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*Distant water cannot put out a fire at hand: the continuity of
Chinese political thought from antiquity to contemporary times*

DOCTORAL THESIS

SUMMARY

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Distant water cannot put out a fire at hand: the continuity of Chinese political thought from antiquity to contemporary times

The present thesis describes that immense continuity that runs along the entirety of Chinese political thought. This may sound like a radical proposition, especially seeing that the general view of the issue is that modern China broke with its long history. The present thesis is divided into eight chapters that in their turn are divided into further sub-chapters.

Using two examples from Chinese history, the preface describes the general outlook of Chinese political thought and more precisely the differences between ancient Chinese and ancient Greek political thought. Both examples show that while in ancient Greece, the philosopher and thinker takes a central role in politics, going as far as becoming the philosopher king in Plato's Republic, in ancient Chinese political thought the sage in the most frequent cases is but the advisor and official of the ruler. On top of this, if he finds that the ruler is mediocre, depraved and thereby renders his entire court unworthy, the sage leaves government and retires from the world. Legalism is the only tendency which holds that the sage official has to strain himself tenfold exactly when the ruler and his government are unworthy to correct them both. According to legalism the sage official has to be ready to sacrifice his own life should the need arise. On the other hand this attitude neatly fits with the general anti-individualist and collectivist main tendencies of the history of ideas in China, from which only the theories of the Yang Zhu school are the sole exception. Every main school of thought in China, aside from the just mentioned Yang Zhu school, are anti-individualistic and collectivist. This main anti-individualist and collectivist tendency is why the thinker all throughout the history of ideas in China does not strive for the dominant position and although there are exceptions to these, they are always exceptions and never the general rule. The thinker is not the ruler himself, but rather the sage official advising him and struggling to instruct and teach him.

This also becomes evident from the cosmology-cosmotechnics distinction theorized by Taiwanese philosopher Yuk Hui. In the western philosophical tradition arose cosmology, in other words the goal to realize the most exhaustive knowledge of the surrounding reality and its most precise description. In a stark contrast to this, according to Yuk Hui, in China this development ought to be termed cosmotechnics which means that the most fundamental discourse regarding reality in China does not strive merely for understanding, but much rather at changing reality. Even more so: changing reality in very specific ways that make it more inclusive and livable for those who inhabit reality. This is intricately linked to the anti-individualist and collectivist tendency outlined above: cosmotechnics does not strive for the maximization of personal welfare and well-being, but much rather the collective betterment of all who inhabit reality. Legalism, confucianism, daoism all strive to change reality, to the best of their knowledge, for the betterment of all who live in this world. Later Chinese Buddhism extends this from the world of men to the world of all living beings. Yuk Hui brings mythological examples to signify this divide in western and eastern conceptions. In his views the fundamental lesson of the myth of Prometheus is that the gods will punish anyone who goes against their perfect reality so ordained by themselves. Prometheus is made an example of this: he dares to change reality by granted humanity the knowledge of fire.

In a stark contrast to this, in China we see Yu, the Great, a cultural hero and sage king who according to tradition ruled during the 3rd millennium BCE, who when floods devastated both crop and men, repairs water diversion ditches and invents new ones. Working and living together with his underlings, they dig ditches, divert rivers, often into rice paddies and so on. According to Yuk Hui one ought to realize three important factors from all this. First, that reality ought to be changed for the sake of those inhabiting it because reality has no preordained perfect state, and in many cases it is downright inimical to human life. Second, the ruler Yu, the Great, lived and worked together with his underlings, because when it comes to fundamentals, there are no distinctions between men: the different hierarchies we observe are sometimes forced solutions, other times they are wholly illegitimate. This influenced the much later Confucian view that people are equal by birth, different by practice. Third, changing reality is not preordained by gods, nor magic, not even illusion, but technological invention and hard work: Yu, the Great, and his diligent people dig ditches, leads rivers into riverbeds, directs them to rice paddies and cultivated land

and so on and so forth. Yu, the Great, though not once uses magic, divine intervention, but rather relies on technology and the diligence of his hard working people. These three main point had an extremely long lasting influence on Chinese thought and continues to influence it to this day.

On the other hand all the way from antiquity we can see how radically Chinese thought centers practice and how much emphasis it lays on it following from theory. Even when it rightfully acknowledges that practice is impossible without theory, it holds that any theory, any reasoning, any contemplation that does not engender practice is less than useless. One of the most well-known dictums of Chinese philosophy is what Wang Yangming (1472-1529) conceptualized as follows during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644): *“Knowing and doing is of one essence, [because] knowing is the root of all practice, while practice is the fruit of knowledge.”* Owing to this, the thought the west ascribes to Marx - namely that the point of philosophy is not merely to know the world, but rather to change it - has a much longer and more developed history in China. Therefore all throughout Chinese history practice has been emphasized a lot more than in the west along with the requirement for philosophers that their thought to have some sort of realistic implications and consequences. This is also the reason why we see all throughout Chinese history that the peasantry was a whole lot more respected than the merchant class, the latter of whom for thousands of years were morally seen as the most bottom rung of society who create no value, merely live off the labor of others. At various times across Chinese history the merchant classes were subjected to extensive extra taxes along with other societal constraints on them. My thesis describes a number of these. There even have been examples where these constraints were devised, advocated for and implemented by officials coming from merchant family backgrounds: chief among them was Sang Hongyang who’s work is analyzed extensively in my thesis. This again shows what was outlined above: the point is that personal advancement is not the main goal of this history of ideas, but rather the betterment of society as a whole.

Derived from all that was described up unto this point, I established three hypotheses. First one being that there is a straight continuity from pre-modern classical political thought to contemporary political thought in China. Second, when in theoretical circles the phrases “socialism with Chinese characteristics” appears, these “Chinese characteristics” always are these very pre-modern and classical philosophical thoughts mentioned in the previous hypothesis and which are now used

integrally with Marxism. The third is a bit more personal and a bit more professional: I show that what the west often derisively calls “Chinese philosophy” is not some merely pre-philosophical “life wisdom”, nor meditation, and especially not “spiritualism”.

Naturally a study of this kind, by its very nature of being a longitudinal historical study, presents a myriad number of methodological constraints. First of all I myself needed to stop viewing Chinese thought through the lens of the western philosophical canon. The above mentioned characteristics of Chinese thought require a wholly different method of approach. The more I read about the above described aspects, and every other detail presented in my thesis, the closer to myself I felt this entire history of ideas. Then when I was able to see a concrete manifestation of these ideas in the way China combated the pandemic sparked by the novel Coronavirus, I became absolutely convinced that this is the direction I need to take my thesis in. All the prejudices even I had up to that point had to vanish for me to be able to see Chinese philosophy on its own merits without constantly wanting to contrast it with the value judgments of the western philosophical canon and trying to force it into any type of box created by said judgments.

Besides all this working from Chinese sources that still to this day do not have English translations, let alone Hungarian, presented an entirely different methodological challenge on its own. This so often not only made my study much more difficult, despite studying both modern and classical Chinese for years, but also made it a lot slower. Understanding a contemporary newspaper article in Chinese and understanding a philosophical text from antiquity or the middle ages are two entirely different challenges on their own. Add to this that one has to be aware of the fact that in every single imaginable translation one not merely translates a language, but an entire culture that language engenders. The words translated do not exist in a vacuum, as things-in-themselves, but rather bring with themselves a baggage of history, history of ideas, an entire cultural nexus where points connect to other points and those points to the first and all other points as well. Simple words translated that in the original may mean different things in various contexts. Take for example the word 義 that depending on context may mean both “justice” and “fairness” or “equity”. Although these terms do have some overlaps, it makes an entire world of difference how we render them in any translated language. This is a relatively simple word, but when we have word with such a diverse map of meanings as 玄, usually rendered in other

languages as dark, darkness, mysticism, mystery, secrecy, thing-unknown, hidden, within the pages of the Daode Jing over three languages (English, Hungarian, Romanian), I found fourteen different translations. This however not only makes this kind of study difficult, it also makes it extremely beautiful and invigorating. That feeling when after weeks of pondering a possibility of translation dawns on the researcher, even if it later turns out to not be the most suitable, is one of the great beauties of translation work.

Finally from the two aspects outlined above came a third difficulty in constantly having to coordinate the meanings of the various philosophical terms in the western and Chinese philosophical canons. Note how both traditions use terms like reality, nature, power, justice and fairness, these might have differences of various nuance when used in tandem to compare these traditions. Not to mention difficult terms in Chinese philosophy like 太極圖 that in other languages we usually renders as “the great ultimate”, not necessarily corresponds to our word of “reality”, although it is usually used like it does. But as I mentioned before, this is not only a difficulty, but can become the essence of a study such as this one. For instance in this case it is not settled even in the original Chinese that “the great ultimate” here is something that is the great ultimate because it is boundless and incomprehensible or something that is the great ultimate because it is boundary so finite that it is unsurpassable. The term itself allows for both readings.

Bridging the methodological concerns, first chapter of my thesis presents the general introduction to legalism, or 法家 in the original Chinese. I deemed this chapter necessary because even though legalism has many different currents within it that show overlaps, it also has a set of general characteristics. This chapter serves the purpose so I don't have to keep repeating what I mean in following chapters. This chapter describes how legalism, even more so than other schools of ancient Chinese thought, based social harmony on strict and clear laws, centralizes power in the state, places universal law above familial and other human relationships, concluding: the organizational principle of society is law, not kinship, neither friendship, nor customs and not even morality. Stemming from this, legalism had a long and tumultuous relationship with confucianism, the other great philosophical tradition of China, despite having various points of overlap. This is not a specific phenomenon: one of the most consistent and fundamental aspects of Chinese thought is its syncretism that has been a part of its entire history up to this day. In this syncretic tradition being at

one a legalist and a confucian with aspects of daoism and Buddhism presents no self-contradiction. The reason for this is detailed in the final chapter of my thesis: in truth it is Chinese philosophy that realizes universalism while all that the western philosophical tradition claims to be universalism is a mere claim to exclusivity. These two are entirely different vantage points.

It is often said that legalism is the philosophy of cynical power mongering, but I claim that this is an extreme simplification of everything legalism entails. It is made obvious in both this preliminary chapter and all later chapters dealing with various legalists and works traditionally ascribed to them that in my view legalism does possess a strong moral dimension. Starting from the fact that all legalist teaching, statecraft and policy aims at realize the benefit of the people (利民) and holds that the sole legitimate government that works for this aim to the point of professing that law is taking care of the people (法者所以愛民也). It is a common a common accusation that legalist conceptions of law are entirely too harsh and often cruel, but this is only conceivable if we do not look to the depths of the issue. The point all legalists made is that they entirely want to do away with laws because they thought that the more laws a state has the more probable its demise. They openly advocated for doing away punishments by punishments and doing away with laws by laws (以刑去刑, 以法去法). At the same time if we look at the practical side of things we see that even in such strict system as the Qin dynasty a very flexible and fair law was operated. Historical recollections note how if people dropped something on the street and went back for it three days later, they would find it at the same place. Of course this is an anecdote, but it speaks volumes about how the conception of laws existed in the minds of the people.

Following this the chapter describes how the legalist conception of law distinguished between state officials and commoners when it comes to the application of said law. This is a consequence of legalist philosophy in which view state officials have to be punished more harshly than commoners for the same kind of misconduct. This was an explicit aspect of legalist law that the bamboo strips containing them unearthed at Shuihudi, China, amply attest. According to legalism, the state official is the person who transmits the state laws to the commoners, therefore if he breaks the law, he transmits that commoners themselves may also break the law. This is the reasoning for punishing state officials harsher than commoners in legalist law. Legalism also did not distinguish between foreigner, kin, commoner, aristocrat,

merchant or peasant when it came to law: if a person broke the law, that entailed consequences. The only possible mitigating circumstance was innocence. The bamboo strips unearthed at Shuihudi describe sever cases in which the investigation went from local to district, from there to county and province levels and finally to the court level. We even have case descriptions in which the law favored the slave against the aristocrat, giving the latter a fine for both dragging the slave before the court unjustly and wasting the court's time. All this as early as the 2nd century BCE.

From here the second chapter turns to the life and works of Shang Yang. He was a legalist and grand chancellor of the state of Qin during the 4th century BCE, but it is questionable how much, if any, he wrote of the *Book of Lord Shang* traditionally attributed to him. It is possible that tradition ascribed policies to him that were implemented by lawmakers of later generations, but for the purposes of this study, the authorship of the work is a mere curiosity, its contents are much more important. According to the *Book of Lord Shang*, the main concern of the state's official is to put a stop to virtually all forms of private commerce and eliminate the inequality between the rich and the poor. His package of reforms is important for my study because it contains economic, political and military reforms which strengthened the state of Qin so much during the 3rd century BCE that by the time of the 2nd century BCE Qin managed to conquer all the other warring states existing in geographic China at the time and founded the first dynasty also called Qin. In his reforms among other things he strove explicitly to curtail the creation of large private fortunes. For example he prohibited by law rich merchants to buy up the surplus grain of the peasantry during bumper years for cheap so that they cannot sell it back to them in famine years expensively, thereby curtailing them from accumulating illicit and immoral profits.

The second legalist work I analyze in my thesis is the Hanfeizi. In my view this work is the absolute quintessence of classical legalist thought. A monumental work that is distinct from its contemporaries even by its authorship: we know that quite a lot of the chapters that it contains were actually written by Han Fei himself. This work is the grand book of realist governance, one of the shining examples of what today we might term realpolitik. The fundamental question of the Hanfeizi in a nutshell is how to establish political, or if you will: governmental institutions in such a way that it does not hinge on the moral character of those operating these institutions. Accordingly in my thesis I made the claim that philosophical aim of the Hanfeizi is twofold. On the one hand it tries to remove the human factor from governance for it

tries to remove from the act of governing those hopes, dreams, wishes, conceptions that are in the hearts of men and on the other hand stemming from this, and for this reason, it strives to create a sort of “governmental automatism”. This also manifests in how the final political project was to create this automatism and then let it flow on without incessant interruptions.

The details of the system are what is actually interesting though. First, it relies on three distinct elements, these being: law, method of governance and position of power. Law, or 法, is through what the system itself is manifested in society, but as we have noted above, this also means that the system manifests within society by taking care of it and all those who live under its administration. The method, or 術, in all actuality is comprised of all policies and methodologies that today we would term “techniques of power”. These are the methods of wielding power on a day to day basis, therefore they are one degree more concrete than law. The essence of the term “position of power”, or 勢, that change in society can only be effected from a position of power in the most mundane sense of this term. This would be the position of the ruler. This is why legalism, and the Hanfeizi in particular, emphasizes that law has to be applied even on the position of the ruler, for not even he is above the law. Understandably this requirement had little to no chance of becoming reality in the monarchic times legalism was first conceptualized. Han Fei reckoned that true change in governance can only be reached from a position of power, therefore all those who want to change society for the better must remain close to power and must influence the ruler with any and all means at his disposal in order to effect the changes he desires. This is the reason leaving government and retiring from the world wasn’t an option for legalist thinkers. Any and all discourse that retired from governance and the world, yet interminably babbled on about it, in the eyes of Han Fei was but little more than “solitary indignation”, or 孤憤, as he himself termed it. The kind of indignation that arbitrarily refuses to act to effect change, yet heaps derision on others for not acting for change.

This is also why he deemed direct and concrete manner of speech so important. Throughout the Hanfeizi the parable of clear speech hurting the ears of the ruler is repeated a number of times - often claiming the life of the clearly speaking official - but it is the obligation of the official to be direct with his ruler. This is the case even if sometimes - or more likely often - it ends up sacrificing the official for the greater good. Accordingly one of the most memorable images of the Hanfeizi is the ruler’s

council chamber being filled to the brim with sages interminably babbling on, yet the people of the state still starve and freeze. For Han Fei the kind of wisdom that does not better the lives of the commoners is not worth even a penny. The nature of the universe is always a question at best secondary, even tertiary compared to the lives of the people and when their lot has been sorted out we will have ample time and opportunity to ponder the nature of the universe for days on end.

The following chapter of my thesis deals with two great reformers of Chinese history, them being Sang Hongyang and Wang Anshi. Sang was the official and thinker of the Han dynasty who rejected the orthodoxy of his times and thought that the state must preoccupy itself with financial issues because that is what guarantees the creation of a strong and prosperous state capable of caring for its people. Accordingly he advocated three kinds of state monopolies: for mining salt, for smelting iron and making wine. His advocacy led to the state discourse on “The debate on salt and iron” or 《鹽鐵論》. These debates raged between the reformist faction led by Sang himself and the conservative faction led by the Confucian officialdom. Sang reasoned that state monopolies have a number of advantages compared to privatized economies. First of all they are a useful means in combating the creation of large private fortunes, this was one of the most fundamental issues for Sang. Beyond this state monopolies are always more efficient than privatized economies because they are a lot more stable based on regulated prices. Furthermore state monopolies are bound by law and are compelled to function according to said law while privatized economies in a legal context often function in gray or outright black markets, which damage not only the state, but because of that, also the people. Finally precisely because state monopolies work within the state apparatus, it is a lot easier to keep it in check and oversee, as well as supervise, its functioning. Therefore it is also a lot easier to compel them to comply with state measures. Sang shared the fate of many of his peers in government: the first round of debates were won by his reformist faction, their reforms and measures were implemented, but later owing to the rumor mongering of the Confucian conservative opposition Sang and his supporters were executed based on fabricated charges and all their reforms were overturned.

Wang Anshi is often called one of the greatest reformers of the entirety of Chinese history for a reason. He and his works are discussed to this day, his reforms, thoughts, world view and philosophy are analyzed in China and abroad. His reforms fundamentally changed Chinese society of his times and accordingly they triggered a

storm of uproar and derision. Fundamentally his reforms had two aims: eliminating the causes of the frequent peasant uprisings, instead of just putting these uprising down one by one, and suppressing the excesses of the elites and official classes. The reforms he initiated had a profound influence on three major social spheres: politics, economy and society at large. The most important among the economic reforms was the Green Sprout Program, which enabled toiling peasants to take out loans from the state either in money or in seeds that were required to be payed back after harvest with ten percent interest, which was seen as low interest at the time. He also initiated a new land survey across the entirety of the Song dynasty and wherever he found illegal land grabs, he forced the government to return said lands to their rightful owners. One of his most important social reforms was abolishing the corvée and all labor was by law made paid labor. He created bureaus to oversee state markets, standardized and regulated prices across the state, put commerce under state supervision to the point of creating state supply lines and transport units as well as transport hubs for them. These policies of course did not make him popular among wealthy land barons, princes, wealthy merchants or even mercenaries who all lost at least large portions of their income as a result.

When it comes to political reforms he chiefly aimed at reforming the administrative system of officialdom: he specifically criticized the regulations concerning the officials sent out maintaining the state borders. In his views, corruption across the borders is always so deep because the state merely sends its officials to the borders and then forgets about them. These officials in turn in search of means of a living, since their state approved wages were low, often looked for illicit deals with communities, tribes and states across the Song borders. The state at its turn when learning about these dealings merely punished these officials without remedying their situation, despite them often being forced into this situation. Similarly he advocated for the emperor's distant relatives being removed from the imperial palace complex because their upkeep puts a strain on state finances. He saw through them, how a lot of them had no direct kinship with the imperial family, yet tried to claim such a relation with dubious family histories, questionable namesakes and whatnot, in order to be allowed to move into the imperial palace and live a carefree life. This was one of his most hated policies. According to an anecdote a few of these dubious "relatives" confronted him one time berating him "look now on the face of our ancestors!" (看祖宗面) to which he replied coldly "Even the closest

relatives of the emperor ought to be removed from the palace complex, let alone you fine gentlemen!” (親盡亦須祧遷何況賢輩).

Among his reforms concerning society at large the most important would be his reforms aiming at the imperial examination system. For centuries this system was based on rote repetition of the confucian canon and often the aim was a dogmatic regurgitation of the contents. Wang Anshi, like his precursors such as Ouyang Xiu, started removing the contents of the confucian canon from the exam questions and started replacing them pragmatic questions such as: if in so and so province there are heavy floods, what is to be done to ensure the growing of sufficient foods and how to curtail the emergence of famines. This reform created an immense uproar since up until that point social advancement was based on the rote knowledge of the confucian canon. Wang was particularly belligerent in refusing to budge on this issue because he claimed that if the sole legitimacy of the state is the care for its people (“The life of a single commoner outweighs the entire world” 一民之生重天下 he wrote in his poem titled “Confiscating salt” 《收鹽》), then it is the role of the imperial examination system to promote those officials who possess practical and useful knowledge. In the majority of the cases this has nothing to do with the contents of the confucian canon, or how based on these the official can craft a poem or not. Like Sang Hongyang before him, Wang also thought that it is paramount that the state and its officials concern themselves with financial issues because finance is part of the governing apparatuses of the state chiefly because Wang claimed that dealing with finance is in itself the practice of fariness.

The next chapter is a bit of an outlier among the chapters of my thesis because this chapter dealing with the life and works of Fan Chengda specifically deals with questions of morality and moral philosophy. Fan Chengda was the official of the Southern Song dynasty, one of the most renowned poets of his times, and well versed in the geography, ethnography and cultural relations of Southern China of his times. An analysis of his life and works is important for my thesis because it is an extremely good example how pragmatism can not only be a moral vantage point, but a specifically collectivist one as well. This is an important aspect of my thesis because it amply demonstrates that when people hear the word “pragmatism” and only think of individual profit and advancement, this is an entirely skewed and distorted view of the issue.

Between 1172 and 1175 Fan was a temporary official in Guangxi province and as government deputy he solved a border conflict in such a way for it to be beneficial for both communities involved. This conflict erupted between certain Yao minority tribes who lived within the physical borders, but outside the administrative borders of the Song dynasty. With the expansion of the Song territories members of these tribes were often illicitly driven out of the best farmlands and up to the karst mountains the province is known for even today. The problem stemmed from the fact that it was impossible to grow crops up in the mountains, therefore the Yao communities were left with two options: either starvation or breaking into Song territory to pillage and plunder, causing mayhem, death and destruction on both sides. Add to this how local Song officials often brokered illicit bargains with Yao tribe chieftains.

Fan upon learning of this situation devised a multi-level policy. First he disarmed and disbanded the Song military units, sent them home, and armed the local population. He hoped that if the Yao tribesmen see they have to fight people they were living among for decades at a time, sometimes even made friends, they would be a bit more reluctant to attack and plunder. He forbade the ranked officials of these armies to strike up bargains with Yao chieftains in order to prevent bargains that would only benefit the ranked officials and Yao chieftains, but not their respective communities. At the same time he gave permission of counterattacking and Yao initiative without notifying government offices, which was a way of going around the extremely long chain of command that often froze the Song armies in place. Meaning: by the time the news of a military issue went up the chain of command and the reply came down, the military conflict often ended. Fan didn't stop here though. He created two types of markets in various cities: one where commerce was done based currency and one where people were bartering. The Yao tribes seeing that their livelihood was now guaranteed, since they themselves produced a myriad of products that the Song population needed, therefore gave up military action and signed a treaty with the Song government lead by Fan in the region.

As we can see, Fan employed a tripartite method, one involving politics, military and economic policies in order to pacify the region and solve the conflict without resorting to bloodshed on either side. He could have solved it as similar situations were often solved throughout Chinese history: he could have drowned the rebellion in blood using the might of the Song army. Fan though consciously strove for a method that would be beneficial to both sides, the entire communities, not just their leaders -

this much we know of his own writings on the conflict. For me this is a shining example how pragmatism does not necessarily mean the cynical pursuit of individual profit and advancement. Pragmatism can be a moral standpoint in which the person forgoes his individual benefits for the sake of the community. If Fan would have drowned the rebellion in blood, quickly solving the issue without much fuss, he probably would have gained some sort of official recognition with regards to central government appointments or the sort. However, in this way, spending months on trying to create a peaceful solution beneficial to both sides, he not only won the recognition of the Song government - we know from historical sources that upon submitting his report to the central government, it was made state wide policy for all similar situations - but he also won the recognition and support of the communities he worked with because there was no more bloodshed, no more lost fathers, sons, brothers, no more stolen goods. This is a lot more important when it comes to long term pragmatism than whatever short term benefits Fan could have scored with a short term solution. That he thought so himself, we know from his own writings.

The final chapter of my thesis deals with contemporary China and it can be divided into two further sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter deals with the thinking and philosophy of Xi Jinping, the current party general secretary on various topics such as China's history, culture and economy, as well as socialism with Chinese characteristics, socialism in general and so on and so forth. Him being the party general secretary, the ways he thinks about these issues are a kind of signpost in gauging how public opinion connects to these issues. One of the most important parts of this first sub-chapter is the way in which he himself reasserts my second thesis, namely that the Chinese characteristics in "socialism with Chinese characteristics" are a plethora of classical Chinese philosophies. Inadvertently he reasserted my other thesis as well, because this also means that there is a direct line of continuation between pre-modern and modern Chinese thought on all issues. With this, only my third thesis was left unproven regarding how Chinese philosophy is philosophy in itself and a legitimate method for acquiring wisdom, amply demonstrated by the myriad of Chinese philosophical works quoted throughout my thesis.

All that remains now is to demonstrate the veracity of my first two main theses (especially the one concerning the continuity) in practice. This is the very reasons I chose the policies implemented during the pandemic created by the novel Coronavirus as a case study. As we have seen in previous chapters the views on governance

espoused by legalist thinkers shows that governance is at once always crisis management and crisis governance: when crisis erupts, it tends towards mediating the sources and stop escalation. All measures implemented by the current Chinese government in mediating the pandemic and making sure a second one does not erupt are mirror images of various legalist policies throughout Chinese history. It is here where the truly interesting aspect becomes evident: the current government, like all previous forms of government of China, are based on a syncretic principle. All that helps one mediate a peaceful and less damaging solution may be used - naturally within tight moral constraints. This specifically Chinese conception of syncretism has been functioning like this for millennia: it is not confucian, not legalist, not daoist, but uses elements of all of these to find solutions to the challenges faced by country and people. In pre-modern time the framework in which all of these elements were considered was confucianism. In contemporary times that framework was changed to Marxism and socialism, or rather socialism with Chinese characteristics, but thought in general is still to the largest degree syncretic.

Policies implemented in this period like quarantining cities, price caps, digital and live coverage of the development of the pandemic, hospitals built in a matter of weeks, the use of drones and robots, using media to disseminate actual information and combat pandemic related hearsay and conspiracy theories, bringing to justice those who broke pandemic related laws and emergency regulations are all consistent with the above mentioned syncretism. Due to the pandemic caused by the novel Coronavirus is an extremely severe crisis, legalist discipline and compliance was more thoroughly emphasized than the tenets of various other schools. However, as numerous analysts pointed out, such legalist principles as “law is the method of caring for the people” and “he who forgets about the people cannot be called benevolent and fair” can be easily juxtaposed with various Marxist and socialists tenets regarding public welfare.

Through these policies I managed to prove all of hypotheses and therefore I regard this study, or at the very least this phase of this study, complete and finished. The topic of course is nowhere near close to being exhausted, since this continuity of of Chinese political and other forms of thought throughout the ages has been written about to fill entire libraries. Me on my part, I only analyzed a very specific and narrow current. From the results of this study, future analyses can be launched regarding continuity not just in thought, but also on the levels of various institutions

in modern and pre-modern eras. Think for instance how the meritocratic advancement of officials through officialdom in pre-modern times can be with more or less success juxtaposed over the meritocratic climb current officials have to endure through the various organizational ranks of the Communist Party of China. This is so even in the case of well-known figures like Xi Jinping who was admitted into the party in 1971 after eight previous attempts and then spent the next three decades slowly climbing the party hierarchy to reach where he is today. Also a well grounded and general outline of the theoretical basis of the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics is also way past its due time in the Hungarian language. One of the biggest lessons of this study for me was exactly how this a serious theoretical system and not something cynically cobbled together on a whim. In conclusion, a myriad of possible future studies can spring up from this thesis, only so much to fit into this one.