

Part 6

Branches of Production in General



I. THE FOUR GROUPS OF PEOPLE



I.1 Division of labour

- *“In the ancient time there were four groups of people: there was a group of people called students (士); there was a group of people called merchants (商); there was a group of people called farmers (農); and there was a group of people called artisans (工).”*

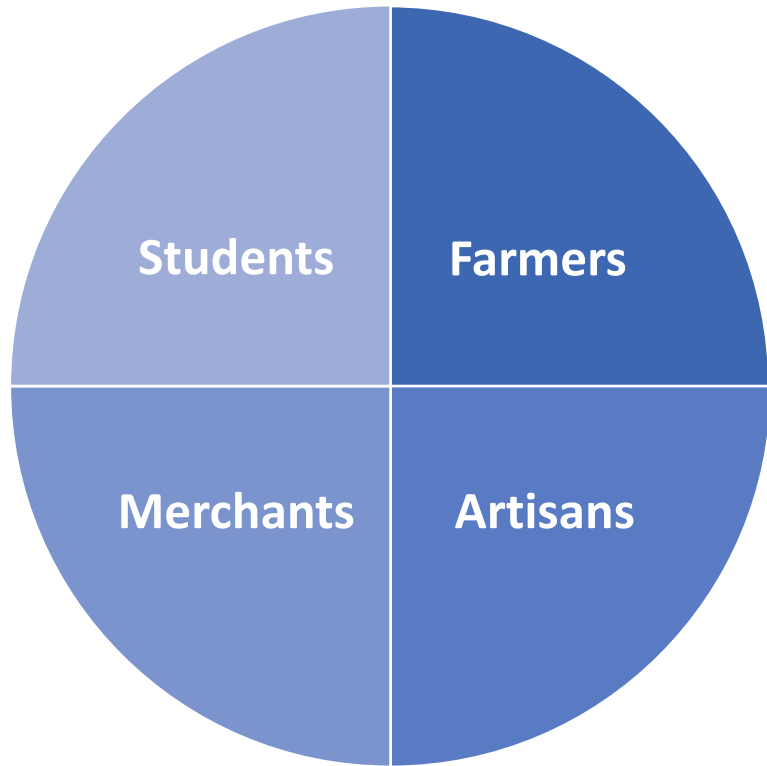
--- Spring and Autumn, year 1 of Duke Cheng of Lu



- Student
 - Those whose virtue enabled them to occupy the public positions
- Farmers
 - Those who cultivated land and produced grain
- Artisan
 - Those who finished the goods with a skilful mind and toilsome hand
- Merchants
 - Those who exchanged wealth and sold goods



- The classification is not a caste system, but a division of occupations



1. Equal status
2. All occupations are productive
3. Free movement between groups



- Equal status
 - In Chinese, the overall name of the four groups is call “the four people” (四民).
 - They are all indiscriminately called “people”
 - Social equality
- All occupations are productive
 - Contrary to conventional understanding, Confucius is not hostile to merchants.
- Free movement between groups
 - This is the principle of division of labour
 - Sufficiency in productive power



I.2 Static labour theory

- In ancient China, different groups of labourers were recommended to collectively live in a **special district** by themselves and attend to their own business.
- They practised their occupation when they were young; their minds were settled; and they **did not like to change their occupations**, even when they came across different things.
- The benefit of this is **excellent skills building for generations**.
- Reading: *Excerpts from Narratives of Nations, State of Qi*



- The theory was successfully carried out by Guan Zi, and it is in harmony with Confucianism.
- The separation of the four groups is not for social distinction, but for occupational specialisation.
- This theory has practical meaning when judging a country's economic condition.



- When Zi Nang (? - 559 BC), the prime minister of the state of Chu, analysed the economic condition of the state of Jin, he praised the occupational stability: *‘the students of Jin vigorously study their lessons; his common people attend diligently to agriculture; his merchants, artisans, and servants know nothing of changing their occupations.’*

--- *Spring and Autumn, year 9 of Duke Xiang of Lu*



- Low frictional unemployment is an indicator of a good economy.
- Except for technological advancement and forced frictional unemployment, job stability means people can support their lives with their current job.



I.3 Freedom of occupation

- Division of labour coexists with freedom of occupation
 - Following family tradition is encouraged simply from a specialisation point of view
 - *“The son of a good founder is sure to learn how to make a fur robe. The son of a good maker of bows is sure to learn how to make a sieve.”*

--- *Book of Rites, Record on the subject of education*
 - Applying transferable skills elsewhere is not only encouraged, but also economic.



- The bigger consideration when choosing a job is **morality**.
 - *“Is the arrow-maker less benevolent than the maker of armour of defence? And yet, the arrow-maker's only fear is lest men should not be hurt, and the armour-maker's only fear is lest men should be hurt. So it is with the priest and the coffin-maker. The choice of a profession, therefore, is a thing in which great caution is required”*
- Mencius, Gong Sun Chou i



- Can you think of some occupations which potentially make workers wish for bad things in order to make a profit?
- The development of a moral sense is very important when choosing an occupation.
- *“The reason those who sell coffins wish to have an epidemic in the year is not because they hate men and wish to kill them, but because their profit depends upon the death of men.”*

--- *Book of Han, Treatise on Punishment and Law*



II. THE NECESSITY, JUSTICE AND HONOR OF WORK



II.1 Necessary to work

- Pan Geng, King in the Shang dynasty
- *Pan Geng said: “When the farmer labours upon the fields and spends his strength in reaping, there is then a good harvest ... When the lazy farmer yields himself to ease, and is not strong to toil and to labour on his acres, he cannot have either rice or millet.”*

--- Canon of History, Pan Geng i



- Pan Geng reproved his people for not knowing how to produce wealth.
 - *“You, the myriads of the people, unexpectedly do not know how to produce wealth”*
- He was well known in history for having moved the country’s capital.
 - *“Go! Produce wealth there, preserve and continue your lives.”*
- *“People’s weal depends on diligence; with diligence there is no want.”*

--- Spring and Autumn, year 12 of Duke Xuan



- *Confucius said, “Hard is it to deal with him who will stuff himself with food the whole day without applying his mind to anything. Are there not gamesters and chess players? To be one of these would still be better than doing nothing at all.”*

--- Analects, Yang Huo



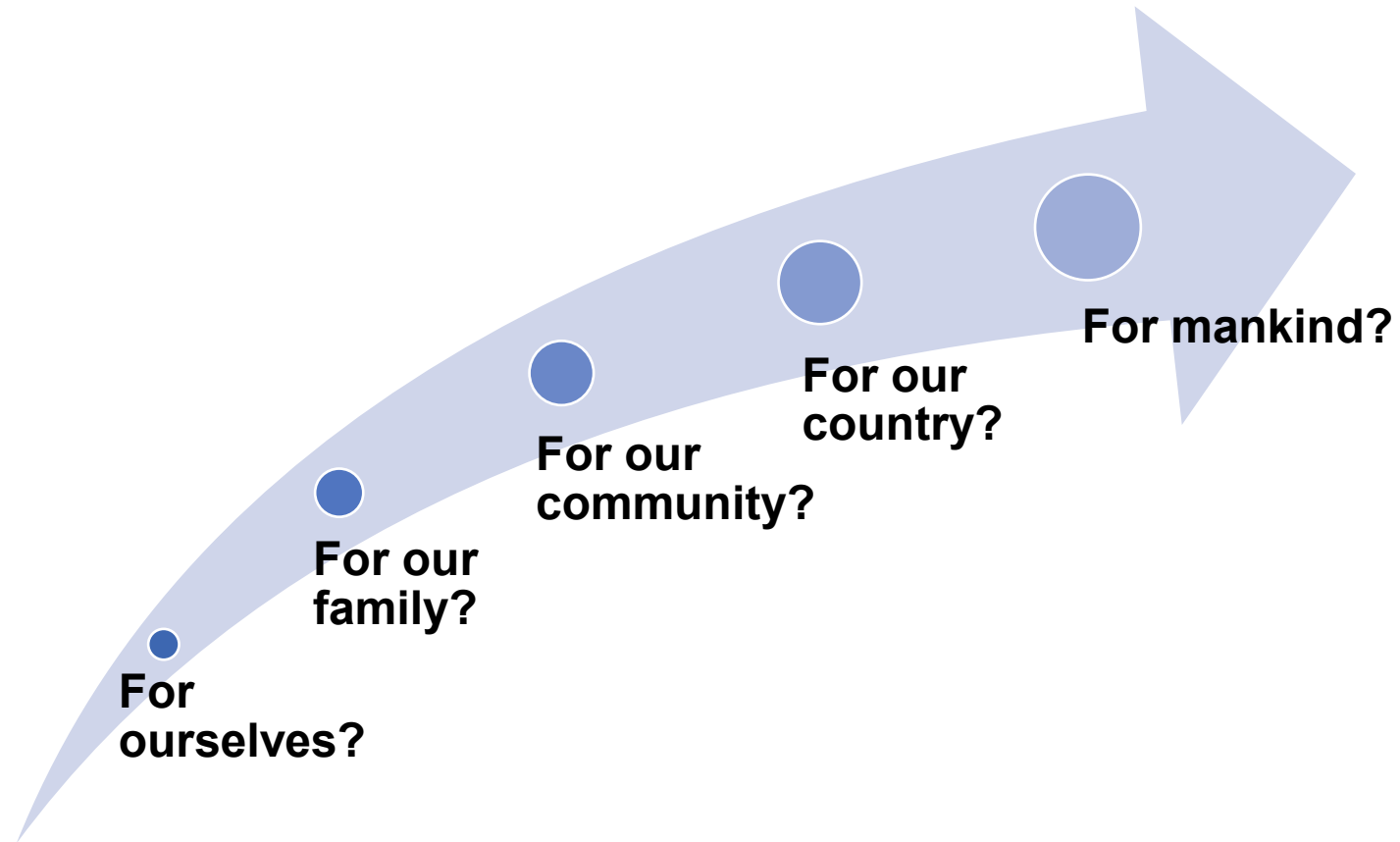
- Let's think deeper about **work**
- In the *Infinite Life Sutra*, the Buddha describes the people of the world as: “*they work constantly to make a living in order to support themselves*” (勤身營務以自給濟).
 - 勤身 – working hard
 - 營務 – single-mindedly manage
 - 以自給濟 – supply and nourish oneself



- Buddha then says that, no matter who you are, everyone worries about their wealth and property, with no time for peace and rest.
- Desire has no end, so the pain taken to satisfy it has no end.
 - Reading: *The Infinite Life Sutra*, chapter 33 (pp. 94-98)
- People must (have to) work to make a living. But given that there is no natural standard of “how much is enough”, how do we maintain our happiness?



- Who do we work for? Why do we work so hard? Why do we toil?



II.2 Honourable to work

- There is no inequality between occupations
- Confucius used to be a keeper of stores and in charge of feeding sheep and oxen.
- Confucius excelled in his work, but modestly describes himself as:
 - *“When I was young, my condition was low, and therefore I acquired my ability in many mean matters”*

--- *Analects, Zi Han*



- Mencius says that a man can only be great after being exposed to extreme pressure, and all the great kings rose from the “mean matters”.
 - Reading: *Excerpts from Mencius, Gao Zi ii*
- According to Mencius, all great men are developed by hardships. The farmer, the artisan, or the merchant may become a great emperor or a great minister.



- Poverty can be a condition under which great men are produced, and a man's working does not bring him any dishonour at all. Under the influence of such teachings, the poor may keep their ambitions even higher than the rich, and workingmen may hold an honourable position in society.

