



SOURCE READING 9

Threefold Duties of the Chinese Ruler

China reached the height of its power in the long rule of the Han dynasty (202 B.C.—A.D. 220). Following Confucian principles and ideas, mandarins (public officials) ran an efficient government, and rulers had both great power and great responsibility. The selection that follows is from "Deep Significance of the Spring and Autumn Annals," a commentary on one of Confucius's works by a Han political scholar named Tung Chung-shu. *The Spring and Autumn Annals* was one of the Chinese texts known as the Five Classics. For centuries, the Classics and other Confucian texts were the basis for education and government services in China.

Guided Reading *In this selection, read to learn about the responsibilities faced by a Chinese ruler.*

The ruler is the basis of the state. In administering the state, nothing is more effective for educating the people than reverence for the basis. If the basis is revered, then the ruler may transform the people as though by supernatural power, but if the basis is not revered, then the ruler will have nothing by which to lead his people. Then though he employ harsh penalties and severe punishments, the people will not follow him. This is to drive the state to ruin, and there is no greater disaster.

What do we mean by the basis? Heaven, earth, and man are the basis of all creatures. Heaven gives them birth, earth nourishes them, and man brings them to completion. Heaven provides them at birth with a sense of filial and brotherly love, earth nourishes them with clothing and food, and man completes them with rites and music. The three act together as hands and feet join to complete the body and none can be dispensed with. . . .

If all three are lacking, then the people will become like deer, each person following his own desires, each family possessing its own ways. Fathers cannot employ their sons nor rulers their ministers, and though there be walls and battlements they will be called an "empty city." Then will the ruler lie down with a clod of earth for a pillow. No one menacing him, he will endanger himself; no one destroying him, he will destroy himself. This is called a spontaneous punishment, and when it descends, though he hide in halls of encircling stone or barricade himself behind steep defiles, he can never escape.

But the enlightened and worthy ruler, being

of good faith, is strictly attentive to the three bases. His sacrifices are conducted with utmost reverence; he makes offerings to and serves his ancestors; he advances brotherly affection and encourages filial conduct. In this way he serves the basis of Heaven.

He personally grasps the plow handle and plows a furrow, plucks the mulberry himself and feeds the silkworms, breaks new ground to increase the grain supply, and opens the way for a sufficiency of clothing and food. In this way he serves the basis of earth.

He sets up schools for the nobles and in the towns and villages to teach filial piety and brotherly affection, reverence, and humility. He enlightens the people with education and moves them with rites and music. Thus he serves the basis of man.

If he rightly serves these three, then the people will be like sons and brothers, not daring to be unsubmitive. They will regard their country as a father or a mother, not waiting for favors to love it nor for coercion to serve it, and though they dwell in fields and camp beneath the sky they will count themselves more fortunate than if they lived in palaces.

Then will the ruler go to rest on a secure pillow. Though none aid him, he will grow mighty of himself, though none pacify his kingdom peace will come of its own. This is called a spontaneous reward, and when it comes, though he relinquish [give up] his throne, give up his kingdom and depart, the people will . . . follow him, and keep him as their lord, so that he can never leave them.