Revisiting Chinese Political Culture: The Historical Politics Approach

Chunlong Lu¹ · Ting Yan¹

Received: 12 December 2021 / Accepted: 24 December 2021 / Published online: 5 February 2022
© Fudan University 2022

Abstract

Western Political science cannot adequately address China's development in the twenty-first century. The inadequacy is due to a general neglect of historical methods and an obsession with progressive views in the discipline. As a result, the study of China's political culture is torn away from Chinese history and loses itself to become another version of modernization thesis. This article calls for the application of a historical politics approach and a poly-chronic view of history to the study of China's political culture. The article examines four potential core value components of China's political culture, namely the quest for great unification, the preference for political order, the orientation towards substance, and the deference to authority and hierarchy. Results show that those values have historical continuity and China-specificity thereby demonstrating the value of the historical politics perspective.

Keywords Historical politics · China · Political culture · Poly-chronic

Western political theories have not adequately explained the China phenomena, namely that it sustains economic growth but does not copy the Washington consensus, that it maintains one-party rule, but studies show over 90% popular support for government (see Fig. 3 in the Appendix), and that it embraces modernity but preserves much of its own culture. The dominant development framework in the West has predicted that China will become like a Western democracy in a gradual (Inglehart 1997) or abrupt way (Shirk 2008; Pei 2008), but the China phenomena have endured for the past four decades and still show signs of great vitality. China's

Chunlong Lu and Ting Yan have contributed equally to this research.

✉ Ting Yan
yanting@cupl.edu.cn

Chunlong Lu
chunlonglu@hotmail.com

¹ School of Political Science and Public Administration, China University of Political Science and Law, 27 Fuxue Road, Changping District, Beijing 102249, China

successful campaign against COVID-19 appears to be such a sign. So why cannot the dominant political science paradigm in the West explain China? How can we amend the paradigm to solve the China puzzle? In this paper, we argue that the neglect of history and context in the dominant framework of the West is the underlying reason and that only by bringing the historical politics approach back in can we get on the right track to explaining China.

The paper is divided into four sections. The next section reviews theory development in the West and exposes its defects. The second section discusses different views on history and change and introduces the concept of a poly-chronic view as the best fitting historical politics approach. The third section applies the historical politics approach and poly-chronic view to examine some core components of China's political culture. Findings and comments are included in the conclusion.

1 Why a Historical Politics Approach Matters?

Guba and Lincoln (1994: 107) define a paradigm as “basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions.” Ontology, epistemology, and methodology are so interrelated that answering one question shapes how others can be answered (Killam 2013: 9). Epistemology and methodology are hard to distinguish except that the former is more philosophical in nature than methodology (Killam 2013: 8). That is to say, to locate and evaluate a dominant paradigm, we need to look at the ontological dimension as well as the methodological dimension. Defect in one dimension leads to problems in the other.

The inadequacy to explain the China phenomena suggests that the dominant paradigm in political science discipline has an ontological defect, namely not studying China as a concept (Wang 2021). Along the ontological dimension, there are two competing approaches—the modernization approach and the contextual approach. In the 1980s and 1990s, the contextual approach led by historical sociological studies declined and the modernization approach represented by democratization studies became the dominant paradigm (Yang 2021c: 494).

The modernization approach posits a positive linear relationship between economic development and democratization, believing that economic development is a panacea, bringing all good things together such as the rise of middle class, democratic culture, and democracy. Modernization advocates assume that the rising middle class is a pro-democratic force in developing societies. In addition, this linear model between economic development and democratization posits a universal path for all developing countries; thus, developing countries should follow the Western model and obey the advice from Western scholarship.

However, the modernization approach fails to consider the different social and historical contexts of developing societies. The contextual approach, however, recognizes such contexts as the middle class in the developing societies and takes into account two country-specific contexts of the middle class.

The first context concerns the role of the state in the formation and development of the middle class in the developing societies. For example, quite a few empirical observations of Pacific Asian societies suggest that the rise of the middle class

in these countries is a direct consequence of rapid state-led economic development over the past several decades (e.g., Brown and Jones 1995; Koo 1991; Bell 1998; Jones 2005; Torii 2003). A large sector of the newly emerged middle class in Pacific Asian societies is “dependent upon the state for their employment, either as public servants, or as employees of state-supported companies” (Brown and Jones 1995: 92). This unique relationship between the state and the newly emerged middle class in Pacific Asian societies makes this class quite different from its counterparts in the industrialized Western societies. Therefore, when analyzing the political culture of the middle class in the developing world, researchers have to bear this difference in mind.

The second context concerns the variations within the middle class, especially along the line of their relationship to the state. Many empirical studies have found that since the state often plays a very active role in creating and shaping the formation of the middle class in the developing world, the emergence of a unified and distinctive middle class identity is nearly impossible. As a result, these studies suggest that the political culture of the middle classes in the developing world is not unified but divided along the lines of their respective relations with the state. Sundhaussen (1991: 112) concludes that inquiry in the political culture of the middle classes in the developing world “would have to begin with distinguishing between the different kinds of Middle Classes.”

In brief, the above comparison between the modernization approach and the contextual approach reveals that the neglect of history and context is the biggest defect in the dominant modernization framework. Because of this neglect, the modernization approach has intrinsic difficulties in recognizing the varied origins and development of middle classes in Pacific Asian societies. With ethnic history and country-specific context out of its picture, the modernization approach tends to assume that all middle classes and all democratizations will follow the Western model, because the latter invents, defines, and exports these things to the rest of the world. In other words, this defect is also ideological in nature. The same could be said about its efforts to explain the China phenomena. To correct this ontological/ideological defect, we need to bring political history back into the center of political science research.

The ontological/ideological defect in the dominant paradigm of political science discipline is also reflected in developments in the methodological dimension.

In the 1950s, the rise of behavioral revolution in combination with rational choice theory had a strong push on political science research towards the hard sciences, which focused on causality, emphasized on discovering regularities in political life, and aimed to make generalizations through laws. This scientific movement has popularized the study of politics outside of its historical and cultural setting, made quantitative methods the core of political science education, and degraded the importance of political philosophy and culture. To hasten this scientific progress in political research, this group of hard science advocates, including rational choice theorists, formal modelers, and quantitative researchers, has imposed a consensus—the so-called positivist paradigm—on epistemology and methodology in the discipline. This positivist paradigm has several tenets (e.g., King et.al 1994; Babbie 2015) as follows:

Table 1 Matrix of western political science paradigm

	Ontological/ideological dimension	
	Left	Right
Methodological dimension		
Hard	Hard left (Comparative historical analysis, historical politics)	Hard right (Modernization theory Quantitative Research Rational choice theory Formal theory)
Soft	Soft left (New Marxist theory, Critical theory, World System theory)	Soft right (Classical Political philosophy Political Liberalism)

- (1) Political science theory shall have as its basis natural laws or empirical regularities;
- (2) political science theory must be falsifiable;
- (3) political science theory shall make predictions, that is, theory offers an explanation for observed facts and predicts new facts;
- (4) fact and values are separate; fact is fact and is objective.

Reviewing this methodological history of Western political science, we can conclude that political science methods can be divided into three different levels—tools, approaches, and the paradigm level. The tool level is not only the lowest level of methodology, but also the most scientific and objective one, comprising methods such as interviewing techniques and statistical methods. The paradigm level is the highest level of methodology, which has ideological connotations behind it. At the approach level, there are quantitative research methods, big data analysis, and experimental methods among others. All these methods belong to the hard science side and have positivist attributes. However, we should be vigilant about the positivist paradigm pursued by Western political science, because it is grounded upon empirical regularities of the highly stable, post-industrial and pluralist society in the West and its ambition is to generalize these regularities to the rest of the world. Therefore, the positivist paradigm has a strong tendency to be Western-centric and embodies the central tenets of Western ideology.

Putting together both ontological/ideological and methodological dimensions, we have a better picture of Western political science research. As Table 1 demonstrates,

it can be separated into four camps along two dimensions—hard left, hard right, soft left, and soft right. The hard right is where the dominant paradigm of modernization theory is located. It mainly includes modernization theory and its variants, with the support of quantitative research, rational choice theory and formal theory, which are guided by the positivist paradigm. Obviously, this camp has ideological implications—it tends to generalize the developmental path based on the industrialized, plural Western society to the rest of the world, and regards Western liberal democracy as the end of human history (Inglehart 1997; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). The soft right includes political liberalism and classical political philosophy. It also has a clear ideological implication—it tends to treat the liberal, plural Western society as the superior model of all human society. As we could see, this camp has declined gradually since the 1950s in the discipline.

The soft left camp mainly includes new Marxist theory, critical theory, and world systems theory. Due to its ideological left nature, it has had a marginalized position in Western political research. It has also been attacked as not scientific by the dominant positivist paradigm. However, the soft left camp has more relevance to the study of contemporary Chinese politics, because the soft left camp uses historical analysis to criticize the Western capitalist system for causing never-ending backwardness in the developing world (Wallerstein 1983). Faced with being criticized as unscientific, the soft left camp endeavors to combine the positivist paradigm and new Marxist theory, using empirical data to test the validity of new Marxist theory. This attempt marks the transition from the soft left to the hard left. Comparative historical analysis is the oft-used approach in the hard left camp and had dominated social sciences for centuries before the twentieth century. However, after some period of neglect, recent decades have witnessed a strong reemergence of the comparative historical tradition. These works of historical comparison are united by a methodological commitment to offering historically grounded analysis.

Therefore, following the hard left camp, we propose the new approach of historical politics. The historical politics approach not only has epistemological/methodological significance, but also has its ontological value, which answers the question of how the political systems and political cultures of various countries take place and provides a better explanation for us to understand the historical relevance of contemporary world politics. On the one hand, we have to respect the unique historical context and cultural tradition of each country, because history and culture denotes meaning to political life and offers a framework for political action. On the other hand, we need to use empirical data to test the validity of historical politics.

The historical politics approach is the right direction to understand the China phenomenon and Chinese political culture, which go against expectations of the dominant Western political science paradigm. To do this, we need to put more emphasis on historical analysis at the paradigm level while still following the positivist inquiry of scientific research. Only from the historical perspective can we understand the special historical context of China's political development. China has unique historical and cultural traditions and hence forms its own political culture which ultimately affects potential choices and political outcomes at the national level. As Professor Yang Guangbin (2021a) argues, the unique political history of China means that history is not only a historical research method but also a subject of political research.

This unified research path is historical politics. It values the unique history and culture of all countries of interest along both ontological and methodological dimensions. Furthermore, historical politics aims at neither monolithic nor idiosyncratic inference. Rather, it seeks theory and explanation in between. It will explain the China phenomena as a combined result from both modernizing forces and China's unique historical/cultural background.

2 Two Different Views of Historical Change in the Study of Political Culture

Following the framework of historical politics, we believe that political cultural traditions—the product of history passed down from generation to generation—play a very important role in determining political results in different societies.

There is general consensus among political culture theorists that a set of political values held at the individual level are conducive to consolidation of a well-functioning political system in a society. Political culture theorists identify distinctive clusters of political attitudes that are widely held across individuals, including political cognition, affection, and judgment towards the political system (Almond and Verba 1963). These clusters of political attitudes are durable and form subjective world orientations that are highly resistant to change and are considered to be the driving force for political development.

With regard to history and political culture, there are two different general views. One is the progressive view that advocates that the trajectory of culture(s) in human history is upward linear (in progression) and that different cultures will converge to one end at some point in history. The other is a poly-chronic view that argues the trajectory of major cultures, despite their historical encounters and interactions, moves like parallel lines over the centuries to diverse ends. German philosopher Karl Jaspers (2003: 98) argues that during the axial age (800 b.c.–200 b.c.), the “spiritual foundations of humanity were laid simultaneously and independently in China, India, Persia, Judea, and Greece...and these are the foundations upon which humanity still subsists today.” His view of traditions in historical parallelism provides an example of the poly-chronic view.

Modernization theory has a typical progressive view of history and culture. The civic culture emphasized by Almond and Verba (1963) and self-expression values advocated by Inglehart and Welzel (2005), among others, are regarded as the ends for all political cultures. Those modernization theorists basically propose that driven by forces of modernization, political cultures of all human societies will slowly change from their traditional forms to the civic culture of self-expression values. With modernization theory as the dominant paradigm of Western political science, progressive ideology is governing the study of political culture.

Inglehart is a faithful supporter of modernization theory. According to his revised version of modernization, Inglehart divides the progress of all human societal values into two stages. The first stage is the transition from traditional authority to secular-rational authority, which is accompanied by the process of industrialization. Traditional societies emphasize the importance of religion and

respect for authority. With modernity brought about by industrialization, human societies start to spread more secular and rational orientations toward political authority. The second stage is the transition from survival values to self-expression values, which is closely related to the ongoing industrialization. Survival values give priority to economic and material security, while self-expression values emphasize free expression, participation in the decision-making process, quality of life, and gender equality. Inglehart and Welzel (2005) stress that this is the empirical law of modernization and the evolutions of cultural values are universal to all human societies.

From poly-chronic view, however, we can deduce that there is a super-stable structure in a society's political culture and that structure keeps key factors of political culture durable over time. Again, we use Karl Jaspers and his followers' axial age thesis as an example (Jaspers 1977, 2003; Eisenstadt 1982; Armstrong 2006). They all identify China, India, and the Occident as three cultures that originate in the axial age, develop in parallel, and co-exist independently today. Furthermore, the key factors of culture for China, India and the Occident are, respectively, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Platonism.

Fukuyama's (2011, 2014) work on political order can be regarded as adopting a poly-chronic view of history. Basically, major political entities today show different traditions in terms of state-building, rule-of-law, and accountability and those different traditions can be traced back to the axial age.

Following the introduction to the two views of history, we propose to use the poly-chronic view of history to recalibrate the study of China's political culture. The progressive view is bundled to the dominant modernization paradigm, which tends to be Western-centric and cannot adequately explain China phenomena, while the poly-chronic view fits well with the historical politics approach. Generally speaking, most mainstream studies of China's political culture are dominated by the modernization approach (e.g., Almond and Verba 1963; Gibson et al. 1992; Putnam 1993; Inglehart 1997). Here, we are going to review several representative studies by those Western scholars to determine what is mistaken with the study of Chinese political culture.

Ogden (2002) lists nine elements of a democratic political culture—individualism and independence, tolerance of different opinions and behaviors, pluralistic perspectives, a concern for the public good and community, equality of opportunity, equality before the law, voluntary participation by the people in governance, interpersonal trust, and cooperative decision-making based on bargaining and compromise. After examination of these nine elements, Ogden (2002:114) suggests “China has inklings of a democratic political culture in certain respects and not in others.” Ogden warns against simple calculation of China's “scores” on these nine characteristics to define China's political culture as either democratic or authoritarian.

Nathan and Shi (1993) focus on three dimensions of political culture that they believe are fundamental to democracy—the perceived impact of government, political efficacy, and political tolerance. They find that few Chinese citizens perceive their government as having an impact on their daily lives, even though Chinese government is more intrusive in its citizens' lives. The underestimation of the impact of government may blunt Chinese demands for democracy. Nathan and Shi conclude

that educated Chinese are substantially less likely to hold democratic orientations than people of the same educational levels elsewhere.

Dowd and his associates (2000) use an open question—which of the following values is most important—and put political democracy and individual freedom together with public order, fair administration of justice, social equality, and national peace and prosperity. They conclude that political democracy and individual freedom are not as cherished as others, notably national peace and prosperity.

The above review exposes some severe problems with the modernization approach to the study of China's political culture. First, as we have argued earlier, the modernization approach tends to use Western-based democratic culture as a template for China's political culture. The selected literature all uses notions from the Western template to evaluate aspects of China's political culture. The conclusions surround the gap in democratic values between China and its Western counterparts. Their views are arrogant and biased, because they imply that China needs to fill the gaps to become something of higher order like Western democracy. That is why we need a historical politics approach to correct the ideological/ontological bias. Second, the above authors have locked their sights on a short span of contemporary China instead of the entire 5,000-year history. They fail to see that some crucial factors in China's political culture have strong inertia and often re-emerge in Chinese society with different new forms, such as the Chinese public's preference for paternalistic authority, social order, and social stability. These factors might be the key to understand why China's political culture consistently differs from the West and why the China model functions well in contradiction to modernization propositions. A poly-chronic view allows us to treat China's political culture at the same order as the Western one.

3 Bringing Historical Politics and the Poly-chronic View to the Study of China's Political Culture

The historical politics approach and the poly-chronic view suggest that China or Chinese civilization is distinct from its Western counterparts and this distinctness has been transmitted from generation to generation, all the way from ancient times to the contemporary era. Yang (2021b:609) calls the distinctness the unique “genes” of Chinese civilization and concludes that “the political development of contemporary China is a natural continuation of the genetic community of Chinese civilization”. The same idea echoes in many studies of China that use the historical approach (e.g., Huntington 1993; Toynbee 2001; Mizoguchi 2011; Pines 2012). However, scholars have not reached agreement on the list of China genes. For instance, Zhao (2015) lists at least seven aspects that make imperial China different from other civilizations. Pines (2012) argues that pillars of traditional China and of relevance today include the hegemonic position of the political center, the concept of political unity, and political elitism. Yang (2021a:560) proposes that China genes include “a unification of the whole country and the people-oriented philosophy of governance; a bureaucracy at the government level (including the system of prefectures and counties, and the imperial examination system); cultural tolerance and the doctrine of the

mean; freedom and autonomy of social life; and the priority of family ethics, among other things”. Many more scholars simply locate the genes as Confucianism-related aspects literally interpreted from the Confucian classics (e.g., Yu 2000). The lack of agreement on that list is mainly due to the fact that there is no criterion of inclusion and exclusion in the Chinese political science discipline. However, the historical politics approach and the poly-chronic view provide some insights on selection criteria. The historical politics approach stresses patterns of historical continuity (regularity). China genes should assert their existence and leave their traces uninterrupted along the course of China’s civilizational history to qualify. Historical continuity serves as an internal validity check on could-be China genes. The poly-chronic view stipulates that the distinction between China and other civilizations has been maintained at different time points throughout history (Jaspers 1977; Armstrong 2006; Fukuyama 2011), so China genes are valid only in comparison with Western peers, which can serve as an external validity check. With those two checks in mind, the rest of the article will explore the issue of locating China genes in history and in the present time. The authors believe that the findings will improve our understanding about the ontological and methodological issue of “what is China,” amplify the voices for studying China as a concept (Wang 2021) and as a method (Yang 2021a), and demonstrate the power of historical politics and the poly-chronic view in political science studies.

The China genes under our purview are the quest for great unification (*dayitong*), the preference over political order, the orientation towards substance, and the deference to authority and hierarchy. They are more or less mentioned in or connected to the afore-mentioned China aspects (Yu 2000; Pines 2012; Zhao 2015; Yang 2021a). For each item, we will track its trajectory to check its historical continuity and examine its current contours in comparison to the West, using evidence from the latest survey data.

3.1 The Quest for Great Unification

Toynbee (2001:235–317) characterizes China as a case of great unification. Pines (2012:165) regards the quest for great unification as “the most fundamental idea behind the empire’s formation, and it remained the least affected by the advent of modernity.” Among others, Zhao (2015:8) and Wang (2021:578) both list this concept in the first place when they make the distinction between Chinese civilization and its Western counterparts. Therefore, we choose this concept as one potential candidate of China genes or essential components of Chinese political culture.

The quest for great unification is a complex notion still shrouded in controversy. For example, Yu (1995:51) postulates that this notion has five dimensions, namely the sense of unity in geography, political unity, longevity under oneness, the continuity of orthodoxy rule, and a union of ethnic minorities into the nation. He (2011) regards it as the cultural and psychological structure of Chinese society that clings to unity in geography, politics, thought, and ethnicities. Duan and Hu (2012) define it broadly as the identification with a unified Chinese state, nation, culture, and civilization. After careful survey, we find that commonalities between various definitions

converge at people's support for a unified state (whether political or geographic) and a shared identity with one Chinese nation.

The concept for great unification is historically constructed. There are four unification periods in China's dynastic history of over 4,000 years, namely the Xia-Shang-Zhou dynasties, the Qin-Han dynasties, the Sui-Tang dynasties, and the Yuan-Ming-Qing dynasties. In aggregate, the unification time is proximately 2,700 years, while the time of division is about 1,200 years. Such a long history of state unification has created, nurtured, and disseminated the ideal of great unification from generation to generation, turning it into something integral to Chinese people's beliefs.

Dynasties rose and fell, but the ideology of seeking great unification has left its footprints along the path of Chinese history since its origin. Its wording was first explicitly put forward by Gongyang (1980) during the Warring States Period (453–221 BC). During the Han dynasty, Dong Zhongshu proposed the thesis of great unification and Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty adopted his proposal. From then on, the idea of great unification was incorporated into the governing philosophy of all dynasties following the Han. Even during the dynasties ruled by ethnic minorities such as the Yuan and Qing dynasty, the concept of great unification was proclaimed as justification for governing or being governed. The quest for great unification was neither abated by the intervals between dynasties, nor repelled by ethnic rule or political division. The ruling powers in Chinese history all had belief in and commitment to the ideal of great unification (Wang and Zhu 2019:27).

When the Qing dynasty came to an end in 1912 and China's integrity was at jeopardy, evocation of the ideal of great unification reached an unprecedented height. Modern-era scholars including Liang Qichao, Gu Jiegang, Fu Sinian, and Qian Mu all wrote a lot about great unification and used it to advocate the cause of national unity.

The People's Republic of China is the fifth great unification period in Chinese history. The ideal of great unification continues to play a great role in today's political ecology. We can observe its vitality in the Communist Party of China's (CPC) latest discourse on rejuvenating the Chinese nation (Li 2017) and in mainland attitudes towards unifying Taiwan. According to a survey conducted in 2016 by the *Global Times*, 96.4% of mainland respondents agree that Taiwan is an indivisible part of China; 70.7% agree that Taiwan unification will greatly boost China's rise; and 86.2% support the option of unification by force.¹

In sum, the quest for great unification exhibits continuity from the perspective of the historical politics approach. However, is this value distinct from its Western counterparts? We choose two survey items from the "World Values Survey" (WVS)² to measure attitudes towards great unification: (1) To which of these geographical

¹ The original survey page: <http://opinion.huanqiu.com/survey/2016-04/8821518.html>. (retrieved on 10/15/2021).

² Inglehart, R., Haerpfer, C., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano J., M. Lagos, P. Norris, E. Ponarin & B. Puranen et al. (eds.). 2020. World Values Survey: All Rounds – Country-Pooled Datafile. Madrid, Spain & Vienna, Austria: JD Systems Institute & WWSA Secretariat [Version: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWVL.jsp>].

Table 2 Attitudes towards great unification

	China	US	OECD	World
National belonging	43%	30%	34%	36%
Willingness to fight for one's own country	89%	68%	66%	72%

Source: Calculated from World Value Survey data (2005–2020)

groups would you say you belong first of all? (2) We all hope that there will not be another war; if it were to come to that, would you be willing to fight for your country? The first question mainly taps a subjective priority for national identity, while the second question is about support for state integrity. Table 2 show the results and a comparison between China, the US, and OECD countries. 43% of Chinese respondents chose to first identify with the nation compared to only 30% of US respondents and 34% of OECD citizens. 89% of Chinese respondents expressed their willingness to fight for their country, while less than 70% of US respondents and OECD respondents did the same. The gaps are substantial enough to conclude that Chinese people are keener on great unification than their Western counterparts.

3.2 Mentality over Political Order

Fukuyama's (2011, 2014) works have triggered wide academic interest in the topic of political order. China is a persistent example in his analysis.

There is no uniform definition of political order, but all definitions emphasize a state of orderliness in politics (Liu 2014:38). The Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC–476 BC) and the Warring States Period (475 BC–221 BC) witnessed the origin of major schools of China's traditional thought. Political order is the core and dominant subject in all those schools, because they all aspire after the ultimate goal of achieving order in politics. Other goals such as justice and etiquette are of secondary importance compared to the emphasis placed on political order. Confucianism was no exception. Confucianism has been the official governing philosophy since Emperor Wudi of the Han dynasty and this preference over political order has carried on and constantly occupied a central place in China's governing mentality. The doctrine of the mean (*zhongyong*), a core Confucian value, can be regarded as the manifestation of this preference for political order (Hu 2012: 20–21), because its tenet is to avoid extremes or contradictions and stay balanced and harmonious. The doctrine of the mean was originally a chapter in the Classic of Rites (*lijing*) and it became an important part of education and ritual life throughout the history between the Han dynasty and the Song dynasty. From the Song to the Qing dynasty, the doctrine of the mean was singled out as a key text and it became one of the Four Classics (*sishu*), which were prerequisites for employment in the imperial government and for the education of emperors. Though its official status was lost with the end of dynastic rule, the doctrine is already deeply rooted in Chinese culture. We find its mark in the CPC's policy statements such as “grasping material and spiritual

civilization with both hands” (*wuzhiwenming he jinshenwenming liangshouzhua*) and “building a harmonious society” (*goujian hexieshehui*).

The wide acceptance of this doctrine led to interesting phenomenon throughout China’s dynastic politics—a widespread propensity to avoid extremes and to prioritize political stability. Radical reforms are something extreme that *the Doctrine of the Mean* advises against. Not surprisingly, the great reforms along the path of Chinese history very often failed due to their radical nature. For example, in the Northern Song dynasty, Wang An-shi, with the emperor’s support, launched a political reform (1069–1085) aimed to overhaul the political, economic, and education system, but nearly all reform measures were rescinded after he stepped down. Similar failures include Emperor Wang Mang’s reform (9–23) between the two Han dynasties, Zhang Juzheng’s reform (1573–1582) in the Ming dynasty and the Hundred Days’ Reform (1898) in the Qing dynasty.

The doctrine of the mean encourages the China state to emphasize political stability and to emulate previously tested institutions. Fukuyama (2011:19) observes that “many of the elements of what we now understand to be a modern state were already in place in China in the third century b.c.” Take the household registration (*hukou*) for instance. As early as in Zhou dynasty, a minister for population management was appointed to record birth, deaths, emigration, and immigration. This institution proved to be effective in facilitating governmental control over the population, hence establishing conditions for social stability. Later, Chinese dynasties all followed suit and installed similar household registration institutions. In contemporary China, the household registration system is still a very important institution of social governance and helps explain the CPC’s efficient and successful mobilization to fight against the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

The above historical politics analysis shows us that the maintenance of political order has been a prominent preoccupation along the course of Chinese history, hence qualifying itself as a historic continuity. If the zest for political order really constitutes a China gene, we should also see a large gap in emphasis on this concept between China and its Western counterparts. We use three WVS questions to measure this as follows: (1) If you had to choose which one of the things on this card would you say is most important (a. maintaining order in this country; b. giving people more say; c. fighting rising prices; d. protecting freedom of expression)? (2) Please choose the one which best describes your own opinion (a. society must be radically changed; b. society must be gradually improved by reform; c. society must be valiantly defended). (3) Most people consider both freedom and security to be important, but if you had to choose between them, which one would you consider more important?

Question (1) uses literal meaning to measure attitudes to political order. As Fig. 1 shows, the percentage choosing “maintain order” as the most important goal is higher in China than in the US or OECD countries across all six WVS waves (1989–2020). Furthermore, the results for China are always above the 50% level, while the US or OECD line struggles to break the 50% threshold. Therefore, in a literal sense, political order is more important in Chinese people’s minds.

Question 2 measures attitudes towards radical change and question 3 taps one’s inclination toward security (stability). The doctrine of the mean suggests that people

Fig. 1 Preference over political order (question (1)). Source: Calculated from World Value Survey data (1989–2020)

Table 3 Preference over political order (question 2&3)

	China	US	OECD	World
Radical change ²	11%	14%	15%	19%
Security more important ³	93%	29%	55%	70%

¹Calculated from World Value Survey data (2005–2020)

²Percentages choosing “society must be radically changed”

³Percentages choosing “security is more important”

with a preference for political order will avoid radical things and prioritize security over other goals. Therefore, if an emphasis on political order is something unique to China, then the Chinese population and their Western peers are expected to differentiate along attitudes towards these two questions. Table 3 show that only 11% of Chinese respondents welcome radical change, which is lower than 14% in US and 15% in OECD; 93% in China believe that security is more important, while the number is only 29% in the US and 55% in OECD countries. The value gap is obvious and lends support to our proposition of treating political order preference as something unique to China’s political culture.

3.3 Orientation Towards Substance

People-oriented thought (*minben sixiang*) is an oft-studied traditional Chinese philosophy related to politics and governance (e.g., Zhu 2012; Liu 2020). Confucius calls for “benevolent rule (*renzheng*)”, Mencius argues that “the people are of supreme importance... last comes the ruler (*mingui junqing*)”, and Xunzi

Fig. 2 Savings (% of GDP). Source: the World Bank data. <https://data.worldbank.org>

emphasizes the people's role (*zhongminlun*). Together, these lay a solid foundation for people-oriented thought to occupy the central stage of traditional Chinese governance culture. Generally, all dynastic rulers accept this thought and try to realize it, which leads to a collateral but vital question of seeking what people want. Xunzi's answer is that people want substantial things such as wealth and material interests. He argues that "he who can profit the people and not profiteer from them, show the people care and not work them, will win over all under Heaven" (Xunzi 2014:93). That is to say, an orientation towards substance and people-oriented thought are actually one thing. The former adopts a people's angle, and the latter uses a rulers' sight. Since we are interested in China's political culture and the Chinese nation, we would like to examine popular orientation towards substance instead of people-oriented thought. We also define this orientation as a popular propensity of preferring real, material goals to non-material ones. This orientation has a reputation overseas, because the world is amazed by the disproportional economic success of the Chinese population almost as if wealth accumulation is an instinct of the Chinese people (Chua 2004). For example, as Fig. 2 shows, the Chinese people's saving rate far exceeds that of people in the US and OECD. Their attitude towards saving money has not appeared to wither over the past 40 years. Lee Kuan Yew (Zakaria and Lee 1994) regards the propensity of accumulating material profits as cultural.

This orientation bears the check of historical politics. Xunzi's policy proposals accompanying his people-oriented thought include substantive measures such as to "lighten taxes on the fields, make fair the tariffs at markets and passes, lower the numbers of merchants, rarely raise corvée labor parties, and do not drag people away during the times of agricultural work" (Xunzi 2014: 85). In China's dynastic history, there are several well-known periods of prosperity and peace, which include the rule of emperors Wendi and Jingdi in the Han dynasty (206

Table 4 Orientation towards substance (2005–2020)

	China		US		OECD		World	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor	6.84	2.89	5.27	2.65	6.29	2.75	6.44	2.99
People choose their leaders in free elections	7.85	2.47	8.48	2.28	8.49	2.22	8.17	2.44
People receive state aid for unemployment	8.18	2.16	5.71	2.65	7.09	2.61	7.03	2.81
The economy is prospering	8.70	1.96	6.87	2.45	7.23	2.51	7.84	2.46
Civil rights protect people's liberty against oppression	8.54	1.98	7.76	2.41	7.80	2.47	7.57	2.60
Criminals are severely punished	8.84	2.03	6.76	2.64	7.16	2.82	7.69	2.75
Women have the same rights as men	8.87	1.85	8.43	2.31	8.72	2.14	8.10	2.53
The state makes people's incomes equal	7.71	2.42	3.87	2.72	5.25	3.03	5.98	3.06

Source: Calculated from World Value Survey data (2005–2020)

BC–8), the rule of Emperor Taizong (626–649) and the Kaiyuan reign of Emperor Xuanzong (713–741) in the Tang dynasty, and the rule of Emperor Kangxi and Emperor Qianlong (1661–1796) in the Qing dynasty. Their reputation for good governance can be attributed to their policy measures corresponding to Xunzi's proposals. On the reverse, the decay and demise of dynasties are mostly coupled with policies that ignore or even repress people's needs. The link between people's needs and good governance runs throughout the course of Chinese history. It still functions today and will continue to have effect. To illustrate, the 2017 report of CPC's 19th National Congress claims that the principal contradiction in Chinese society is between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life.

Now, let us move on to examine whether the orientation towards substance is distinct in China. To measure it, we choose a set of eight WVS questions asking respondents whether some given items constitute basic elements of democracy. The items are all about people's substantive needs for government except the one emphasizing elections.

Respondents are asked to rate each item on a scale from 1 (being not a basic element of democracy) to 10 (being an essential element of democracy). Shi and Ma (2009) conclude that Chinese traditional culture stresses substance and Chinese people want a type of democracy consistent with Confucius and Mencius' people-oriented thought. Zhang (2013) further points out that Chinese people need substantive democracy instead of procedural democracy. If orientation towards substance is a China-specific character, we expect Chinese respondents to rate highest on substance items and lowest on the election item. The results testify to our expectations: the China sample has the lowest average of 7.85 on the election item compared with the US (8.48) and OECD (8.49) counterparts; and Chinese respondents rate highest on all other seven substance items. Therefore, the results lend support to the conclusion that orientation towards substance is a distinct China character (Table 4).

3.4 Deference to Authority and Hierarchy

The last candidate for core Chinese cultural values in our article is Chinese people's deference to authority and hierarchy. In Confucianism, political authority and hierarchy are a means-end relationship, and together, they are central to Confucian political philosophy. Xunzi puts great emphasis on the role of political authority in good governance, arguing that the subjects should respect rulers and be awed by them. Xunzi further postulates that the only way to maintain political authority is to define and obey social hierarchies (Peng and Tang 2019: 60). Interestingly, contemporary studies of Chinese political culture continue to find evidence about the prevalence of authoritarian orientations among the Chinese public (e.g., Neher 1994; Ackerly 2005; Park and Shin 2006; Dalton and Ong 2006; Chu 2013; Zhai 2017). For example, Nathan and Shi (1993) analyze cultural values in China and find that the majority of Chinese respondents have strong orientations towards authority and hierarchy. Huntington (1991:24) explicitly names respect for authority and hierarchy as a central value for Chinese civilization, so we are interested to test whether this is the case.

Authority and hierarchy correspond to one of the five Confucian basics—ritual or *li*. Xunzi writes, “in ritual, noble and lowly have their proper ranking, elder and youth have their proper distance, poor and rich, humble and eminent, each have their proper weights” (Xunzi 2014: 84–85). That is to say, ritual arrangements should reflect the primacy of authority and hierarchy. In China's dynastic history, ritual has been heavily institutionalized to become an integral component of China's bureaucratic system. The underlying primacy over authority and hierarchy makes centralization of power a representative feature of China's bureaucracy. The Sui dynasty (581–618) first set up the ministry of ritual (*libu*) to take charge of official rituals, ceremonies, banquets, schools, royal examinations, and foreign affairs. Since then, this institution has appeared in every Chinese dynasty after the Sui and enjoyed the same executive prominence in centralized political systems. In addition, ritual was also made into state laws and ritual-breakers received severe punishment. For example, the legal code of the Qing dynasty had a separate chapter about ritual standards and stipulated that any violation of those standards was subject to banishment or even capital punishment. Similar clauses could be found in the legal documents of every Chinese dynasty.

With Confucianism and centralized bureaucracy as its vehicles, deference to authority and hierarchy demonstrates historic continuity and has been ingrained into Chinese people's minds and soul. In today's People's Republic of China, a centralized bureaucracy still functions (Fukuyama 2011) and Confucianism remains popular as shown in China's promotion of the Confucius Institute program. Chinese people's orientation towards authority and hierarchy can be felt even by seating arrangements for formal meals (Bell et.al, 2020). A comparison of this orientation between China and its counterparts demonstrated its “Chineseness” (Yang 2017).

First, we use a WVS question to measure deference towards authority and hierarchy. The question asks the respondents whether people-obey-their-rulers is an essential characteristic of democracy. Respondents are asked to rate this item on a scale from 1 (being not a basic element of democracy) to 10 (being

Table 5 Deference to authority and hierarchy

	2010–2014			2017–2020		
	Mean	SE	Pct	Mean	SE	Pct
China	6.59	2.63	68%	6.35	2.92	61%
US	5.18	2.77	42%	5.37	2.78	46%
OECD	4.67	2.99	38%	4.80	2.98	40%
world	5.99	3.01	56%	5.95	3.09	55%

¹Calculated from World Values Survey data (2010–2020)

²Survey item: people-obey-their-rulers is an essential characteristic of democracy

³Percentages whose score 5 and higher on the survey item

an essential element of democracy). The higher the respondent rates this item, the deeper deference to authority and hierarchy he or she shows. As Table 5 show, the mean score of Chinese respondents' on this question is 6.69 and 6.35, respectively, in wave 6 (2010–2014) and wave 7 (2017–2020); the US' mean scores are 5.18 and 5.37; and the OECD's mean scores are 4.67 and 4.80. China scores much higher than the US and OECD. The percentage figures tell the same story. Over 61% of Chinese respondents clearly show strong deference to authority and hierarchy, while less than 46% of US and OECD respondents do. The results provide support for treating deference towards authority and hierarchy as something distinct of Chinese culture.

We also choose an East Asian Barometer (EAB) question to measure this. The survey question presents the statement: “government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions.” Respondents are asked whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the above statement (assigned scores of 1–4, respectively). The higher the score on this question, the stronger orientation towards authority they exhibit. The reasons for using this EAB measure are twofold. First, a question with nearly the same wording was used by Nathan and Shi (1993) to measure orientations to authority and our results using nearly the same measure can provide more validity and reliability. Furthermore, the nearly 30-year span between the two analyses can provide some evidence of historical continuity. Second, the statement compares leaders to the head of a family, which broadens the concept of authority and comes closer to the Confucian definition of authority. However, one defect with this measure is that the EAB does not have the US or OECD data. To compensate, we use Japan and South Korea in comparison, because they are OECD countries and Japan is labeled as a distinct culture (Huntington 1993). Table 6 show the results. China's mean scores and percentages far exceed the numbers in Japan and South Korea. The findings are robust in 2005, 2010, and 2016. Nathan and Shi (1993: 550) recorded a percentage of 73.3% in 1993, demonstrating that the Chinese people's strong attachment to authority has endured for the past 30 years.

Table 6 Comparison of deference to hierarchy

	2005			2010			2016		
	Mean	SE	Pct. ³	Mean	SE	Pct.	Mean	SE	Pct.
China	2.91	0.48	86%	2.56	0.63	55%	2.68	0.66	61%
Japan	2.48	0.79	52%	1.76	0.75	16%	1.82	0.73	15%
South Korea	2.31	0.75	39%	2.33	0.74	41%	2.22	0.77	36%
Asia	2.88	0.85	70%	2.55	0.89	54%	2.48	0.89	49%

¹Calculated from East Asia Barometer data (2005–2016)

²Survey item: Government leaders are like the head of a family; we should all follow their decisions

³Percentages agreeing or strongly agreeing with the survey item

4 Conclusion

The study of China's political culture is at a crossroad. Modernization thesis, the dominant paradigm in the American political science discipline, has not adequately addressed the China puzzle in the twenty-first century. “[T]he country not only has thus far carved out a unique ... path to economic modernization under the rubric of market socialism but also is poised to carve out an alternative path to political modernization...[this model] can acquire its legitimacy without the standard institutional fixtures of a representative democracy (such as regular election, multiparty competition, and free media), as it will be buttressed by a set of shared symbolisms and values that are embedded in the country's own revolutionary legacy and cultural heritage and are significantly different from Western norms and values” (Chu 2013:2). Our article attributes this inadequacy to the neglect of historical methods and an obsession with progressive views in the mainstream political science discipline of the West. Modernization thesis ignores the importance of historical context, so that its research is unhealthily Western-centric (in ideology and methodology). As a result, the field of China's political culture research is dominated by Western discourse such as political efficacy, social trust, social capital, and consensual democracy. Furthermore, the modernization thesis is necessarily accompanied by a progressive view of history. As a result, study on China's political culture has been reduced to another Western version of “the end of history” proposition. However, even Fukuyama (2006, 2011) who initiated this proposition finds it problematic and resorts to Chinese tradition for answers. Therefore, our article calls for applying the historical politics approach with a poly-chronic view of time to the study of China's political culture. We go a step further by demonstrating the power of this application. We use the historical politics approach with a poly-chronic view to examine four potential core components of China's political culture, namely, the quest for great unification, the preference for political order, the orientation towards substance, and the deference to authority and hierarchy. We show that those values are of historical continuity and demonstrate China-specificity from a historical politics perspective. Therefore, they can be considered the genes of Chinese politics. The findings suggest that those values may be the key to understanding the contours of

Fig. 3 Confidence in government. Source: Calculated from WVS data (1999–2020)

contemporary Chinese political culture and help explain the dynamics of the China puzzle, including but not limited to China's high regime support, determination to unify Taiwan, effective mobilization against COVID-19, and the notion of a community of shared destiny.

Appendix:

See Fig. 3.

Declarations

Conflict of interest We have no known conflict of interest to disclose.

References

- Ackerly, Brooke. 2005. Is liberalism the only way towards democracy? Confucianism and democracy. *Political Theory* 4: 545–576.
- Almond, G.A., and S. Verba. 1963. *The civic culture*. Princeton University Press.
- Armstrong, K. 2006. *The great transformation: The beginning of our religious traditions*. Anchor.
- Babbie, E.R. 2015. *The Practice of Social Research*. Cengage Learning.
- Bell, Daniel A. 1998. After the tsunami: Will economic crisis bring democracy to Asia? *New Republic* 10: 22–25.
- Bell, D., W. Pei, and D.A. Bell. 2020. *Just hierarchy*. Princeton University Press.
- Brown, David, and David Martin Jones. 1995. Democratization and the myth of the liberalizing middle classes. In *Towards illiberal democracy in Pacific Asia*, ed. Daniel A. Bell, et al., 78–106. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

- Chu, Yun-han. 2013. Sources of regime legitimacy and the debate over the Chinese model. *China Review* 1: 1–42.
- Chua, Amy. 2004. *World on fire: How exporting free market democracy breeds ethnic hatred and global instability*. Anchor.
- Dalton, Russell J., and Nhu-Ngoc T. Ong. 2006. Authority orientations and democratic attitudes: a test of the Asian values hypothesis. In *Citizen, democracy and markets around the Pacific rim*. Dalton and Shin Oxford: Oxford University Press, 97–112.
- Dowd, Daniel V., Allen Carlson, and Mingming Shen. 2000. The prospects for democratization in China: Evidence from the 1995 Beijing area study. In *China and democracy: Reconsidering the prospects for a democratic China*, ed. Suisheng Zhao, 189–206. New York: Routledge.
- Eisenstadt, S. 1982. The axial age: The emergence of transcendental visions and the rise of clerics. *European Journal of Sociology* 2: 294–314.
- Fukuyama, F. 2006. *The end of history and the last man*. Simon and Schuster.
- Fukuyama, F. 2011. *The origins of political order: From pre-human times to the French Revolution*. Straus and Giroux: Farrar.
- Fukuyama, F. 2014. *Political order and political decay: From the industrial revolution to the globalization of democracy*. Macmillan.
- Gibson, J.L., R.M. Duch, and K.L. Tedin. 1992. Democratic values and the transformation of the Soviet Union. *The Journal of Politics* 2: 329–371.
- Gongyang, Gao. 1980. Gongyang's commentary on the spring and autumn annals. In *Shisanjing Zhushu*. Beijing: ZhonghuaShuju.
- Guba, E.G., and Y.S. Lincoln. 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. *Handbook of Qualitative Research* 2: 163–194.
- He, Xingliang. 2011. “Great unification” and China's ethnic minorities. *Yunnan Social Science* 5: 91–96.
- Hu, Ruijun. 2012. Controlling vectors for the operation of Confucian political order. *Journal of Guangxi Normal University (philosophy and Social Sciences)* 3: 19–24.
- Huntington, S.P. 1991. Democracy's Third Wave. *Journal of Democracy* 2: 12–34.
- Huntington, S.P. 1993. The clash of civilizations? *Foreign Affairs* 3: 22–49.
- Inglehart, R. 1997. *Modernization and postmodernization in 43 societies*. Princeton University Press.
- Inglehart, R., and Christian Welzel. 2005. *Modernization, cultural change and democracy: The human development sequence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jaspers, Karl. 1977. *The origin and goal of history*. Westport: Greenwood Press Reprint.
- Jaspers, Karl. 2003. *The way to wisdom: An introduction to philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Jones, D.M. 2005. *Democratization, civil Society and illiberal middle class culture in Pacific Asia*.
- Killam, L. 2013. *Research terminology simplified: Paradigms, axiology, ontology, epistemology and methodology*. Laura Killam.
- King, G., R.O. Keohane, and S. Verba. 1994. *Designing social inquiry*. Princeton University Press.
- Koo, Hagen. 1991. Middle classes, democratization, and class formation: The case of South Korea. *Theory and Society* 4: 485–509.
- Li, Dalong. 2017. Natural clustering—understanding the theory on formation trajectory of multi-ethnic China. *Journal of Northwestern Normal University (social Sciences)* 3: 68–75.
- Liu, Xing. 2020. An analysis on the fit between core values of Confucian thought and governance thought of the new era. *Shandong Social Science* 9: 149–155.
- Zhang Mingshu. 2013. *What democracy Chinese want?* Beijing: Social Science Academic Press (China).
- Mizoguchi, Yuzo. 2011. *China as a method*. Translated by Sun Junyue. Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore.
- Nathan, A.J., and Tianjian Shi. 1993. Cultural requisites for democracy in China: Findings from a survey. *Daedalus* 2: 95–123.
- Neher, Clark D. 1994. Asian style democracy. *Asian Survey* 11: 949–961.
- Ogden, Suzanne. 2002. *Inklings of democracy in China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Park, Chong-Min., and Doh Shin. 2006. Do Asian values deter popular support for democracy? *Asian Survey* 3: 341–361.
- Pei, Minxin. 2008. *China's tripped transition: The limits of developmental autocracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Peng, Zhengde, and Yuhuan Tang. 2019. Ethic connotations of Xunzi's Political authority thought. *Ethics Study* 4: 60–66.
- Pines, Yuri. 2012. *The everlasting empire*. Princeton University Press.

- Putnam, Robert D. 1993. *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Shi, Tianjian, and Ya. Ma. 2009. Out of “democracy” superstition. *Open times* 6: 142–149.
- Shirk, Susan L. 2008. *China: Fragile superpower*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sundhaussen, Ulf. 1991. Democracy and the middle classes: Reflections on political development. *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 37: 100–117.
- Torii, Takashi. 2003. The mechanism for state-led creation of Malaysia’s middle classes. *Developing Economies* 41: 221–242.
- Toynbee, Arnold J. 2001. *A study of history*. Translated by Liu Chengbei and Guo Xiaolin. Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. 1983. *Historical capitalism with capitalist civilization*. London, New York: Verso.
- Wang, Xiangmin. 2021. “China” as an analytical concept: A new beginning. *Chinese Political Science Review* 6: 575–597.
- Wang, Jianguo, and Li. Zhu. 2019. Great unification—cultural base of China’s modern state building. *Jiangnan Forum* 6: 57–63.
- Xuebin, Liu. 2014. On pre-Qin Confucians’ and legalists’ views on political order. *Journal of Guangxi Normal University (philosophy and Social Sciences)* 4: 38–42.
- Xunzi. 2014. *Xunzi: The complete text*. Translated by Hutton Eric L. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Yang, Guangbin. 2017. General theory on national governance capabilities: Exploring new paradigms for research on world politics (Comparative Politics). *Teaching and Research* 1: 5–22.
- Yang, Guangbin. 2021a. “China as a method” for Chinese political science research. *Chinese Political Science Review* 6: 546–574.
- Yang, Guangbin. 2021b. The political development of contemporary China. *Chinese Political Science Review* 6: 598–620.
- Yang, Guangbin. 2021c. Research agenda for political science in China in an era of great change. *Chinese Political Science Review* 6: 488–505.
- Yu, Yingshi. 2000. *Democracy, human rights and Confucian culture*. Asian Studies Centre, St. Antony’s College.
- Yu, Rubo. 1995. Brief comments on Confucian thought of great unification. *Qiluxuekan* 1: 51–54.
- Zakaria, F., and Kuan Yew Lee. 1994. Culture is destiny: A conversation with Lee Kuan Yew. *Foreign Affairs* 2: 109–126.
- Zhai, Y. 2017. Values of deference to authority in Japan and China. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 2: 120–139.
- Zhao, Dingxin. 2015. *The Confucian-legalist state: A new theory of Chinese history*. Oxford University Press.
- Zhu, Fengjuan. 2012. An analysis of the contemporary values of ancient China’s people-oriented thought. *Journal of Peking University (philosophy and Social Sciences)* 1: 123–129.