that divisions between commoners and patricians had not functioned in such a productive way in the history of Florence. Florentine politics often led to bloodshed, and the victory of one faction over the other. Through the fighting between factions, worthy people and virtuous traditions lost out in Florence, causing the political instability of the state. Machiavelli argued that “Florence arrived at the point (around 1350) that it could easily have been reordered in any form of government by a wise lawgiver.”²⁹ Here Machiavelli hinted the rise of the Medici clan under the leadership of Cosimo de’ Medici. Machiavelli believed that the political institutions in Florence determined the princely rule of Medici. Due to the different political institutions, the political virtues in the Roman Republic were not necessarily always directly useful in Florence. Thus, Machiavelli argued that it was also useful for the rulers to learn the history of Florence itself, discover the long-term sources of the city’s corruption, and thereby avoid repeating the damage done by earlier citizens.

Like Machavelli, Chen Liang also had great interest in the history of antiquity. In his essay *dialogical debate*, Chen Liang acknowledged that the way of the sages was possessed by people in the Three Dynasties (around 2000 BCE – 256 BCE).³⁰ As he put it, “[The sage kings] conquered the land under heavenly rule based on their humanity and righteousness. Their original intention was to save the people but not to enjoy their positions.”³¹ Chen Liang argued that the sages of the Three Dynasties possessed the real virtues, including humanity and righteousness. He also expressed his affection for the

²⁹ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, Book III, 106

³⁰ Three Dynasties include Xia dynasty (around 2000 BCE – around 1600 BCE), Shang dynasty (around 1600 BCE – 1046 BCE), Zhou dynasty (1046 BCE – 256 BCE). The history of Three Dynasties was recorded and edited in the Zhou dynasty. In the Song dynasty, it was widely believed that Confucius was the chief editor.

³¹ 三代以仁義取天下, 本於救斯民, 而非以位為樂. Chen Liang, *The Collection of Chen Liang*, 32.

government of Three Dynasties, believing that a king chosen by the will of the former king and people would protect the commonwealth, or common good.³² Through this form of election, the state would grow healthy because its goal was to protect the public interest.

Chen Liang's interest in Three Dynasties was also shared by other Confucian scholars. Unlike the historical texts of later periods, the histories of Three Dynasties, recorded in *Books of Histories* and *Spring and Autumn Annals*, became mandatory readings in Confucian education. Like Chen Liang, most Confucian scholars, especially the *Daoxue* leaders, agreed that the Three Dynasties recorded the golden ages of Chinese history. And they aspired to recover the glories of antiquity by imitating their structures of government, ethical systems, and natural philosophy.

Machiavelli recovered his ideal of the Roman republic from a vast body of ancient historical writing that, if by no means objective, nonetheless evinced great detail and offered sometimes conflicting evidence, one writer to the next that could fund his critical reading. Texts discussing the Three Dynasties, by contrast, offered less granular or detailed expositions; early Confucian thinkers tended to privilege conceptual elegance and stylistic ornament over treasuries of information. The history of Three Dynasties that the Song thinker read offered a "flawless" historical narrative. Chen Liang was aware of this problem, but he did not necessarily want to rupture the legends of the Three Dynasties because these examples, however dubious with respect to "fact," could still instruct rulers in the Song dynasty.³³ Therefore, he chose to avoid discussing the Three Dynasties

³² Hoyt Tillman, *Ch'en Liang on Public Interest and the Law*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 13-14.

³³ Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism*, 135-137.

whenever possible and devoted most of his attention to discussion of the history after Three Dynasties, often referred to as a “Dark Age” by *Daoxue* thinkers.

Chen Liang believed that the Han dynasty (202 BCE – 9 CE, and 25–220) and the Tang dynasty (618–907) were two successful periods after the Three Dynasties. He believed that the criticism of these two periods by *Daoxue* thinkers on the grounds of a perceived moral degeneration was unfair, stemming from the way of the sages being lost during the chaotic periods right after the Three Dynasties. The heroes in Han and Tang had to reconstruct a new way to rule the state because political realities had changed. Instead of the traditional value of morality, the Han and Tang rulers governed their state through shrewd strategies and military force.³⁴ Even though the Han and Tang rulers’ accomplishments were less significant than those in the Three Dynasties, they were also successful rulers because they brought peace and stability to the state:

Various Confucian scholars have placed themselves has been called integrity (*yi*) and kingship (*wang*); the accomplishments of the Han and Tang rulers have been labeled utility (*li*) and hegemony (*ba*). Although what has been said by various Confucian scholars is very good, what was accomplished by heroic rulers was also not bad. A perspective like this you have characterized as “seeking both integrity and utility and using the methods of kingship and hegemony together.”³⁵

Comparing the achievement of the sages in the Three Dynasties and the heroes in Han and Tang, Chen Liang argued that their end results were similar. He suggested the utility of combining the virtues of the Three Dynasties and the political strategies in Han and Tang together, believing that an ideal ruler should have virtuous intentions like the sage kings *and* clever brains like the heroic emperors. Through examining the differences between the Three Dynasties and the history of Han and Tang, Chen Liang contended that China during

³⁴ Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism*, 138.

³⁵ Chen Liang, *The Collection of Chen Liang*, 281. Translated in Tillman’s *Confucian Discourse*, 139. Translation modified by me.

these periods should be understood as quite successful. He believed that the real root of the recent crisis happened closer to his own time.

Chen Liang disagreed with *Daoxue* leaders' contention that the crisis of China occurred after the Three Dynasties. Instead, he believed the political reforms and the rise of *Daoxue* in the past one hundred years were to blame for the humiliation of the Song dynasty:

Formerly, in the flourishing period of our dynasty's founders, each of the empire's scholar-officials took on only what he could effectively manage and did not idly meddle in other affairs. From the perspective of later generations, this was judged to be primitive and crude, but they did not comprehend its zenith. After this period, culture became daily more flourishing, morality became daily more rigorous, theories became daily more lofty, government affairs daily were reformed, and the empire's scholar-officials no longer had any repose in the ordinary and simple.³⁶

In this passage, Chen Liang expressed his fondness to the political culture of the early Song. The turning point was the reform movements led by Wang Anshi (1021-1086), who raised a series of new military, economic and political policies. The court was divided into two factions, the conservative party and the reformist party. Due to this reform, the emperor lost his political superiority over his ministers. Chen Liang believed that Wang Anshi's reform was the starting point of the crisis, because it led the Song scholar-officials to pursue their private interest and neglect their duty to the state and the emperor. After that, these scholar-officials pursued moral philosophy and created *Daoxue*. These scholar-officials focused on the personal cultivation of virtues, rather than taking care of politics and military affairs. Therefore, Chen Liang argued that the factionalism created by the reform movement and the moral philosophy led by *Daoxue* were two primary factors of the Song crisis.

³⁶ Chen Liang, *The Collection of Chen Liang*, 192-193. Translated in Tillman's *Confucian Discourse*, 109.

The historical interpretive frameworks Machiavelli and Chen Liang built prove to be quite similar. They both had a rather conservative view of history, believing that the ideal period of time happened in the past and recent history was a relative failure. Both also adopted a pragmatic view of history, believing that the goal of writing history was to present actionable lessons to readers. Through reading history, the audience could learn successful political strategies from the past, and avoid repeating the same problems that happened recently. In their minds, history was an important component of their utilitarian political philosophies.

After comparing their pragmatic views of history, I would like to unfold in more detail two examples central to their writings. In Machiavelli's *The Prince*, he created a deeply problematic hero, Cesare Borgia. Borgia was known for his cruelty and untrustworthy military behaviors. Even if he ultimately failed to achieve all he set out to do, Machiavelli still set him as a good example of strategies essential for a prince to understand. Similarly, Chen Liang also depicted a controversial hero, Tang Taizong. Through these two examples, I would like to compare two thinkers' approach to morality as well as their utilitarian use of history.

In Chapter 7 of *The Prince*, Machiavelli made a heroic model out of Cesare Borgia, Duke of Valentino. An illegitimate son of Pope Alexander VI, Borgia nonetheless still managed to lead the Papal army. In 1499, Borgia allied with the French King, Louis XII. Through this alliance and the support of his father, Borgia occupied large territories in Central Italy. Borgia's army was a great threat to Soderini's regime. And in fact, from June 1502 to December 1503, Machiavelli met Borgia three times in a series of ambassadorial

duties.³⁷ Borgia was known for his brutality and immorality, both of which Machiavelli would come to understand as crucial to the expansion of his territory in Italy. Despite his failure after the death of his father, Machiavelli still gave him a high praise: “Despite the fact that he did everything and used every method that a prudent and virtuous man ought to employ in order to root himself securely in those states that the arms and Fortune of others had granted him.”³⁸ Machiavelli admired the political strategies that the Duke of Valentino used to maintain his rule. The historian believed that Borgia’s sheer bad luck, his father’s untimely death and his own illness, ensured his failure and not his own strategies.

In Chapter 7, Machiavelli detailed Borgia’s methods in securing his position. After the initial success of hiring mercenaries from the Orsini and the Vitelli, Borgia found them unreliable and decided to rely on his own armies. He used money and civil appointments to appease the mercenary leaders, then at last managed to eliminate these leaders at the appropriate moment and take possession himself of their armies.³⁹ Borgia also avoided reliance on the auxiliary armies from Louis XII of France. He realized that the French army would not give him any real help to achieve his ambition. Therefore, Borgia tried to find new allies and vacillate in his connection to the French as they continued their wars against Spain and Naples.⁴⁰ Machiavelli believed that Borgia set a good example to his audience because he relied on his own armies rather than mercenaries or auxiliary armies.

³⁷ John M. Najemy, “Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia: A Reconsideration of Chapter 7 of ‘The Prince.’” In *The Review of Politics* 75, no. 4 (2013): 540-541.

³⁸ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. by David Wotton, (Hackett Publishing Company, 1995), 35-38

³⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 26, 48

⁴⁰ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 27-28

In addition to his self-sufficient policy, Borgia's method to win popularity was also an important lesson in chapter 7:

He gave a cruel and unscrupulous man, Messer Remirro de Orco, the fullest authority there. In no time at all Remirro reduced the territory to a peaceful and united state, and in so doing, the Duke greatly increased his prestige. Afterwards, the Duke judged that such excessive authority was no longer required, since he feared that it might become odious, and in the middle of the territory he set up a civil tribunal with a very distinguished president, in which each city had its own advocate. Because he realized that the rigorous measures of the past had generated a certain amount of hatred, in order to purge the minds of the people and to win them completely over to his side he wanted to show that, if any form of cruelty had occurred, it did not originate from him but from the violent nature of his minister. Having found the occasion to do so, one morning at Cesena he had Messer Remirro's body laid out in two pieces on the piazza, with a block of wood and a bloody sword beside it. The ferocity of such a spectacle left that population satisfied and stupefied at the same time.⁴¹

In Machiavelli's depiction, Borgia's method to secure his power was immoral but useful. He promoted Remirro because he wanted his minister to secure the state through violence, but then later take the blame for that and indeed suffer execution to satisfy the understandable grievances of the people. Borgia thus cheerfully sacrificed his chief minister, too. If they spoke of him at all, most Renaissance thinkers would have criticized Borgia's behavior, for his lack of ethics. However, Machiavelli praised Borgia for using methods that ensured control of the state. He used Remirro's violence to let people fear him, then used his blood to win the satisfaction of population. In this way, Valentino was a ruler who was loved and feared by his people. He emerges once again as an ideal ruler in Chapter 17, where Machiavelli stated that it was difficult for a prince to be loved and feared by the people at the same time.⁴²

⁴¹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 27

⁴² Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 58

Machiavelli believed that Fortuna determined the failure of Borgia. His father, Pope Alexander VI, died prematurely in the summer of 1503. If the Pope had lived, Borgia might have secured his power and made even greater achievements. Borgia's own illness in 1503 made the situation worse, for he was not able to organize an effective defense against his enemies. Machiavelli argued that the only thing that Borgia could have done to improve his chances had to do with interference in the election of the new pope. Machiavelli believed that the Duke should have supported the Cardinal of Rouen or the Spaniards' choice due to their close relationship and common political interest. Since Julius II was injured by Borgia, the Duke should not trust the promise of a Cardinal who would hate him after the election.⁴³ Borgia's errors in the election were an important factor in his failure as well, then.

Despite the criticism of Borgia's choice in the election, Machiavelli's overall attitude remained positive. John Najemy among others have questioned Machiavelli's commitment to Borgia's example, which brought the Florentine politician even intentionally to paper over the faults of the Duke as he created his quintessential "Machiavellian" hero.⁴⁴ Najemy points to examples of Borgia's use of the mercenaries and auxiliary armies after crushing the conspiracy of the Orsini and the Vitelli. Borgia did not create his own military power, then; he still hired new mercenaries, and he even requested Louis XII's assistance. Najemy further points out that Machiavelli was *fully aware* of Borgia's reliance on mercenaries and auxiliary armies. In his report to Florentine commissioner in 1503, Machiavelli revealed that Borgia's own army was less than one thousand men; and the Florentine Republican would still need to be cautious to Borgia's

⁴³ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 30

⁴⁴ Najemy, "Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia", 555-56

threat because of the potential auxiliary armies from France.⁴⁵ Machiavelli's praise that Borgia gave up his reliance on the mercenaries and auxiliary armies contradicted his own experience.

Why did Machiavelli thus effectively invent a hero, recombining certain elements of history and weaving them together to suit his rhetorical need – and a hero, above all, who was notorious among Italian princes? I suggest that Machiavelli admired Borgia's political strategies and wanted to position those strategies as a perfect lesson to teach his audience. Borgia had tried to create his own army and get rid of the mercenaries, perfect examples for Machiavelli's theory of military self-sufficiency. The use of mercenaries and auxiliary armies was a result of the lack of financial support. If Machiavelli recorded every detail of history, the story would not reveal a lesson quite as useful as the "perfected" history did. Thus, the Florentine politician turned a blind eye on the flaws of Cesare Borgia. He might not be a good historian by our standards, but his example of Cesare Borgia made him an excellent political philosopher. In this way, Machiavelli used history utilitarianly to achieve his goal of creating political lessons.

Similar to Machiavelli's hero of Cesare Borgia, Chen Liang also made Emperor Taizong of Tang, a controversial ruler for his moral flaws, a central model and even a hero. Taizong was the second ruler of the Tang Dynasty. At the age of 19, he encouraged his father, Emperor Gaozu of Tang (566-635, r. 618-626), to rebel against the Sui dynasty (581-618).

In the battles against Sui and other regional powers, Taizong showed his extraordinary military leadership and helped his father to unify China. In 626, he murdered

⁴⁵ Najemy, "Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia", 547-48

his two brothers, one of whom was the Crown Prince, in the Xuanwu Gate Incident. Then he forced his father to abdicate and became the new emperor. After he was crowned, he managed to improve the economic condition of common people, which had been destroyed in the civil war in Late Sui and Early Tang. Taizong also defeated the Eastern Turkish Khanate and took the title of Tengri Khan, which made Taizong the leader of the ethnic minorities in the northern frontier of Tang.

Taizong was one of the central historical figures in the debate between Chen Liang and Zhu Xi. Zhu Xi urged Chen Liang to give up his research on Taizong, precisely because of this figure's immoral behavior. Zhu Xi believed that "not a single one of [Taizong's thoughts] did not arise from his private desires."⁴⁶ In the case of murdering his brothers and forcing his father to abdicate, Taizong betrayed the most basic Confucian value: filial piety. Even if his cleverness helped him to defeat his brothers, the lack of essential morality made his political achievements valueless. Zhu Xi argued that Taizong set a bad example for later emperors of the Tang dynasty, producing the degeneration of morality notable in the Tang dynasty. The issue of morality, then, was the *Daoxue* scholar's fundamental platform for seeking to displace Taizong as any kind of exemplar.

In Chen Liang's reply to Zhu Xi, the utilitarian thinker used Taizong's political achievements to defend this admittedly immoral yet still (in his view) heroic monarch. Chen Liang believed Taizong's greatest achievement was to unify China and end a chaotic age. Even if Taizong might be disloyal to the old regime of Sui, he managed to protect the ordinary people by using ruthless military strategies to end the long period of wars. Chen Liang did not mention the Xuanwu Gate Incident directly. He tried to avoid debating with

⁴⁶ Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism*, 147

Zhu Xi about filial piety. After that, Chen Liang pointed out the military achievement of Taizong, who defeat the Turkish and brought peace to the northern frontier, which was often raided by “northern barbarians”. In Chen Liang’s mind, Taizong’s military achievements to end the civil war and repel foreign invaders justified positioning him as a sage ruler.

In addition to Taizong’s military achievements, his openness to the ministers was another factor that, in Chen’s vision, justified positioning Taizong as a perfect model of effective Chinese imperial conduct. Taizong promoted Wei Zheng (580-643), who served under his brother, as Crown Prince of Tang, before the incident of Xuanwu Gate.⁴⁷ The promotion of Wei Zheng was surprising, since Wei Zheng was an advisor of Taizong’s direct enemy and was thought untrustworthy. However, Taizong looked beyond their past rivalry; and that decision proved wise. Wei Zheng’s advice and sometimes his admonitions helped Taizong achieve a good reign in the first years of Zhenguan era. Even though his minister sometime harshly criticized the emperor, Taizong was not offended and still took the counsel seriously. Chen Liang believed that Taizong’s openness to his minister made him a heroic ruler.

Chen Liang wanted to offer his readers a perfect example of the monarch. Like Machiavelli, he therefore chose to omit some important information in his analysis of Taizong. In the case of Wei Zheng, although Taizong often listened to his minister’s ideas and gave him rewards, the emperor usually did not actually follow the advice. Taizong used the relationship to Wei Zheng as evidence of the emperor’s magnanimity and used that as a basis for his representation of Taizong’s character. Any contrary evidence moved

⁴⁷ Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism*, 146-147

to the margins. Chen Liang even omitted discussion of Taizong's major military failure in his expedition to the Korean peninsula. As a keen student of military tactics, Chen Liang would have been familiar with this incident and failure. Still, he chose to avoid discussing the issue so as to keep Taizong an ideal model.

Chen Liang's method of positioning Taizong in history did differ from Machiavelli's depiction of Borgia in one important way. Chen Liang focused most on the end of the story, while Machiavelli highlighted the specific political strategies Borgia deployed as events moved along. I would argue that this difference can be explained by the different types of historiographies operational in these two contexts. In China, there was a well-established and official system for recording history. The court officials of Taizong had already recorded Taizong's own view of political philosophy and organized his activities into a political textbook called *The Essentials of Governance of the Reign of Constancy Revealed*.⁴⁸ Chen Liang did not need to repeat the political strategies which were recorded in this text. His job was to argue against the moral philosophy raised by the *Daoxue* leaders and set Taizong as an example worthy of imitation by Song emperors. In Italy, by contrast, few would write about the actual political strategies of Borgia because of his bad reputation. Thus, Machiavelli saw it as his job to excavate this example for particular strategies that Borgia devised, so as to create a sharper lesson for princes, especially, of the Medici family.

Despite the different focus in their analysis, both Machiavelli and Chen Liang shrewdly manipulated history in order to create a perfect lesson of political philosophy.

⁴⁸ Wu Jing, *The Essentials of Governance of the Reign of Constancy Revealed*, edited and translated by Hilde De Weerd, Glen Dudbridge and Gabe Van Beijeren, texts in the History of Political Thought, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020)

Both thinkers chose to omit some important information which might have a negative effect on their argument. They believed that history was a repository of information essential for creating a useful, and indeed utilitarian, political thought.

History was important in the philosophical systems of Machiavelli and Chen Liang. History was a lesson for themselves to construct their statecraft. Machiavelli and Chen Liang found the historical roots of the crises wracking their states. The political instability caused by factionalism was responsible for decline and chaos. History was also a lesson for their audiences. These two utilitarian historians hoped that their audiences, members of the ruling class, could learn the art of statecraft by imitating the successful examples and avoiding repeating the mistakes of more recent times. History became for both a weapon against abstract moral philosophy. Both Machiavelli and Chen Liang considered immoral princes as their heroes to criticize the idea of “virtue politics,” at least implicitly. In their minds, effective political strategies were far more important than the morality of the ruler.

4.0 FROM CIVIL POLITICS TO MILITARY REFORMS

Learning political lessons from history was not sufficient for the state to achieve the political goals of these two utilitarian thinkers. In their political philosophy, military organization constituted the other important part of the statecraft. This section will use the Chinese term *wen* (culture, civil, literary) and *wu* (military, physical) to compare the two thinkers' approaches to the unification of civil and military affairs. Both aimed to change the military views of the ruling class in order to achieve their personal objectives. In addition, both thinkers believed that the combination of a standing army and civilian jobs was a solution to the military weakness of the state. The section will also examine how the two utilitarian thinkers' military view connected with their broader political philosophies.

The dichotomy between *wen* and *wu* originated from the *Three Dynasties*. Prior to the Warring States period (5th century BCE – 221 BCE), the aristocracy could possess *wen* and *wu* values simultaneously. In their traditional educations, literary cultivation and military training were equally important.⁴⁹ Confucius depicted this dichotomy in his *Analects*: "There is no man who does not have something of the way of *wen* and *wu* in him."⁵⁰ However, the balance of *wen* and *wu* in one person was broken after Confucius. Elites did not study the literary values during the chaotic Warring States period, further separating the tradition of *wen* and *wu*. The literati, especially those who studied Confucian

⁴⁹ Yu Ying-shih, *Shi and Chinese Culture*, (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 1987), 22-25.

⁵⁰ *Analects*, XIX.22, translated by D. C. Lau's in his *Confucius: The Analects* (Harmondsworth, Middx.: Penguin, 1979), 156. K. Louie and L. Edwards, "Chinese Masculinity: Theorizing 'Wen' and 'Wu'", *East Asian History* 8 (December 1994), 140.

values, possessed the idea of *wen*, while the military officers owned the value of *wu*.⁵¹ These two ideas gradually became two poles in Chinese state politics.

During the Song dynasty, the balance between *wen* and *wu* was finally destroyed. Due to the rising social status of Confucian scholars and the state policy of emphasizing *wen* and restricting *wu*, *wen* overwhelmed *wu* in Song politics. Military power was held by the chief chancellor, the head of *wen* ministers. The centralization of military and administrative power reached its peak after the Jurchens invaded Song territory. Qing Hui (1091-1055), the chief chancellor under Gaozong's rule, killed the popular general Yue Fei (1103-1042) and forced the Song court to negotiate a peace treaty with the Jurchens.⁵² In local affairs, Confucian scholars were often appointed as regional military leaders due to their literary achievements. For example, Chen Liang's two great friends, Xin Qiji and Ye Shi (1150-1223), had experience of charging local military affairs as Confucian literati. The dominance of *wen* and the effects of that shift would prompt Chen Liang to reflect carefully on the relationship between *wen* and *wu*.

Chen Liang argued that Song elites should combine the values of *wen* and *wu* through education. In the introduction of *Discourses on the Antiquity*, Chen Liang criticized the division of *wen* and *wu*. "The way of *wen* and *wu* was unified, but in later generations it divided into two," he explained. "The *wen* literati focused on pens and wood blocks, and the *wu* men focused on swords and shields. [They] ridiculed each other in order to exceed their rivals."⁵³ Chen Liang believed that the division between *wen* and *wu*

⁵¹ In Chinese, the word *wen-wu* would refer to all of the ministers in the court. *Wen* ministers usually did not stand with *wu* officers in the court meeting.

⁵² Hoyt Tillman, "Proto-Nationalism in Twelfth-Century China? The Case of Ch'en Liang", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 39, no. 2 (1979): 412. Gowers and Hang, "Yue Fei and Thomas Becket", in De Weerd and Morche, 484-492.

⁵³ Chen Liang, *The Collection of Chen Liang*, 50

resulted in the weakness of the *wen* scholars and the lack of essential talents among the *wu* warriors. To achieve military triumph against the barbarians, the civil and military values should be mutually dependent.⁵⁴ As a result, Chen Liang believed that Song literati and generals should study the deeds of the aristocracy in the Three Dynasties and combine *wen* and *wu* values once again.

Chen Liang also urged reforming the educational system in order to achieve his philosophical view. To this end, he tried to redefine the value of *wen* and *wu* in order to accord with his utilitarian philosophy: “I believe that the *wen* literati could not only learn [using] pens and wood blocks, but they should also possess the [martial] talent to handle affairs; the *wu* generals could not only learn [using] swords and shields, but they should also possess the wisdom to anticipate their enemies.”⁵⁵ Chen Liang firmly believed that literati and generals should study with each other in order to cultivate good ministers.

In this same passage, Chen Liang also offered his new definition of *wen* and *wu*. He believed that wisdom was the core value of *wen* and talent was the core value of *wu*. Wisdom was not the essential value in Confucian education. Instead, in the twelfth century, *Daoxue* thinkers situated wisdom as contrary to the Confucian virtues by criticizing the Han and Tang historical figures who represented wisdom. Chen Liang abandoned the Confucian interpretation of *wen*, believing that morality did not help solving the dichotomy between *wen* and *wu*. Chen Liang’s idea of “wisdom” was a mental talent for conceptualizing grand strategies in civil and military affairs. Both the literati and the generals should possess such a mental talent to design strategies against their enemies. Neither did Chen Liang agree with the classical idea of *wu*. He believed that the classical

⁵⁴ Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism*, 72

⁵⁵ Chen Liang, *The Collection of Chen Liang*, 4

education of physical skills on archery and chariotry was not useful for the cultural elites any longer. Instead, the literati and generals should study history, learning military tactics, and use those tactics properly in order to better their own martial talents. Through those educations, Chen Liang wanted to eliminate the gaps between cultural elites and military generals. In addition to traditional literary and physical education, the *wen* literati and *wu* general would receive a common training to maximize effectiveness on all fronts.

Chen Liang's way of recalibrating and even combining *wen* and *wu* offered another lesson to the monarch. In his memorial to Emperor Xiaozong, Chen Liang suggested that the government should be less dependent on the current civil service exam for selection of court officials. Instead, Chen Liang argued that recommendations from competent ministers should become the chief method to promote *wen* and *wu* officials – particularly when the government faced the threat of northern barbarians. He believed that the emperor should select officials himself through evaluating their mental and military talents. Through the recommendation system, the emperor could give more power to those new ministers, reversing the dynasty's trend to absolutism.⁵⁶ Moreover, Chen Liang asked Emperor Xiaozong to imitate the successful examples of Emperor Zhenzong (r. 998-1022) to stop taking a direct part in *wu* affairs, which would make him seem immoral to the populace. Chen Liang believed that focusing on benevolence, which accorded with the traditional *wen* value, would help Xiaozong to win his people's loyalty.⁵⁷

In addition to reforming education of elites and the system of imperial examination, Chen Liang also determined to promote a military reform on the local level. He believed that the centralization of military and financial power was the primary cause of the

⁵⁶ Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism*, 78

⁵⁷ Chen Liang, *The Collection of Chen Liang*, 8

Northern Song regime. In order to restore Northern China, Chen Liang urged Xiaozong to reverse ineffective policies and return central power to each region. He also argued for reintroducing the colonies of farmer-soldiers. Compared to the standing army controlled by central government, he contended that these farmer-soldiers were more flexible and thus better able to defend against foreign invasion. Furthermore, farmer-soldiers cost far less than a standing army, helping to reduce the burdens on common people in peacetime.

Historians have sometimes connected *wen* and *wu* to ideas prevalent in medieval and early modern Europe. Some have compared these two concepts in particular with the different ideals animating knights and literati or well-educated churchmen in Medieval Latin Europe.⁵⁸ While the differences of context are important, I think the comparison illuminating. Indeed, I suspect one could go even further back, to Roman and Greek traditions, to find comparable concepts to *wen* and *wu*. I believe that one can connect the core value of *wu* to the idea of Roman *virtus*. Both *wu* and *virtus* showed the active and martial mastery inherent in definitions of elite masculinity in the two societies. In *Machiavellian Moment*, J. G. A. Pocock parallels the Roman *virtus* and Greek *arete*, which shares much with *wen*. Both terms were used to indicate excellence, particularly in public affairs.⁵⁹ Roman *virtus* and Greeks *arete* were not poles but parallels in Roman and Greek aristocratic culture, and in some ways fused in Greco-Roman thought. Their relationship was similar to that between *wen* and *wu*. Furthermore, *virtus* and *arete* both evolved in the medieval period, becoming incorporated into the Christian virtues.

⁵⁸ Gowers and Hang, “Yue Fei and Thomas Becket”, 483.

⁵⁹ J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, 2nd edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 37

In Machiavelli's intellectual world, the idea of *wen* and *wu* still fused within the larger structure of Christian virtues. However, as he saw it, the *wu* virtue had already lost on the Italian peninsula. Machiavelli criticized Italian princes who did not understand the military strategies necessary for leading an army themselves. Instead, they heavily relied on mercenaries and auxiliary armies, which often cost them their principalities and ensured the suffering of the commonality as well. In order to achieve his political and military ambition to unify Italy and drive out foreign intervention, Machiavelli determined to reintroduce original idea of the Roman *virtus* with his own explanations.

Machiavelli's project was to reintroduce civil-military relations that would assist Italian princes in achieving the necessary military reforms. Indeed, his argument in the opening passages of the *Art of War* proves remarkably similar to Chen Liang's introduction of his *Discourses on Antiquity*: "If one considers ancient institutions, one will not find anything more united, more harmonious, and of necessity with greater affinity for each other than civilian and military institutions."⁶⁰ He believed that the civil and military affairs should be united, in accordance with the successful examples of the ancient institutions. Then Machiavelli pointed out the reasons for the crisis in Italy, believing that the corruption of the military institution was one crucial factor. "But military institutions are now completely corrupted and much changed from the ancient ways," he observed, "which has led to mistaken ideas that make men hate the military and avoid any interaction with those who have soldiery as their profession."⁶¹ Machiavelli believed that the return to the traditional army and increasing professionalism of soldiers were two primary missions for princes.

⁶⁰ Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, in the Essential Writings of Machiavelli, 291

⁶¹ The Essential Writings of Machiavelli, 291

Machiavelli believed that a good ruler should understand both civil and military institutions in order to defend the state against foreign invasion. First, he believed that the ruler should focus on military infrastructure even in the peaceful periods. The ruler needed to physically train the army regularly and study military history in order to keep a strong army and learn military strategies. This strong army would then guard the state against foreign invasion. Second, Machiavelli proposed that a strong army was not sufficient in itself, particularly when considering a variety of *internal* threats. In order to keep the independence of the state, the ruler should also make good laws and keep his people loyal through legal and diplomatic strategies.⁶² Machiavelli believed that *wen* and *wu* values should be possessed simultaneously by the ruler of the state.

Machiavelli also believed that citizen militia was the best form of army to defend against both external and internal enemies. On the one hand, a citizen militia militated against the danger of a martial hierarchy emerging within the state. If a state relied on a standing army, there would be a constant threat that high-ranking military officers could usurp the power of the regime. In the Roman Republic, many military leaders, including Sulla, Marius, and Caesar, used their military power to efface republican traditions.⁶³ Machiavelli believed that a citizen militia could both centralize military power and avoid the potential threat of a military dictatorship. On the other hand, Machiavelli believed that the citizen militia could still defend against foreign powers effectively. It was still a “professional” army because the militia would receive regular exercises. The citizen militia also belonged to the state, ensuring its loyalty to the state. Machiavelli’s citizen militia also

⁶² J. 'Bayo Adekanye, “Machiavelli and the Military: The Prince and the Psychology of Empty Pow”, *Strategie Studies* 8 (Winter 1985), 12.

⁶³ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* 3.24, 316.

echoed Chen Liang's vision for the unification of *wen* and *wu*. Members of the citizen militia were meant to do civil as well as the military work.

For both Machiavelli and Chen Liang, military projects directly connect with their political philosophies. Both thinkers tried to unify political and military institutions in order to create a strong army to defend foreign enemies. Even if they often highlighted the importance of military infrastructure as such, they still position this as subordinate to and in the service of civil politics, their real concern. History also informed their discussions of military affairs, providing the source of their central argument and lessons for their audience. But this same connection between politics and military affairs ultimately brought both Machiavelli and Chen Liang to innovate in yet another way: this time, with respect to the traditional views of the military's status and role.

One essential difference between the military views of Machiavelli and Chen Liang was the role the prince in this militarized government. In Machiavelli's view, the ruler should be responsible for both *wen* and *wu* affairs, including taking charge of army and stabilizing domestic politics. In Chen Liang's view, however, the Chinese emperor should give up his duty of *wu* and focus exclusively on satisfying his people. Even if the emperor still held the power to select the *wen* bureaucrats and *wu* officers, his administrative power was still largely restricted. Under this structure, the power of the Chinese emperor was far less than the "Machiavellian" prince. I would argue that Chen Liang did not want to break the tradition of the decentralization of power in the Song dynasty. If the ruler's power was restricted (even by himself), the scholar-bureaucrats would then lose political power. If Chen Liang's advice was accepted, he and his social class could benefit from the new political system. In Machiavelli's mind, by contrast, the incompetent and corrupt Italian

princes would, unless atypically fortunate, ultimately lose their position unless because of the ongoing Italian Wars and the constant internal threat of factionalism. Therefore, Machiavelli directed his works only to those competent rulers who could enjoy decent power and avoid corruption. He also knew that centralizing power remained necessary in sixteenth-century Italian politics. The Italian city-states were weak, while their enemies, large and relatively coherent monarchical states, were powerful. He hoped to lay the groundwork for the emergence of a strong figure to unite Italy and liberate the peninsula from “barbarian” invaders.⁶⁴ Since the Medici princes, Giovanni and Lorenzo, were backed by the Papal state, the greatest obstacle of unification, they had the greatest chance to be these Italian heroes. Like King Romulus of Rome, Machiavelli hoped they might enjoy centralized power and rule alone, as long as they fought for the public interest of Italians.⁶⁵

Machiavelli’s military project of forming a citizen militia was also similar to Chen Liang’s idea of empowering farmer-soldiers. Both thinkers tried to combine the ideal of a standing army with mechanisms for creating civilian jobs. The primary difference of two systems is the different types of armies. Chen Liang’s system of farmer-soldiers was still a form of standing army, while the system of citizen militia was a type of semi-professional army. The farmer soldiers were more flexible in active missions. This model accorded with Chen Liang’s dream to restore Northern China as swiftly as possible. By contrast, the citizen militia focused on defensive missions, protecting the independence of the city-state.⁶⁶ This difference showed that Chen Liang’s foreign policies were far more

⁶⁴ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, XXVI

⁶⁵ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* 1.9, 46-47.

⁶⁶ Adekanye, “Machiavelli and the Military”, 31-32

aggressive than those of Machiavelli. Moreover, Machiavelli's idea could also protect the state from internal conspiracy; while Chen Liang's idea might give the regional officers too much power, causing a rebellion or coup d'état.⁶⁷

Machiavelli and Chen Liang's ideas of civil politics and military reforms reflected their utilitarian philosophy. In their writing about military, both thinkers highlighted the lessons derived from history. Even both harbored a fascination with prying military tactics as such from their reading of history, a broader political concern ultimately predominated and shaped the ways in which they engaged even the nitty-gritty of military tactics. Teleological ethics and statecraft remained the overarching rubrics under which the events of military history would be organized. Moreover, they shared an ultimate goal of using military force to unify their nation, the final instantiation of their desire to promote the public interest, the commonwealth of the state.

⁶⁷ After Chen Liang's death, the new chief chancellor, Han Tuo Zhou, who shared many military views with Chen Liang, raised a northern expedition. However, it came to a disaster end due to the rebellion of Wu Xi, the general who took charge of the *wen* and *wu* affairs in the Sichuan Province. The failure of the expedition showed that Chen Liang's military view of farmer-soldier might be problematic.

5.0 CONCLUSION

Facing internal political and cultural crises as well as foreign threats, Machiavelli and Chen Liang formed their utilitarian philosophy as an antithesis of what they viewed as unhelpful (even pernicious) traditional morality. Both thinkers redefined “virtue” on their own terms. Machiavelli spoke of *virtù*, and Chen Liang emphasized a similar fusion of ability and wisdom. They explained their redefined virtues through object lessons and models derived from history, and from their distinctive combination of civil politics and military projects. Both crafted concrete plans to strengthen the government and achieve the unification of their nations.

Machiavelli’s and Chen Liang’s “patriotism”, while only suggested in this exposition, offers an interesting point of comparison to consider at least briefly in conclusion. In Machiavelli’s letters to Vettori and Chen Liang’s poetry to Xin Qiji, the two thinkers showed their devotion to their beloved states. Modern historians have certainly considered these two thinkers’ possible relationships to modern forms of nationalism, not least since they explicitly called for the unification of the “nation-state” – and characterized foreign powers as “barbarians”.⁶⁸

I admit I am skeptical about using the term “nationalism” as such in connection with sixteenth-century Italy and twelfth-century China.⁶⁹ Instead, I think Benedict Anderson’s theory of “imagined communities” could help us to understand an early

⁶⁸ Felix Gilbert, “The Concept of Nationalism in Machiavelli’s Prince”, *Studies in the Renaissance* 1 (1954): 38–48. Tillman, “Proto-nationalism”.

⁶⁹ Nicholas Tackett believed that the Song Chinese had already emerged a sense of early nationalism in the 11th century. See Nicholas Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order*, (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

permutation of an idea of “nationalism” in the pre-modern world. Anderson believed that a nation “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion”.⁷⁰ I would argue that in the Renaissance Italy and Song China we do see such a vision of “communion” in the state – at least within the intellectual elite. In both contexts, literati such as Machiavelli and Chen Liang remained a small part of the population who may or may not have had much common ground with the populace at large. I would thus propose that the proto-nationalism Machiavelli and Chen Liang shared was a sense of “*elite* patriotism”. Neither of them had patriotic ideas that particularly involved the masses in their imagined communities. In their minds, only a small group of political or intellectual elites had the duty to create a nation-state; while the goal did remain public warfare, “the people” did not contribute significantly to its forging. I think “proto-nationalism” or “elite patriotism” would be a highly fruitful topic for further research.

The positions of Machiavelli and Chen Liang hold in intellectual history would also repay future study. Machiavelli has long enjoyed a reputation as the father of modern political science.⁷¹ By contrast, Chen Liang often goes without mention even when scholars discuss Chinese great philosophers. How did these two thinkers end up in such dramatically different positions in the historiography, when they had such similar political philosophy? While much more research would be needed to address these questions

⁷⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended, 2nd ed. (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 6-7.

⁷¹ Leo Strauss, *What is Political philosophy? And other Studies* (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 40-41.

definitely, work on this micro-comparison at least puts me in a position to offer some initial thoughts.

From my point of view, both Machiavelli and Chen Liang were important in laying conceptual foundations for modern intellectuals. In Yu Ying-shih's *Shi and Chinese Culture*, the great intellectual historian showed the evolutions of Chinese and European intellectuals. In the European context, the fundamental differences between pre-modern literati and modern intellectuals were that the latter groups had a duty of providing critical thinking about public affairs and change them actively. Yu pointed out that the western tradition of intellectuals was connected loosely to the Greek tradition, but really originated from enlightenment thinkers who benefitted from centuries of gradual secularization.⁷² I would argue, however, that Machiavelli also played an important role in this process. His critique of Christian virtues certainly played an important part in the long story of secularization. Moreover, Machiavelli felt a personal duty to use his writing to improve the public's welfare at a time when the Roman Catholic Church still dominated his world. Without Machiavelli, we really cannot understand eighteenth-century enlightenment thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and David Hume.

In a different way, Yu argued that the Chinese Confucian scholars after Confucius enjoyed an unbroken intellectual tradition. He believed that there was always the ideal figure of the Confucian intellectual who wrote and worked for the public welfare. This figure was similar to the platonic circle. The Confucian scholars knew it and tried to approach it, even if they could never reach the spiritual level of a perfect figure.⁷³ I would argue that Yu's depiction to tradition Confucian scholars was correct before the emergence

⁷² Yu Ying-shih, *Shi and Chinese Culture*, introduction, 1-11, 112-115.

⁷³ Yu Ying-shih, *Shi and Chinese Culture*, introduction, 9-10

of *Daoxue*. However, such intellectual spirits declined by the twelfth century. Due to the centralization of the state and coopting of Confucian scholars, most Confucian scholars effectively lost their independence.⁷⁴

Chen Liang was aware of the potential danger of *Daoxue*. His insistence that *Daoxue* led scholars to neglect their public duties proved true in the late imperial China. As *Daoxue* became the official study in the thirteenth century, passing the civil service examination became the first priority of Confucian scholars. During the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), Confucian scholars did not dare to critique the central government; accordingly, some of the vibrant intellectual traditions of China disappeared. Chen Liang's work was not "useful" for the government and Confucian scholars. Therefore, his texts became marginalized when scholars turned to editing and commenting on Song Confucian work. In the late nineteenth century, when the Qing Empire started to decline in part owing to western imperialism, Chen Liang's work was rediscovered by Chinese republicans. Now he became useful again, highlighting the public interest among intellectuals and arousing patriotism against foreign barbarians – in this case, understood to be the ruling dynasty of the Manchus (the former Jurchens). However, due to the collapse of Confucianism, Chen Liang's utilitarian ideas as such were not highlighted in the republican period.

Both Machiavelli and Chen Liang had fighting intellectual spirits determined to critique and change the world. Even though their philosophies held different positions in intellectual history, I remain convinced that both of them deserve further study at least as highly influential "dissidents" in their lifetimes. Furthermore, as modern literati, I feel that

⁷⁴ See more in Yang Nianqun, *Where is Jiangnan? The Establishment of the Qing Orthodox and Variations of the Intellectual World*, (Sanlian Shudian, 2010).

we might steel our own intellectual spirits in the ways they did, trying to use our knowledge to think and change the world for the better, always with an eye to the public welfare.

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