

Agrarian Primitivism. One solution to the problem of rural poverty was rural simplicity. Separatist agrarian communities, whose patron deity was Shǔn Núng 神農, the God of Agriculture, began to appear in the 03c. The Mencians here confront, and refute, an apologist for a socially simple system of this kind.

2:56 (MC 3A4, excerpt, c0261). There was a man who practiced the doctrines of Shǔn Núng – Syǔ Syíng, who came from Chǔ to Tǔng. He went up to the gate and said to Wǔn-gūng, I, a man of distant regions, have heard that the Sovereign is practicing Benevolent Government, and I would like to be given a place to live and become one of your subjects. Wǔn-gūng gave him a place. His followers, numbering several tens, all wore rough clothing and hemp sandals, and wove mats for sale.

Chǔn Lyáng's followers, Chǔn Syāng and his brother Syīn, came from Sùng to Tǔng with plough and ploughshare on their backs, saying, We hear that the Sovereign is practicing Sagely Government. We would like to be the people of a Sage. Chǔn Syāng met Syǔ Syíng and was delighted. He dropped what he had previously studied, and began to learn from him.

Chǔn Syāng saw Mencius, and reported what Syǔ Syíng had said: "The Sovereign of Tǔng is truly a worthy ruler. Nevertheless, he has not yet heard the Way. A Worthy would get his food by ploughing in the fields beside the people; he would govern while preparing his own food. But Tǔng has its storehouses and its arsenals. He is thus oppressing the people and thereby nourishing himself: how can he be called worthy?"

Mencius said, Does Syǔdǔ eat only grain he has planted?

He does.

Does Syǔdǔ wear only cloth he has woven?

No; Syǔdǔ wears hemp.

Does Syǔdǔ wear a cap?

He wears a cap.

What kind of cap?

He wears a cap of plain cloth.

Did he weave it himself?

No; he exchanged grain for it.

Why does not Syǔdǔ weave it himself?

It would be detrimental to his farming.

Does Syǔdǔ cook in dishes and pans, and plough with an iron share?

He does.

Does he make them himself?

No; he exchanges grain for them.

To exchange grain for implements is not to oppress the potter or smith. Furthermore, when the potter and smith exchange utensils for grain, how can they be said to be oppressing the farmer?

Here is the key point: For the Mencians, trade is not intrinsically detrimental; it has its proper place in the ideal society. The Mencius passage continues . . .

And why does not Syŵdž himself turn potter and smith, and from his own shop get things to use in his residence? Why all this flurrying about, exchanging things with the various craftsmen? Why does not Syŵdž spare himself the trouble?

The business of the craftsmen cannot be done on top of farming.

And is it then only the ordering of the world that can be done on top of farming? There is the work of the great, and the work of the small. And with one individual, the wares of the craftsmen are all there; if he insists on making something himself before he will use it, this would lead the world off in all directions. Thus it is said, Some work with their minds, some work with their strength. Those who work with their minds govern others; those who work with their strength are governed by others. Those who are governed by others feed others; those who are fed by others govern others. This is the common principle everywhere in the world.

The radically egalitarian society of Syŵdž is self-contradictory. Even in such a community, specialization and social hierarchy turn out to be necessary.³⁹

Enterprise. Others sought their fortunes in the non-Sinitic coastal cultures. Ywè was surrounded by mountains, and little was known of it;⁴⁰ Wú, further north, was relatively accessible. This business story involves Wú:

2:57 (JZ 1:6, excerpt, c0240). In Sùng there was a man who knew how to make a preparation that would keep the hands from chapping. For generations his family had made a living by washing silk. A stranger heard of it, and offered to buy the formula for a hundred pieces of gold. The man called his family together and said, For generations, our family has been engaged in washing silk, and in all that time we have made no more than a few pieces of gold. Now, in one morning, we have a chance to make a hundred pieces of gold. I propose that we give it to him.

So the stranger got the formula and recommended it to the King of Wú. Wú was just then in conflict with Ywè. The King of Wú put this man in charge of the Wú forces. That winter, Wú fought a great naval battle, and inflicted a great defeat on Ywè. Wú divided up the new territory, and enfeoffed the stranger with part of it.

The ability to prevent chapping of the hands was the same, but one used it to get himself a fief, whereas the other could never escape from the toil of washing silk. The level at which they made use of it was different.

³⁹For a study of these agrarian primitivists, see Graham **Nung-chia**.

⁴⁰Some coastal cultures of classical times have their contemporary counterparts. The name Ywè 越 (< Vyèt) survives in that of modern Vietnam 越南. In the Hàn text Shwō Ywæn 說苑 (11:13), a song in the Ywè language is first transcribed and then translated into Chinese; one transcription syllable (lân 濫, < lām) probably represents Vietnamese ðēm (< ðlem) “night.” (Eric Henry, personal communication, 2010).