

## **Part 3**

# **General standard of consumption**



# **I. HAPPY MEDIUM BETWEEN PARSIMONY AND EXTRAVAGANCE**



# I.1 Too much or too little consumption

- Guan Zhong and Yan Ping Zhong are the two examples of extravagance and parsimony. Neither is a good practice, as they put pressure on those above and below them.
  - Reading: Excerpts from *Book of Rites, Miscellaneous Records II*



- “The rites should be most carefully considered. Rites are different; they are the standards above which it is too much and below which it is too little.”

--- *Book of Rites, Rites in the formation of character*



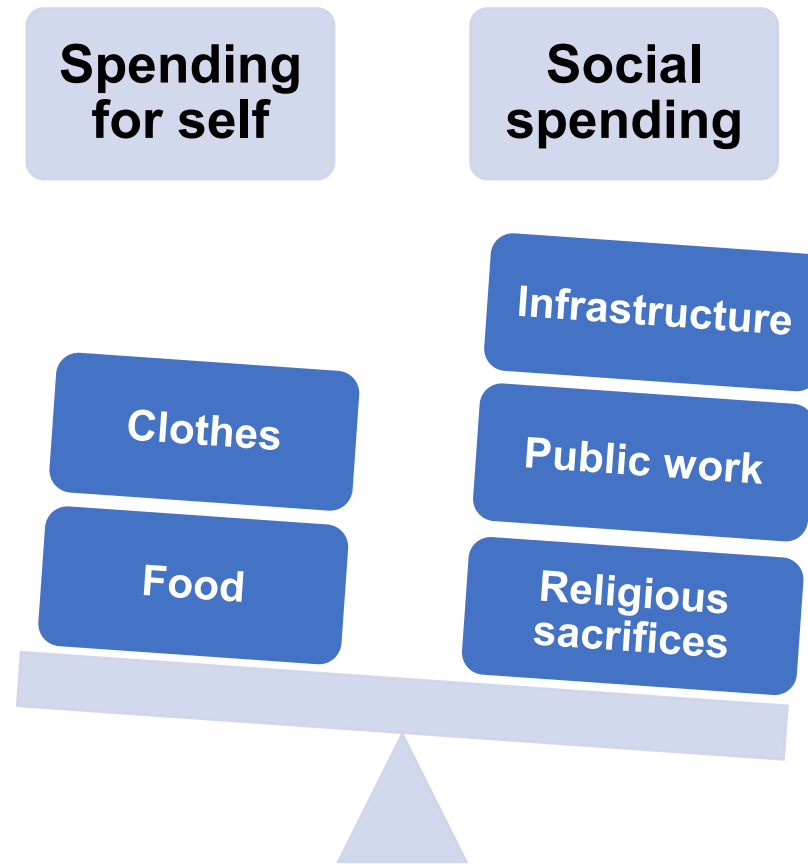
## I.2 Self vs social spending

- *“The Master said, ‘I can find no flaw in the character of Yu. He used himself coarse food and drink, but displayed the utmost filial piety towards the spirits. His ordinary garments were poor, but he displayed the utmost elegance in his sacrificial cap and apron. He lived in a low, mean house, but expended all his strength on the ditches and water channels. I can find nothing like a flaw in Yu’”.*

--- Analects, Tai Bo



- Frugal when spending for self, and liberal when spending for social interest



## **II. EVIL OF LUXURY AND EXTRAVAGANCE**



## II.1 Bad examples and consequence

- Luxurious son despises hard working parents
  - *“Where the parents have diligently laboured in sowing and reaping, their sons (often) do not understand this painful toil, but abandon themselves to ease, and to village Slang, and become quite disorderly. Or where they do not do so, they (still) throw contempt on their parents, saying, ‘Those old people have heard nothing and know nothing.’”*

--- Canon of History, Against luxurious ease



- Rulers who enjoy easy and luxurious life from birth inevitably enjoy have very short career
    - *“Enjoying ease from their birth, they did not know the painful toil of sowing and reaping, and had not heard of the hard labours of the lower people. They sought for nothing but excessive pleasure; and so not one of them had long life.”*
- Canon of History, Against luxurious ease



- There are many examples of condemnation of extravagance in the Spring and Autumn (please refer to the excerpts reading material)
  - Usurpation of the right of the emperor, since the legitimate colour of the pillars of a prince is black (recorded during year 23 of Duke Zhuang of Lu)
  - Labour-intensive work for the prince's own building (recorded during year 24 of Duke Zhuang of Lu)
    - This work puts a tax burden on people without an obvious benefit to the people



- Recording the fire of the altar of Poh, Confucius gives a warning against the danger of luxury and extravagance. Since it can ruin even an emperor and an empire, how much more easily will it ruin an ordinary man or an ordinary family (recorded during year 4 of Duke Ai of Lu)



- Confucius condemns the evil of luxury and extravagance on both social and economic grounds.
- There are many examples in the Analects where Confucius condemns the usurpation of the class of princes and great officials, who misuse the right dedicated to the emperor. He points out that, “if these are allowed, whatever else may not be allowed?”



## II.2 Good examples and consequence

- *“King Wen of Zhou dynasty dressed meanly, and gave himself to the work of tranquillization and to that of husbandry ... From morning to mid-day, and from mid-day to sundown, he did not allow himself leisure to eat; thus seeking to secure the happy harmony of the myriads of the people. King Wen did not dare to go to excess in his excursions or his hunting, and from the various states he would receive only the correct amount of contribution.”*

--- Canon of History, Against luxurious ease



## II.3 Luxury life is allowed with a condition

- The *Canon of History* is against luxury, but it does not go to the extreme, and allows a reasonable luxury.
- From the government's perspective
  - *“The officials shall not live the life of luxury. But, after they have **first understood the painful toil of sowing and reaping**, they may then be allowed luxury; and thus **they can understand the suffering** of the inferior people.”*

--- *Canon of History, Against luxurious ease*



- From the people's perspective

- *“Zi Gong having gone to see the agricultural sacrifice at the end of the year, Confucius said to him, ‘Ci, did it give you enjoyment?’ The answer was, ‘The people of the whole state appeared to be mad; I do not know in what I could find pleasure.’ The Master said, ‘For their hundred days’ labour in the field, (the husbandmen) receive this one day's enjoyment (from the state); this is what you do not understand. (Even) Wen and Wu could not keep a bow (in good condition), if it were always drawn and never relaxed; nor did they leave it always relaxed and never drawn. To keep it now strung and now unstrung was the way of Wen and Wu.’”*

*--- Book of Rites, Miscellaneous records ii*



### **III. EVIL OF PARSIMONY**



- Confucius does not put too much emphasis on frugality, but sets a check against excessive frugality.
- If extreme parsimoniousness is the general spirit of a nation, besides these economic defects, there will be many defects of an ethical and social nature. When the people are stingy, their minds are narrow, their natures cruel, their characters mean; their ambition amounts to nothing; their lives are unhappy; they have no generosity in social relations, and social conditions are unpleasant.



- Confucius has detailed requirements for the preparation of food
  - Reading: Experts from *Analects*, *Xiang Dang*;
- For clothing:
  - **Function 1: Practical living standard**
  - Taking dress code for young children as an example, the dress ensures that it is convenient and not too warm for children, given their active nature.
    - Reading: *Excerpt from Book of Rites*, *Yu Zao*



## □ **Function 2: Stimulate respect**

- The theory of dress of Confucius is to make clothes the symbols of personality. Hence, they must have colours for distinction, and the colours must be classified according to the social orders.
- *“Heaven graciously distinguishes the virtuous - are there not the five habiliments, five decorations of them?”*

--- Canon of History, Gao Yao Mo

- According to Confucius' theory, all the officers should be virtuous, and should be awarded decorations according to their virtue.



- Thus, the decorations of the **emperor** are of yellow fowl, white tigers, red flames, and green dragons, all upon a black background. Those of a **marquis** are the same as those of the emperor, leaving out the yellow fowl. The **viscount or baron** has only the white tigers, the red flames, and the green dragons. The decorations of the **great officials** consist of only the red flames and the green dragons, while the decoration of the inferior officials consists only of the green dragons.



- The costume of Confucius' system is by no means simple. On the contrary, it is intricate and very beautiful, and has social value. It is the mark of personal distinction; hence, it inspires the people to do good and guards them against falling into disgrace.
- **It is used as a means of reward and respect.**



## IV. SOME FINAL THOUGHTS



- *“When establishing states and governing the people (建國君民), made instruction and schools a primary object (教學爲先).”*

*--- Book of Rites, Record on the subject of education*

- During the 5000 years of ancient Chinese history, whenever a new dynasty or government is born, the establishment of a complete system of rite for the people is always the first and foremost project.
- For this reason, it never took longer than 5 years for the society to stabilise and prosper again after the change of regime.



- System of rites = Education (Instruction)
- In modern society, class-based consumption has disappeared; consumption no longer serves the function of moral stimulation.
- Therefore, education using virtue-based consumption is needed.

