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DEBATES ON POLITICAL
MERITOCRACY IN CHINA
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Debates on Political Meritocracy in China A Historical Perspective

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In his satirical novel *The rise of the meritocracy*, Michael Young, suggests that political hierarchies in meritocratic regimes may become frozen and undermine social mobility. Daniel Bell has argued against this position in his book *The China Model*.¹ We will support and deepen this rebuttal from the perspective of the history of ancient Chinese political thought. In fact, every political hierarchy may become frozen; every society may face the problem of the decline of social mobility. However, the problem may not be the concrete political institutions but the weakness of human nature. Meritocracy is precisely the only treatment of such political bottlenecks, which had been proved repeatedly in the history of ancient Chinese political history. The debates about political meritocracy tend to reappear, with new iterations and interpretations, precisely when the old political hierarchies become ossified. Bell's book should thus be viewed as the latest critical intervention. It is important to discuss the historical background to such debates.

¹ Daniel Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*, Princeton University Press, 2015, pp. 111-112, pp. 125-135.

I

The context for debates about political meritocracy

Regarding the word “meritocracy”, the first part, *mereō* (“earn”) is from Latin, and the second part, *κράτος* (“strength, power”) is from Greek. These two parts of different origins were put together by Michael Young to create an effect of political irony. In contrast, in ancient Chinese (as well as modern Chinese), the words “选贤与能” (*xuan xian yu neng*), from one of the most important Confucian classics, *The Book of Rites (Eastern Han Dynasty)*, which could be translated as political meritocracy in English, is a political ideal. “选” means select or advance. “贤” means the virtuous. “能” means the capable ones. “与” means the conjugation, and the whole phrase means that the political system should aim to select or advance the virtuous and the capable ones for public service (ruling for all).

The phrase “Select the virtuous and the capable ones” expresses a kind of temporality. When we refer to “选”, select or advance, there is a presumption that before the selection or advancing, the virtuous and capable people haven’t yet been given suitable positions. Hence, to select the virtuous and the capable ones could be interpreted as an ideal principle for selecting competent people and applying the principle could be understood as a treatment when political realities do not conform to this ideal.

As a matter of fact, in ancient Chinese history, every occurrence of appealing for meritocracy occurred not when politics was going well but rather when the court lacked political dynamics. Due to different kinds of reasons, political hierarchies became frozen, and the governing body could not function well.

That's when the appeal of meritocracy appeared, repeatedly. It is not meritocracy itself that leads to the freeze of political hierarchies. Quite the reverse, political meritocracy—selecting and advancing the meretricious according to the criteria of “virtue” and “capacity”—is the only solution for improving the political situation.

So the original intention of meritocracy is to solve the problem of ossification of political hierarchies by bringing the dynamics back to politics, although it doesn't mean that meritocracy is a method that could put things right once and for all. We have to continuously fight with the weakness (say, greed or selfishness) of human nature. If an institution keeps aiming for selecting and advancing the virtuous and the capable ones, it expresses recognition of human frailty.

The China Model, by Daniel Bell, appears against a similar background. Along with the anti-corruption drive in China, the debate of meritocracy became important again. How to allow people of virtue and ability to participate in politics in the position where he or she is fit, and to make more politically intelligent decisions? It's the problem of meritocracy. This problem is a recurring theme in Chinese history, and let us discuss some of the institutional innovations meant to restore meritocratic elements in times of decline.

II

The interweaving of recommendation and examination

If we look closely at the way ancient Chinese officials were selected, we will find that the two methods of recommending and testing complement each other, having different emphasis in different times. The most important ways of selecting people in

Chinese history were recommendatory system, nine-rank system, and imperial examination system. We will discuss these various methods, in (roughly) chronological order.

The Recommendation System

The historical background of the appearance and perfection of the recommendation system was the Han Dynasty (BCE202-220), which replaced Qin Dynasty (BCE221-BCE207). At the beginning of the new dynasty, many people were appointed to participate in political governance because of their meritorious military services, which is consistent with the Qin Dynasty. This is the principle of employing established in the Shang Yang reform², and also the principle of promoting generals in successive dynasties. However, as the reign of the Han Dynasty going become more stable, the political environment had shifted from a turbulent state of war to a period of relative peace. At this time, the division of work between the ministers and the generals became clearer and there was a need for more ministers. Therefore, Emperor Han Wu Di (BCE157-BCE87) further developed the recommendation system, which originated in the period of his father, Han Wendi. Emperor Wu Di named it “以儒取士” (selecting scholars according to the criteria of the Confucianism).³ People were selected according to four criteria or “specialties” (四科): virtue and conduct, study of Confucian classics, rules of composition and rhetoric, and capacity.

² For example, the soldiers were promoted according to the numbers of decapitated heads of the enemy soldiers, which could be regarded as a kind of meritocracy favored by Legalists.

³ Cf. 劳干：“汉代察举制度考” (On the Recommendation system in Han Dynasty) 中研院历史语言研究所集刊, 第十七册.

The rulers of the Han Dynasty declared themselves different from the rulers of the Qin Dynasty because they aimed to govern the country according to “孝” (filial piety, or reverence for elderly family members). The most important the four specialties is the first, virtue and conduct, and the most important part of moral conduct is filial piety.⁴The influence of *The Book of Changes* was profound in Han Dynasty, including the political aspect. As the 后汉书·荀爽列传 (Biography of Xun Shuang, *History of the Later Han Dynasty*) puts it: “Han is of virtue of fire, fire is born from wood, wood promotes fire, so the virtue of fire is filial piety, the image of which in *The Book of Change* is Li... thus the system of Han Dynasty ordered the whole country to learn *The Book of Filial Piety*, and selected officials by recommendation according to filial piety and clean record.” Such ideas be seen as metaphysical justifications for the importance of filial piety in the Han Dynasty.

Filial piety gradually became the most important virtue at that time, which was not only political but also religious. As *The Book of Filial Piety* put it: “孝, 始于事亲, 中于事君, 终于立身” (Filial piety, starts with serving parents, unfolds by serving the emperor, and completes itself by establishing oneself in society?) “故当不义, 则争之” (When the one you serve is unjust, argue with them.) “孝悌之至, 通于神明, 光于四海, 无所不通” (When filial piety grows utmost, it could access to the spirits and illuminate the four seas—it reaches everywhere.) Filial piety demands serving parents and emperor by upright conduct, which is definitely not blind obedience. It is filial to correct the faults of parents and of the emperor. Filial piety is in the light of “正道”

⁴Especially during Eastern Han Dynasty, filial piety became even more significant.

(*orthos logos*), or more precisely, the moral order of universe expresses filial piety.

However, every specific metaphysical problematic comes from current social reality. Many emperors took over the Court at a very young age in the Han Dynasty, and they needed their mother to help them governing the country. During the Han Dynasty, “孝” was used often as posthumous name of emperors. As a consequence, filial piety became an extremely important political element.⁵ Ministers, generals, and officials had to learn from the emperor who was filial.

Although filial piety was most important in Han Dynasty, the other three specialties also influenced the selection of scholars. Whereas filial piety relied mainly on recommendations, the other three specialties relied on more on examinations. The words “察举” means recommended by examining. The recommendatory system did not purely and simply rely on recommendations. It was a system of combining recommendations with examinations. Local officials recommended a certain number of people to the central government every year. The Court gave recommended people suitable official positions; or, officials and students at all levels of school underwent some sort of assessment or interview to get political positions.

The original motivation of the recommendatory system was to select and promote the virtuous and the capable ones for public service, emphasizing more on examining their virtue and capacity

⁵ Cf. 白效咏; “易学与东汉政治初探” (On the relation between the study of the Book of Change and the politics in Eastern Han Dynasty), 浙江学刊, 2013 年第1期.

rather than “门第” (family status). After the middle of Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), the more powerful families came to control the main power of recommendation. Most of the recommended people were from those noble families. The recommendatory system lost its initial function of selecting and promoting competent and virtuous officials and degenerated as a way to protect the interests of certain families. Political hierarchies ossified, the rulers ruled for the interests of established elites, and politics lost its dynamics.

The Nine-rank system

To solve the problem of ossification, the nine-rank system appeared in the Wei, Jin, Southern, and Northern Dynasties (220-589).⁶ The court appointed several local recruiters (中正) to recommend the talents, and the competent men were ranked by three criteria: family status, moral conduct, and capacity. After ranking they would be appointed to suitable positions. The original intention of setting up nine-rank system was to correct a series of problems raised by recommendatory system. As *The History of Liu Song Dynasty* put it: “The nine-rank system aims to classify the competent men by merit, rather than family status.”

⁶ Cf. 唐长孺: “九品中正制度试释” (On the nine-rank system), *魏晋南北朝史论丛*, 中华书局, 2011年; 陈琳国: “两晋九品中正制与选官制度” (The nine-rank system in the Western and Eastern Jin Dynasty), *历史研究*, 1987年第3期; 胡宝国: “关于九品中正制的几点意见” (A few points on the nine-rank system), *历史研究*, 1988年第1期; 胡舒云: “九品官人法性质辨析” (The nature of the nine-rank system), *东北师范大学报*, 2003年第6期.

At the time of implementation, several noble families dominated the recommendatory system, and those from humble families hardly had chance to be recommended. The most important change reform of nine-rank system was that people were to be recommended not by those powerful families, but rather by local recruiters (中正). Although family status was one of three standards, compared to the recommendatory system, men from humble families had more opportunities in the new system.

Unfortunately, the new select system gradually became frozen. In the intellectual history of ancient China, the nine-rank system is often criticized as a backward selection system. The most famous criticism was put forward in *The History of the Jin Dynasty*: “In upper ranks, no one came from the humble families; in lower ones, no one came from the powerful families.”

On one hand, powerful families gradually took charge of the positions of local recruiters, thus entirely controlling the ranking system. On the other hand, the nine-rank system has its own drawback, because “family status” was regarded as a selection standard. However, it’s worth noting the political context of education in the Wei and Jin dynasties. Because of incessant warfare, people had to be constantly on the run. Official and private schools decayed, and aristocratic families preserved their particular family education by homeschooling or paternal teaching and influence. Hence, the educational situation of aristocratic families often fits their good reputations. But when the official and private schools were revived, the nine-rank system declined and was replaced by the imperial examination system.

The Imperial examination system

The Imperial examination system was founded in the Sui Dynasty (581-618) and perfected in the Tang (618-907) and Song dynasties (960-1279). The court selected the competent men by imperial examination regardless of family background and without any need for references or recommendations. As a consequence, the monopoly of aristocratic families on the selection of the competent men was almost completely broken, reflecting the spirit of fairness. This is discussed in *The China Model*,⁷ but we will complement what he says with some criticisms of the examination system.

In the Song Dynasty, the imperial examination system was substantially improved. But some Confucian thinkers criticized the scholars' motivation for taking the examinations. If scholars lost their original conscience of rightness and truth, and instead took the exam as a profitable way to gain fame and material interests, those selected ones as officials would have no virtue at all. The imperial examination system could select those who are neither virtuous nor capable. Thus they argued for reforming the imperial examination system. For example, Zhu Xi (1130-1200) wrote to the emperor arguing for establishing a separate discipline, called “德行” (virtue and moral conduct), and for abolishing the discipline of “词赋” (composition and rhetoric).⁸ The discipline of “virtue and moral conduct” is different from the other disciplines as “经、子、史、时务” (“Confucian classics, philosophical writings, history, and current affairs”). This new discipline of “virtue and moral conduct” uses

⁷ See also Daniel Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*, Princeton University Press, 2015, p65.

⁸ Cf. 李存山: “朱子《学校贡举私议》述评” (On Zhu Xi's comments of chief examiners in school), 中国社会科学院研究生院学报, 2011年第2期.

recommendation to select the talents, not as “Confucian classics, philosophical writings, history, and current affairs” using examination to select. Zhu Xi regards it as a necessary supplement of the imperial examination system, erecting concrete examples for scholars, and also reminding them the significance of virtue and moral conduct.

Zhu Xi’s teachers were even more radical. Cheng Hao (1032-1085) and Cheng Yi (1033-1107), known as “二程” (“The Two Chengs”), were completely against the system of the imperial examination.⁹ They argued that the imperial examination system was neither efficient nor politically practical. On the one hand, too few officials few selected by examination, hence not sufficient for the governing body; on the other hand, people selected through examinations may only “博闻强记” (“have encyclopedic knowledge”), but would lack the ability to deal with politics. Hence they suggested replacing imperial examination system entirely by recommendation. First, the elders of the counties and the students of the Imperial College could recommend some candidates. Then, the Court would inspect them, both assessing their abilities as erudite scholars, and also appointing them as provisional officials in order to review their political capacities. In the end, the Court would rank scholars through a debate. After all these procedures, the Court could officially appoint every selected scholar to a proper position. Therefore, more talents could be selected by recommendatory system designed by “The Two Chengs”. At the same time, this system could avoid selecting those who are neither virtuous nor capable. The more important innovation is that the Court could

⁹ Cf. 潘富恩、徐余庆: “论二程的人才观” (On the Two Chengs’ view of talents), 兰州大学学报, 1987年第1期.

select those scholars who are politically competent through actual political trials. Such suggestions were implemented to a certain extent in later dynasties.

We could clearly perceive the return of recommendatory system, which couldn't be understood as reactionary. "The Two Chengs" proposed the method of recommendation as a proper treatment of malaise of imperial examination. However, the imperial system had been fully developed in Song Dynasty, the suggestions of "The Two Chengs" and Zhu Xi weren't adopted at that time. We could only discuss it as a historical criticism from the Confucianism aspect.

In short, it's not easy to select virtuous people through examination, but it is also difficult for the recommendation system to be fair and to give equal opportunities to candidates without powerful family backgrounds. It's worth asking more general questions. Why do political systems tend to degenerate from meritocratic ideals, and what sorts of prescriptions can restore and reinterpret meritocratic ideals so they fit new political contexts? The pre-imperial debates between Confucian and Legalist thinkers help us to answer such questions. Next, we will discuss the interaction between these two complementary thought systems that are inseparably connected as the two sides of the same medal.

III

Debates on Political Meritocracy between Confucians and Legalists

During the Spring and Autumn (BCE 770-BCE476) and the Warring States (BCE47-BCE221) periods, the monarchs of various states introduced institutional reforms, in order to occupy

more land even unify China again, and they often relied on the talents of Legalist thinkers.¹⁰ The three schools of Legalistic thought laid emphasis on “勢” (puissance), “術” (technique), “法” (Law). The leading scholars were Shen Dao (BCE390-BCE315), ShenBuhai (BCE385-BCE337), and Shang Yang (BCE395-BCE338). Shen Dao likened the King and the Puissance to the Dragon and the Dragon needs mist and clouds to fly high. If the mist disperses, the dragon will become a little earthworm. Therefore, a king has to use puissance to guarantee his reign, and the execution of the law as well. ShenBuhai who emphasized technique had a different view. Technique differs from puissance. The one in a high position doesn't necessarily have puissance. In the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States' periods, many ministers killed their kings. ShenBuhai admonished the king to know how to harness his ministers, the technique of which should silently hide in the heart of the king. The laws should be used to govern the civilian population, thus need to be known by everyone. By contrast, the technique should only be used to deal with ministers who are very close thus most dangerous to the king.

However, Shang Yang depended more on written laws. His suggestion to Duke Xiao of Qin was implementation of new laws, demanding all the ministers, officials and the civilian population to follow the laws. If the nobles or ministers violate the laws, they need to be punished as much as the civilians. Although Shang Yang was torn asunder by five carts in the streets after his death because of the draconian enforcement of the new laws, the new laws were not abolished. Among all the political

¹⁰ It is worth noting that the political appearance of Legalism is also in accordance with the Confucian principle of “selecting the virtuous and the capable ones.” In this context, it related more to capacities.

reforms in the Warring States period, only Shang Yang Reforms actually made a systematic change in the legal system, which helped the Kingdom of Qin to accumulate and eventually to unify China (BC221) and name himself Qin Shi Huang, First Emperor of Qin.

However, his son, Hu Hai (BC230-BC207) was neither virtuous nor capable, making Qin the shortest dynasty in Chinese history, lasting only 15 years. Many Confucian thinkers argued the law of Qin too strict; the civilians took cruel officials as their teachers. However, the Han Dynasty was also keen to use ruthless officials. There were so many cruel officials in the Han Dynasty that the *The Book of Han* even had a special chapter called “Biography of Cruel Officials.”

The essential difference between Han Dynasty and Qin Dynasty is to what extent they also used the political thoughts of Confucianism to govern a country. Qin Shi Huang was famous for burning books and burying Confucian scholars. By contrast, Emperor Wu Di adopted the suggestion of Dong Zhongshu (BC179-BC104)—“罢黜百家，独尊儒术” (“pay supreme tribute to Confucianism while banning all other schools of thought”) -- to educate the people with a unified Confucian ideology. Initially, Emperor Wu Di preferred to use severe laws and punishments, for which Dong Zhongshu admonished him. Dong persuaded him to replace draconian torture with benevolent politics, but Emperor Wu Di still used many cruel officials and complicated names of punishment to assure that the law would be followed. During the reign of Emperor Wu Di, which lasted about fifty years, there were fourteen prime ministers, five of which were executed, and four of which committed suicide or died in prison. Even the ministers were in such a dangerous situation, not to mention the common officials and the civilians. From this aspect, there is no essential difference between the Han Dynasty and the

Qin dynasty in applying legalism to govern the country. However, the Han Dynasty went further by developing a quasi-metaphysical form of Confucianism to provide legitimacy for its rule, which was a step that the Qin Dynasty failed to achieve. On one hand, Emperor Wu Di used the Confucian thought of Dong Zhongshu's philosophy as the ideology and base of domination; on the other hand, he relied on Legalists' law to guarantee the policies being executed thoroughly. Thus, the mutual complementary structure of Confucianism and Legalism was developed, which became the most fundamental political structure in ancient China.¹¹

According to 汉书·宣帝本纪 (Biography of Xuan Di, The Book of Han), during the reign of Xuan Di (BCE91-BCE49), the grandson of Wu Di, was characterized by a stable political climate, social harmony, and economic prosperity, which is called "Resurgence of Xuan Di". However, Xuan Di had the same propensity of his grandfather to rely on severe officials. According to 汉书·元帝本纪 (Biography of Yuan Di, The Book of Han), when the prince (later Yuan Di) suggested that Xuan Di using more Confucians, Xuan Di answered: "汉家自有制度,

¹¹ There are some debates on whether it's "the Confucianism in appearance while the Legalist in nature" or "the Legalist in appearance while the Confucianism in nature". "The Confucianism in appearance while the Legalist in nature" means using Confucian ideology as appearance, but Legalism technique as the true political source. "The Legalist in appearance while the Confucianism in nature" means the essential core of political ideology is Confucian, but with reliance on concrete Legalist technique as an external method to realize specific political aims. So we use the term "being inseparably connected as the two sides of the same medal" to describe the relation of the Confucianism and the Legalism.

本以霸王道杂之，奈何纯任德教，用周政乎？” (“Han Dynasty has its own principle, mixing the Tao of hegemon with Tao of humane authority. How could we simply apply the virtuous civilizing means of the Zhou Dynasty?”) Xuan Di figured that the prince couldn’t comprehend the depth of his advice, and he sighed for a very long time, then said: “It’s going to be the prince who messes up the politics.” Tao of hegemon is of Legalist inspiration, while Tao of humane authority is of Confucian inspiration. It’s the earliest documented effort to mix Legalism with Confucianism. During Xuan Di’s reign, he improved the mutual complementary structure of Confucianism and Legalism to a mature state where they could make up for their own and each other’s shortcomings. That’s how Xuan Di could revive the Han Dynasty. In contrast, once Yuan Di (BCE74-BCE33) assumed the throne, he used so many Confucians that bureaucracy became too weak to sustain a whole country. The group of emperor’s in-laws and eunuchs took the opportunity to crush the group of Confucians. Yuan Di had no ability to save the situation, and the court fell into chaos.¹²

Hence, Confucianism and Legalism are both indispensable for politics in ancient China. Without Legalism, it is difficult to ensure administrative efficiency; without Confucianism setting good aim to politics, the technique of Legalism would be a disaster. The aim of Legalism is to continuously improve the state’s capacity and efficiency. But the Legalists were not overly concerned with the question of whether or not the aim itself was just or moral. Therefore, it’s clear that the advantage of Legalism is providing means of achieving an end, not a guarantee of

¹² We might think of Qin Dynasty, when the emperor ruled the whole country solely by Legalism the politics sank into chaos as well.

morally justifiable purpose. In contrast, one of the most important contributions of Confucianism is unceasingly persuading the emperor to “Rule for All”, which is the good and just aim of politics. “Select and advance the virtuous and the capable ones for public service” is the very principle of selecting the competent and virtuous ones according to the general aim of “Rule for All”. The political system should aim to select virtuous and capable people, and appoint them to suitable positions. Those selected ones are the ones who could grasp the way of the humane authority, implement the benevolent policy in the world, and protect the civilians from cruel policies.

Hence, when we criticize meritocracy for corruption and class ossification, we need to think twice that after all the subjects of greed are real people. A good political system should have taken into account the weakness of human nature, and seek to overcome it to the extent possible. Through our narrative and analysis, we could reach the conclusion that the Legalism has no moral authority higher than the emperor, which is why the ethical focus of Confucianism was indispensable to ancient Chinese politics. Properly speaking, “Rule for All, and Select the Virtuous and the Capable Ones for Public Service” was the treatment for the weakness of human nature that Legalist thinkers so much emphasized. The weakness of human nature results in the decay of social mobility, while the meritocratic selection system that can remedy the situation.

Such ideas are not unique to ancient Chinese political thinking. If we regard politics as a career, those who engage in politics need relevant ability, and we can also refer to the discussion on *φρόνησις*, practical wisdom, in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 6. Virtues of character could make the practical aim correct, and practical wisdom could make the aim realized. (EN 1140b11-20; 1144a7-9, a20-b1; 1145a5-6; 1151a15-19). Virtues of character

are relevant to every aspect of life, and also to our understanding of the good life in general. Evil will demolish our notion of the good life, but virtues preserve it (1140b11-20, 1144a34-b1, 1151a15-16). The practical problems are specific, variable, and uncertain, and practical wisdom is the very virtue to let an agent do the proper thing in the proper place at a proper time. A person of practical wisdom is a virtuous person, who has went through years of training, and whose desires are in accordance with right reason, and who could set rational aims for concrete ethical practices. If someone could only solve problems but could not set proper aims for his or her life, Aristotle would not regard this person as one with practical wisdom, but rather just one with cleverness. Cleverness, unlike practical wisdom, is a neutral even negative term in Aristotle's terms.

When we refer to the relation between Confucianism and the Legalism as “inseparably connected as the two sides of the same medal”, we can understand it in the same way. Legalism emphasizes “cleverness”, so Legalists could make accurate judgments on specific practical situations and mobilize all kinds of resources to take measures to solve problems. Confucians pay more attention on setting good aims for ethical practices, whether it's the planning of a good life in general or a perception on specific issue under a certain circumstance. Accordingly, the standard for the selection of the competent men by Legalists is strong and effective execution and relying on power to solve problems for the emperor, although according to the Confucian standard, Legalists often selected villains who have no desire for the justice but only for partial or immoral interests. In contrast, the Confucians aim to select virtuous and exemplary people as public officials, but according to the Legalist standard, those exemplary men have no capacity to deal with politics and administration.

In short, the main difference between Legalism and Confucianism is that the former have no moral authority to appeal to beyond what the rule desires, whereas Confucians aim to follow the way of the humane authority, a moral standard that serves to evaluate the political status quo. If the emperor has desires or implements policies that are not in accordance with morality, every real Confucian has responsibility to directly admonish the emperor. They should never be afraid of the power, but afraid of being away from the Tao. Exemplary persons ask to limit the emperor's unreasonable desires and policies, while preserving justice and peace throughout the all country. When an exemplary person could have the Legalist ability to grasp practical issues and implement the Way, or when a Legalist could be able to pursue justice for all, it would be the complete expression of the principle of "Rule for All, Select the Virtuous and the Capable Ones".

IV

Conclusion

The essence political meritocracy is "Rule for all, select and advance the virtuous and the capable ones." In ancient China, every selection system shared the same initial purpose, namely, to select competent and virtuous men for public service. However, due to the weakness of human nature, the political rulers would tend to degenerate from the ideal of "rule for all", and the selection system would fail accomplishing its mission. When the competent men couldn't be selected fairly and continuously for the governing body, politics would inevitably lose its dynamics and become frozen until the next round of fair selection, hence necessitating reform of the selection system. In ancient Chinese history, Confucians scholars never stopped appealing for a fair

selection system, persuading and admonishing the emperor to rule for all, which repaired the deficiencies, and sometimes tragedies, caused by Legalism. That might be the greatest contribution of Confucian political thought, and also one of the most important features of ancient Chinese politics.

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