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Faculty of Social Sciences

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MASTER'S THESIS

**Taming Human Nature:  
A Comparative Study of the Political Philosophies  
of Xunzi and Thomas Hobbes**

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## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. I hereby declare that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. I hereby declare that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

In Prague

2022.4.30

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## **Abstract**

Throughout history, many philosophers have considered the topic of human nature. Their exploration of this topic not only means that human beings' cognition has changed from exploring the natural world to reflecting on their own existence, but also that it provides new basis for our choice of political beliefs and doctrines. Almost all political systems are based on some human nature theories. Many of these theories involve a debate between good or evil aspect of our nature, which philosophers have focused on since ancient times. Xun Kuang (Xunzi) and Thomas Hobbes are two famous thinkers who argued that human nature is originally evil. Both of them hoped to create an effective social order, eliminate interpersonal tension, and rely on their own methods to achieve their political ideals. Xunzi believed that sage king's propriety could transform evil human nature, thereby ending chaotic political division and conflict, ultimately achieving unification and harmony. Hobbes believed that human beings are naturally selfish, brutal, and aggressive. In his book *Leviathan* where he believed that human peace and security can be truly realized only when a social contract is used among people to form a powerful state.

My thesis will start with theories of human nature to compare Xunzi's and Hobbes' models for constructing an ideal society as well as their political philosophy. In particular, I will attempt to answer the question of why Xunzi and Hobbes had similar starting points but ended up relying on radically different methods for constructing society. In addition to comparing the philosophical work of their own, my thesis will also conclude by pointing out some theoretical limitations of their ideas.

My thesis focuses on Xunzi and Hobbes' political philosophy as the research topic. This is not limited to a detailed description of Xunzi and Hobbes' methods of constructing society, but touches all aspects of their philosophical thought. By identifying the theoretical contributions and limitations of their philosophical viewpoints, we can

identify their intellectual role in the history of political philosophy. In an era of globalization, China is becoming more open to the outside world, and its philosophy must help it interact with the world. Therefore, this thesis intends to start from theories of human nature to comprehensively compare Xunzi's and Hobbes' political philosophy. This approach has significant historical value and can be an important reference for studying the history of Chinese or Western political philosophy or for building an effective modern political order.

**Key words:** *Thomas Hobbes, Xunzi, Political Philosophy, Human nature*

# CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction.....  | 1  |
| 1.1 Research background and significance.....   | 1  |
| 1.2 Literature review.....  | 3  |
| 1.2.1 English literature.....   | 3  |
| 1.2.2 Chinese literature.....   | 5  |
| 1.3 Methodology.....  | 10 |
| 2. Historical and cultural background of Hobbes and Xunzi's political philosophy ...      | 11 |
| 2.1 Historical and cultural background of Hobbes' thought.....                            | 12 |
| 2.2 Historical and cultural background of Xunzi's thought.....                            | 14 |
| 2.3 Comparison of the historical and cultural background of Hobbes and Xunzi              | 16 |
| 3. Xunzi and Hobbes's theory of human nature.....   | 17 |
| 3.1 The materialist basis of their human nature theory.....                               | 17 |
| 3.2 Xunzi and Hobbes's theory of human nature.....  | 19 |
| 3.3 Similarities and differences between Hobbes and Xunzi's theories of human nature..... | 22 |
| 4. Hobbes and Xunzi's model for constructing society .....                                | 25 |
| 4.1 The problem of unity .....  | 25 |
| 4.2 Hobbes's model of social construction .....   | 27 |
| 4.2.1 The state of nature.....  | 27 |
| 4.2.2 Law of nature .....   | 28 |
| 4.2.3 The birth of "Leviathan" .....  | 29 |
| 4.3 Xunzi's model of social construction.....   | 31 |
| 4.3.1 Innate human nature and acquired human nature .....                                 | 31 |
| 4.3.2 Able to form community and have division.....                                       | 32 |
| 4.3.3 Propriety and law .....   | 33 |
| 4.3.4 The rule of sage king.....  | 34 |
| 4.4 Why Xunzi and Hobbes chose different models for constructing society .....            | 36 |
| 4.4.1. The appeal of the times .....  | 36 |
| 4.4.2. The ways to end conflicts .....  | 38 |
| 4.4.3. The individualist versus collectivist tradition .....                              | 39 |
| Hobbes and West individualist tradition .....   | 39 |
| Xunzi and Chinese collectivist tradition .....  | 41 |
| 5. Limitations of Xunzi and Hobbes' political thought.....                                | 43 |
| 5.1 Limitations of Xunzi's political thought.....   | 43 |
| The dilemma of maintaining a "propriety principal -- law supporting" structure            | 43 |
| How can individual freedom be attained? .....   | 44 |
| 5.2 Limitations of Hobbes's political thought.....  | 45 |
| The limits of human nature theory.....  | 45 |
| The dilemma between individual freedom and the freedom of authority.....                  | 46 |
| 6. Conclusion .....   | 48 |
| Bibliography .....  | 51 |

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Research background and significance

Xunzi (313-238 BC) and Hobbes (1588-1679 AD) are philosophers who have profoundly influenced the history of eastern and western philosophy respectively. Hobbes, the founder of modern western political philosophy, pioneered a modern political tradition that centred on rights-oriented individualism and influenced such historically important thinkers as Locke, Rousseau and Kant. Strauss said of Hobbes: “Many thinkers abhorred Hobbes’ materialism, atheism and evil human nature, but many were actually influenced by Hobbes, they just didn’t want to admit it (Strauss, 2015)”. Xunzi also criticised and assimilated the ideas of early Confucianism masters, such as Confucius and Mencius. He developed the early Confucianism that centred on individual virtue into a sophisticated political system centred on institutionalised “propriety”, thus enhanced the political practicality of Confucianism. Xunzi’s ideas greatly influenced the early Qin dynasty’s legalism, while legalism helped Qin to bring about China’s first great unification, which ushered in China’s more than 2,000-year-long feudal monarchy. As the modern Chinese critic Tan Sitong put it: “China’s political system of two thousand years was inherited from the Qin dynasty; the ideas that have been passed down for two thousand years are all those of Xunzi” (Cai, 1981).

Even so, it would still be difficult to compare the ideas of these two epochal philosophers. After all, one came from the East and the other from the West, and they also lived almost two thousand years apart. However, both Xunzi and Hobbes had the same starting point for constructing their political philosophies: they both held the view that “human nature is evil”. Both Xunzi and Hobbes lived in troubled times, and they both had first-hand experience of social disorder. They both looked forward to a peaceful and stable society and therefore both tried to pacify it in their own way. They both believed that before entering civil society, or what Hobbes called “in the state of

nature”, people were overwhelmingly driven by desire, or in Hobbes’ words “passion”, the desire for material goods and power led to interpersonal strife and chaos in the world. Both thinkers wanted to help people escape from this state of nature, to build an effective moral order and political system in their own way.

By looking at Xunzi and Hobbes’ backgrounds and goals in constructing a harmonious society, as well as their analyses of the causes of social disorder, we can find two different models for constructing a harmonious social order: Xunzi wanted to change the greedy human nature and control the excessive human desire through sage king’s implementation of propriety and law, so that people’s desires were met in a differentiated but reasonable manner according to their position in the hierarchy, thus a balance was reached between material goods and desires. As Xunzi put it, “so that people’s desires are never unsatisfied because of material reasons, and material resources are never depleted because of people’s desires” (Zhang, 2012). Hobbes finds in human nature the factors that control unsocial passions, namely the passion of fear and rationality. These factors led men to discover the law of nature and to form a powerful “leviathan” through social contract, so that natural law can be obeyed. The power of absolute sovereign rests the foundations of social order on the framework of protection-obedience, which finds a way for people out of the state of nature.

This thesis is an attempt, an attempt to bring the wisdom of the East to the West and the knowledge of the West to the East. Considered in its theoretical dimension, a comparative study of Xunzi and Hobbes’ political thoughts is of great importance to both China and the West in the field of political philosophy. China has started to study Western thought since the 19th century, but has only learnt the facade, not the essence (Shi, 2012). The tension between traditional Chinese culture and modern Western civilisation requires us to assess the value of Eastern and Western cultural traditions from a new point of departure. Comparing the political philosophy of Xunzi and Hobbes is conducive to the mutual promotion and development of different political



cultures. Comparison and competition between different cultural theories is the driving force behind the development and progress of humanity. As Chinese philosopher Ai Siqu once pointed out, “Everything has some connection with things around it, they all have interdependent or mutually constraining relationships with these things (Ai, 2018).” It is only through a systematic comparison between the different theories that the distinctive features of each theory are brought to the fore. The development of any cultural tradition is not self-imposed, but rather a process of competition and comparison in which the strengths and weaknesses are exploited, and new theories are developed through the establishment of new concrete links within the old framework of each. Otherwise, the tradition will be lost in the tide of progress. If we measure Xunzi and Hobbes’ theories in this way, we can find that although Xunzi’s theories predate Hobbes by almost two thousand years, some of Xunzi’s ideas could have improved Hobbes’s theory. By complementing each other’s strengths and weaknesses, different theories will not only perfect themselves, but also serve as a reference for constructing our modern political order, which is what I hope to achieve in my research.

## **1.2 Literature review**

### **1.2.1 English literature**

So far, very few English-language texts have been found on the comparative study of Xunzi and Hobbes’ political philosophy. In his article “Taming Human Nature? Reflections on Xunzi and Hobbes”, Kok-Chor Tan takes the ultimate goal of Xunzi and Hobbes in constructing society as his starting point. He argues that Hobbes’ well-ordered society simply means a society in which, through the restraint of good laws, people who escaped from the state of nature can coexist peacefully without their evil nature being altered (Tan, 2018). In contrast, Xunzi believes that in order to build a harmonious society, it is not enough to have good laws, but also to cultivate people’s moral character through systematic propriety, thus transforming human nature from evil

to good (Tan, 2018). The author thereby poses a normative question: does an orderly and harmonious society require that its citizens possess good moral character? To this question, the author argues that in Hobbes' system people obey the law only because they fear punishment. Good order for Hobbes is based on the premise that sovereignty can effectively establish its authority over its citizens. This social order is fragile because it relies on sovereign's continued oppression over its citizens and citizens' reverence for it (Tan, 2018). In contrast, in Xunzi's system, people develop their personal virtues through their practice of propriety, which helps them to internalise and agree with the law voluntarily; through the revolution of human nature, social order is sustained not by authority, but by the citizens' respect for the law and authority, thus this social order is more sustainable (Tan, 2018).

In his article "From Desire to Civility: Is Xunzi a Hobbesian"? Kim Sungmoon takes Xunzi and Hobbes's theories of human nature as the departure point. He attempts to answer the question of why Xunzi and Hobbes introduced opposing approaches to social construction from their similar human nature theory, with Xunzi constructing a society based on hierarchy and Hobbes based on equal citizenship. Kim Sungmoon argues that although both Hobbes and Xunzi advocate evil human nature, their different framings of it determined their different paths of social construction (Kim, 2011). Among them, Hobbes attributed the cause of evil nature to the fact that people have always been driven by their inherent unsocial passions. People have always moved mechanically towards their own desires, which is fundamental for human self-development (Kim, 2011). Among the various kinds of unsocial passions, man's desire for power trumps all, for it is the instrument through which man achieves his self-worth. Hobbes portrays man as extremely narcissistic as well as prideful, with unending quests for power and need for the recognition of others in order to satisfy their ego. However, such recognition is impossible to obtain in a state of nature, as narcissistic individuals will not admit to being inferior to others. Thus, only by establishing mutual recognition based on equal citizenship in a civil society can each individual's narcissistic and

prideful ego be satisfied (Kim, 2011).

For Xunzi, on the other hand, the factor that leads to human evil is that people's natural desire for material goods is always unsatisfied. Xunzi believed that everyone desires the same things, but they must be limited in number. As Xunzi put it, "it is impossible for everyone to own a cow" (Zhang, 2012). People's competition for material resources inevitably leads to chaos. Kim Sungmoon argues that this shows the difference in human nature theory between Xunzi, who believed that people's pursuit of material desires led to conflict between people, and Hobbes, who believed that people's unsocial passion for power dominated human activities, a Hobbesian narcissistic and prideful personality does not care about material happiness. Thus, unlike Hobbes' model of "rational control", Xunzi opted for a "nurturing model". Xunzi relied on systematic propriety to moderate human desires. The greatest effect of propriety is that it makes the "division" of society possible, whereby everyone's desires are satisfied to a certain extent through the division of social classes. This was clearly better than the chaos of people fighting over each other in the natural state (Kim, 2011). People therefore practise propriety voluntarily, which justifies propriety as a form of external regulation. Kim Sungmoon finally argues that compared with Hobbes' abstract equality, Xunzi's nurturing model can "entertain genuine civility in which each member of the society in a particular relational (often hierarchical) position can give the most appropriate moral and social recognition to his or her counterpart" (Kim, 2011).

### **1.2.2 Chinese literature**

Compared to the scarcity of English-language literature, there is a larger amount of Chinese-language literature on the comparative study of Hobbes and Xunzi. As early as the early twentieth century, the Chinese Enlightenment thinker Liang Qichao noted the similarities between Xunzi and Hobbes: "Hobbes' thought is extremely similar to Xunzi's. What he calls philosophy is the heart of Xunzi's evil human nature (desire). The political path he was arguing for was Xunzi's great righteousness of respect for the

king. The doctrines of both men developed from interpersonal struggle to the establishment of a peaceful state, from beginning to end, in the same way” (Zhang, 1997). Later, in his “General History of Chinese Thought”, the modern Chinese thinker Hou Wailu also remarked: “Xunzi, who represented the prosperity of the East in the age of transformation in the ancient world, was similar to Hobbes, not only in his theory of human nature, but also in their political ideas, both of which espoused centralized monarchy at different times” (Hou, 1998).

Since the turn of this century, there has been a gradual increase in the literature on the comparative study of Xunzi and Hobbes’ philosophy. However, most of the relevant articles are short and lacking in depth. The similarity between these articles lies in the fact that the authors only attempt to discuss the similarities and differences between the two men by citing their ideas and are therefore of little reference value. These articles include Chang Xiao’s “A Comparison of Chinese and Western Theories of Human Nature: Take Xunzi and Hobbes as Examples”, and Liu Xiaogang’s “Leviathan and Sage Politics: A Comparative Analysis of Hobbes’ and Xunzi’s Views on Human Nature”, and so on.

In addition to the above-mentioned articles, Chinese literatures which have research value includes Gbur Adam’s doctoral dissertation “The Concepts of Human Nature as Contrasted by Xunzi and Hobbes”, in which Adam, by comparing the human nature theories of Hobbes and Xunzi, argues that both Xunzi’s and Hobbes’s theories of evil human nature are developed based on natural human dispositions (Adam, 2008). With this in mind, Adam further compares the similarities in the relevant contexts in which the two men proposed their theories of human nature. In terms of political philosophy, Adam compares Xunzi’s propriety with Hobbes’ natural law. Finally, Adam discusses the value of propriety and natural law for today’s China in the context of China’s dedication to building a law-based society. He argues that natural law, based on rationality, should serve as a solid shell of the legal social order. Since the existence of

natural law was for people's self-preservation, how to maintain social stability under the construction of a legal society and allow China to carry out legal reform under the premise of stability is where the natural law fits. Nevertheless, Adam also points to the practical dilemma of how to make the rational construction of natural law possible. Subsequently, Adam argues that the strictness and control of statutory law make citizens solely political symbols either to be excluded or incorporated into normative political life. Therefore, propriety should become objective standards of private virtue to enrich human subjectivity. Private virtue should serve as promotor of public virtue, thus a sound public virtue system that allows for dialogue and exchange between private virtue and politics can be formed (Adam, 2008). Because of Adam's background as a historian, he does not analyse the political and philosophical thoughts of Xunzi and Hobbes in greater depth as he spends most of his paper stating the historical context of their respective periods and the study of human nature in different disciplines and religions.

Wei Fuming and Sun Xupeng's article "Nature, Peace, Freedom - A Comparison of Xunzi and Hobbes's Political Philosophies" presents Xunzi and Hobbes' respective theories of the state of nature and the way in which Xunzi constructs a peaceful society through the "sage" and Hobbes through "sovereignty" (Wei and Sun, 2016). They then critiqued Xunzi and Hobbes' theories with the "dilemma of liberty". They argued that Xunzi's harmonious society neglected to consider the freedom of individuals. Xunzi's pursuit of a normative moral life, the core of which was that everyone should observe the propriety laid down by the sages, which will undoubtedly stifle individual freedom. As propriety was not formulated with objective criteria, then the existence of individuality brought the universality of propriety into question. Wei and Sun go on to criticise Confucianism for always developing its own ideas in a "self-referential" manner, with all Confucian masters tried to develop universal doctrines based on his own moral origins, and thus Confucianism has never had practical value from ancient times to the present day (Wei and Sun, 2016). As for Hobbes' ideal society, Wei and

Sun argue that the liberty dilemma of Hobbes' theory lies in the fact that he gives too much freedom to the sovereign. The "freedom" of the sovereign is likely to cause tyranny over its people, and Hobbes does not offer a good solution to this problem. Moreover, in Hobbes' system, since self-preservation is the freedom that every citizen possesses, there are special circumstances in which the citizen must confront the sovereign. This would instantly dissolve the supremacy and absoluteness of sovereignty and cause the disintegration of Leviathan (Wei and Sun, 2016).

Lei Zhen's article "Two Models of Constructing a Harmonious Society - A Comparison of Xunzi and Hobbes's Political and Philosophical Thought" also takes Xunzi and Hobbes' theories of human nature and their models of ideal society as its starting point. By comparing the two ways of constructing society, Lei Zhen argues that Xunzi gave or pinned his hope of saving a disordered society on the sage. When the sage emerges, the world will be at peace, and when the sage dies, the world will fall into chaos (Lei, 2011). Lei Zhen further critiques that the ancient Chinese people always yearned for and called upon the heaven, bright rulers, and wise ministers to regulate social order. But they never started working on themselves, never established their own subjective personality, never really stood up for themselves, but always relied on external forces. Because of this, the ancient Chinese, inwardly speaking, simply did not have, and could not generate, a true sense of law, the spirit of law. They always thought that the law was just an external restraint and that all they needed to do was not to break the law, and that would be enough. They, however, never thought about how to employ the law to fight for their rights (Lei, 2011).

In contrast, Hobbes looks to the human being themselves for the salvation of society, and he finds the path to individuals' deliverance in the passion of fear and rationality. This path is powerful and binding for each individual because it comes from their inner strength, from their craving for peace. From the fear and loathing of death and the desire for life, man pushes out the natural law and the state. Lei Zhen believes that this law

spirit and state consciousness are key factors in the persistence of social order and the efficiency of social governance. It is intrinsic to man, and therefore he follows it. Individuals give law to themselves, thus its effectiveness is deeply rooted and universal (Lei, 2011).

To sum up, no systematic and comprehensive comparative study of Hobbes and Xunzi's political philosophy has been carried out to date, either in the East or in the West. The only two English-language literature in which the authors have produced some insightful findings are too small in number. Moreover, the authors focus on comparing a particular concept in Xunzi and Hobbes' political thought, which helps them elicit relevant normative questions in order to develop the authors' own views. Such a comparison of Xunzi's and Hobbes' thoughts based on a preconceived ideal conclusion lacks objectivity, as the author is sifting through some of the out-of-context ideas of Xunzi and Hobbes' philosophical frameworks to support the author's preferred conclusion. Such an approach lacks a grasp of Xunzi's and Hobbes's thoughts as a whole. This is the reason why both authors mentioned above consider Xunzi's model to be more ideal than Hobbes'.

Compared to the English literature, the Chinese literature on the comparative study of Xunzi and Hobbes is more copious, but most of them are merely lists of Xunzi and Hobbes' respective ideas, lacking in depth and reference value. Moreover, due to the different traditions of publishing in Chinese and English journals, most of the Chinese literatures are extremely short, with few articles exceeding five pages in length. It is difficult to make a systematic and comprehensive comparison of the ideas of Xunzi and Hobbes in such a short space. I hope that my thesis will fill the gap in the Eastern and Western literature on the systematic and comprehensive comparison of Xunzi and Hobbes. My thesis focuses on the similarities and differences between the political ideas of Xunzi and Hobbes by analysing relevant texts, without addressing normative questions such as what our ideal society should look like from comparing their ideas.

Such a pure comparative approach would reflect all aspects of their thought on an objective basis, and more importantly, it would directly reflect the differences between Eastern and Western political cultures and systems of thought. Drawing on the strengths of differences has been a central tenor of China's social development since the modern era (Shi, 2012). I hope that my research will follow the great march of Chinese society and provide some inspiration for improving the law-based society and constructing a harmonious society in China today.

### **1.3 Methodology**

The main methodologies adopted in my thesis are literature analysis, comparative analysis, and historical analysis. My literature analysis mainly summarizes and analyses English and Chinese-language literature related to Xunzi and Hobbes. It also systematically and comprehensively narrates and comments on the related topic's research results and academic progress during a specific time period. By analysing and organizing Xunzi and Hobbes' philosophy from many aspects and perspectives, it provides a foundation for the current research. The application of comparative analysis is presented during the entire thesis. It is also indispensable in studies involving comparisons between China and the West. Specifically, my thesis compares many aspects of Xunzi and Hobbes' political philosophy, including their theories of human nature, as well as relevant natural philosophy and models for constructing society, and so on. Each chapter must be written using comparisons and summaries. Finding differences through comparison is necessary for solving research questions. Historical analysis involves researching existing historical documents and events, and then finding answers to the research questions while relying on historical trends. In this paper, the analysis of why Xunzi and Hobbes chose varying models for constructing their ideal society and why Xunzi and Hobbes came up with their human nature theory is linked to the historical significance. Historical analysis can help us understand the objective factors that influence their political philosophy, which creates new ways of examining



philosophical problems.

## **2. Historical and cultural background of Hobbes and Xunzi's political philosophy**

Marx said that any true philosophy is the essence of the spirit of its own time (Marx, 2003). If we look at the philosopher's views in the abstract, apart from the time in which he lived, we will miss the spirit of what the philosopher was trying to convey. However, there is considerable debate in Western academia about the relevance of Hobbes' political philosophy to the context of his time. Steinberg argues that Hobbes' views were not developed in the context of chaotic seventeenth-century England, but that Hobbes constructed his philosophical system in a scientific manner as well as by scientific approaches, thus it was instructive in any ages (Steinberg, 1988). Similarly, Warrender argues that Hobbes was more interested in logical reasoning than historical argumentation. He was not concerned with the chaos in England at that time, so his theories were not a panacea for restoring peace in England (Warrender, 2000). Plamenatz even claims that to truly understand Leviathan, we do not need to understand Hobbes' intentions in writing about Leviathan and the conflict between the royalists and Parliament in 17th century's England (Plamenatz, 1963). Similarly, Crespigny and Minogue argue that the construction of Hobbes' philosophical system was purely a philosophical as well as a scientific activity, rather than a political proposal for 17th century England (Minogue and Crespigny, 2012).

In contrast, Watkins argues that historical context is crucial to understanding Hobbes' political philosophy because historical information helped Hobbes to complete the logical construction of his philosophical views (Watkins, 1989). Also, Skinner argues that without an understanding of historical context we cannot explain most elements of Hobbes' scientific politics (Skinner, 1996). Martinich also argues that understanding

Hobbes's work requires an understanding of his beliefs and the intentions he was trying to convey, both of which cannot be shaped without the influence of historical trends (Martinich, 2011).

However, there is not much debate among scholars about the relationship between Xunzi's political philosophy and his historical background. Scholars agree that the formation of Xunzi's ideas was closely related to the chaotic social background of the Warring States period. Most scholars hold the view that the realist stance of the vassal states during the Warring States period and the cultural backdrop of hundred schools of thought forced Xunzi to modify Confucianism in order to make it more politically practicable, thus Xunzi completed the transformation of propriety from private to public virtue (Zheng, 2020), (Bai, 2003), (Feng, 2014), (Qiang, 2013) .

## **2.1 Historical and cultural background of Hobbes' thought**

In its historical context, since the Middle Ages, political society in Europe has been underpinned by two pillars: one is the unshakeable power and influence of the Christian Church, and the other is the feudal system (Russell, 2004). Christianity touches everyone's life and can sometimes even intervene in the political sphere. And the economic development of European society was based on a good feudal regime (Russell, 2004). The feudal regime determined the development of people's material life; the Catholic Church controlled people's minds and souls. Politics and church power were closely connected, so when these two pillars of European society weakened, social tensions that had been silenced under authority were intensified.

After the Reformation in England, public attitudes towards the Reformation were divided into three broad groups: Catholic recalcitrants, Anglicans, who were under the King's authority, and radical Puritans. The Puritans were unhappy with the results of the Reformation in England. In the Puritan view, the Reformation did not deliver its

ultimate ends, but merely shifted popular allegiance from the Pope to the King of England. The continental Protestant spirit of Martin Luther and Calvin's "justification by faith" individualism was not carried through to the Reformation at all (Roberts and Roberts, 2002). As the public struggled financially to cope with the heavy taxes imposed by the government but were unable to express their discontent, the Puritans wanted to take this opportunity to further the Reformation's progress and overthrow the monarchy. The Puritans thus raised the slogan "obedience to the sovereign should give way to obedience to God and conscience" and "resistance to evil king is lawful and necessary" (Roberts and Roberts, 2002). After gaining a majority seat in Parliament, the Puritans asked Charles I to limit the power of the King, but Charles I rejected this proposal (Lubienski, 1930). Charles I did not succeed in upholding royal power as his father, James I, and Queen Elizabeth had done. The English Civil War ended with the victory of Parliament and the rise to power of Cromwell. Hobbes experienced the enclosure movement, the bourgeois revolution, the Civil War of England in his life, the social upheavals and transformations profoundly influenced Hobbes' thinking.

In the cultural context, after the Renaissance, along with the scientific progress of the Middle Ages, Europe faced the Reformation. As capitalism developed and religious authority was continually questioned, the power of Catholicism in England and elsewhere in Europe was greatly weakened, which accelerated the process of separating philosophy and politics from theology and contributed to the creation and development of new theories. The Reformation was followed by a lingering period of the Enlightenment, which laid the foundations for the industrial revolution in Britain and Europe. This emancipation of thought brought an end to the feudal system in most European countries. Numerous ideas and theories arose during this period that have had a profound impact on the academic world and on people's understanding of literature, art, science, politics and even human nature in European and overseas societies to this day (Adam, 2008). Many of the formerly unquestionable Christian dogmas and medieval philosophies had lost their influence and were replaced by the new doctrines

that were leading Europe. Influenced by the times, Hobbes attacked religion with vengeance. In his book “Behemoth”, the first three of the various demagogues that Hobbes saw as “devilish”, and which caused the Civil War, were first and foremost the priests and the various religious groups (Hobbes, 2017). It was precisely the religious question that attracted his close attention. And Hobbes devoted about a third and a half of his major political works, “De Cive” and “Leviathan”, respectively to religious matters.

## **2.2 Historical and cultural background of Xunzi’s thought**

In historical context, Xunzi was born during the Warring States period. It was a turbulent time with great social changes. The well-established ritual system of the Western Zhou Dynasty collapsed during the Warring States period, causing the various suzerain states to break away from the Zhou dynasty and compete with each other for hegemony. A powerful and unified China had fallen apart. Such changes caused political and social upheavals that had never been seen before.

Politically, the vassal states gradually abandoned the patriarchal aristocracy and began to form a centralised monarchy headed by king (Tian, 1998). Militarily, vassal states’ conflicts evolved from hegemonic wars in the Spring and Autumn period to annexation wars in pursuit of unification, which means society moved again from fragmentation to unification (Qian, 2013). As the influence of the Zhou dynasty declined severely, it was degraded to a minor state in the late Warring States period which soon afterward was overthrown by vassal states. The seven powerful states and many other minor vassal states were politically separated, competing for the annexation of each other. Society continued to progress towards greater unification. During the Xia, Shang, Zhou Dynasties and the Spring and Autumn Periods, the tradition of unification was inherited, social development of each state gradually converged with scientific progress. The increasingly close economic ties between the vassal states, and the convergence and

unification of their systems that resulted from these ties, made the Warring States period another era of achieving unification (Tian, 1998).

In the cultural context, Xunzi lived in the “Hundred Schools of Thought” period, the golden age of ancient Chinese philosophy. The chaotic times of the Spring and Autumn period and Warring States period provided the soil for cultural development. During these periods, the level of productivity and economic development continued to rise. Not only were there major breakthroughs in the innovation of science and technology, but also in culture and education, as “official tutoring” developed into private schools, a large number of brilliant talents emerged, the academic atmosphere was characterised by pluralism and diversity (Xue, 2015). Many Chinese classic texts and traditional philosophies were born in this era and have had a long-lasting influence on society and on the guidance of human activities to this day (Xue, 2015). These ideas not only influenced the respective administrative beliefs of the various vassal states but also replaced much of the previous Western Zhou dynasty’s philosophies and political thoughts.

By this time China was divided, and the power of the Western Zhou dynasty had become a long-lost memory. Instead of providing the theoretical guarantee to a unified state as before, philosophies had to play a completely new role: to guide China towards true unification while learning the lessons from the downfall of the Zhou dynasty, so that a powerful China could rise again (Xue, 2015). Against this backdrop, thinkers were bound to consider how wars could be brought to an end and how they could promote the unification of the world and bring about social stability. Xunzi and other thinkers therefore made the contemplation of how peaceful order could be achieved an important subject. They discussed the end of wars and the re-establishment of good social order, putting forward their different ideas for governance.

## **2.3 Comparison of the historical and cultural background of Hobbes and Xunzi**

Xunzi and Hobbes lived in a very similar era. It can be argued that both Xunzi and Hobbes lived in the process of transformation of social systems. Xunzi lived during the transition from slavery to feudalism, when slavery was largely dismantled and the feudal system was largely established; Hobbes lived during the transition from feudalism to capitalism, when feudalism was largely dismantled and the capitalist system was largely established. Moreover, during the transformation of the social system, there were constant wars in their countries, the social order was quite chaotic. The public were yearning for the end of wars, the elimination of chaos, and the realization of peace. It was in the face of these chaotic and disorderly social realities that two thinkers of different eras and countries responded to the calling of history and set out to build a harmonious and stable society.

In terms of cultural context, both men's political ideas were influenced by the changing of cultural paradigms. Hobbes applied natural science to his construction of political philosophy, his attack on the church, questioning the sources of state authority were all closely linked to the development of science, literature, and political theory during the Enlightenment period. On the other hand, during the period of the Hundred Schools of Thought at the end of the Warring States period, clan blood relations were separated from the administrative system due to the decay of the patriarchal clan system. The administrative organisation replaced the bloodline organisation, which provided the basis for the king to centralize power (Tian, 1998). Faced with this new scenario, schools of thought such as Legalism, Mohism, and Taoism all improved their doctrines (Zhao and Wei, 2006). In the light of the possible marginalisation of traditional Confucianism in the new world, Xunzi also put forward new Confucian theories such as "respect for the king" and "rule by propriety and law", and so on.

### **3. Xunzi and Hobbes's theory of human nature**

Political philosophy is the philosophical discipline that studies the origin and nature of politics and the laws of its development at the highest and most general level of abstraction, the first question it seeks to account for is the question of the origin of politics (Li, 2017). It is also here that Xunzi and Hobbes' reflections on political philosophy begin, as they both attempt to examine human nature and find the ideological basis of politics on the ground of natural philosophy. Thus they both attempted to establish views or doctrines that explain human beings' common nature by leaving aside their social and class characteristics. Hegel points out that Hobbes posits the nature and organism of the state on the basis of human nature, human desires, appetites, and so on (Hegel, 2011). Many Chinese scholars have pointed out that Xunzi's human nature theory emphasises the influence of natural desires, appetite, and other "value-neutral" elements on human behaviour in order to legitimise propriety's role in the construction of an ideal society in which the ultimate goal is to cultivate human being's moral characters (Feng, 2014), (Xu, 2005), (Ding, 2012).

#### **3.1 The materialist basis of their human nature theory**

Based on Galileo's principles of mechanics and inspired by Bacon's materialism, Hobbes applied the methods of geometry and physics to his philosophical studies and created a whole set of mechanical materialism theories, i.e., his "natural philosophical thought" with the concept of "material things" as its core. This laid a solid foundation for modern European mechanical materialism (Li, 2017). On the one hand, Hobbes believed that the world is the collection of all material things (Hobbes, 2007). Hobbes demonstrated the material uniformity of the world from the position of mechanical materialist monism. He defines material things as "something that does not depend on our minds, something that is united with some part of the space or has the same vastness (Hobbes, 2007)". These material things in the universe exist as objective entities whose

existence is not subject to people's will and whose movement must follow the general laws of the mechanics in our nature. Hobbes also believes that all material things are in motion. Once material thing is in motion (unless it is stopped by something else), it will always be in motion; whatever stops it cannot immediately and completely obliterate its motion, but can only do it gradually and slowly (Hobbes, 2007).

Hobbes divided material things into three main categories: firstly, all things in our nature, which Hobbes referred to as natural things, including living plants and animals as well as inanimate water and minerals; secondly, artificial things, Hobbes rejected the Christian theologian's traditional notion that God created the state and that state sovereignty comes from God, he saw the state as an object created spontaneously by humans; and finally, there are special things that are part of natural things, human beings. Man is the most important object in the universe and plays an important role in Hobbes' philosophy in connecting the other two categories of material things and in linking natural world and society (Bertman, 1991).

Xunzi's natural philosophy also deals with the essence of the world from a materialist monism viewpoint, which is similar to that of ancient Greek philosophers such as Thales, Heraclitus, and Anaximenes. Xunzi believed that pneuma (qi) was the material basis of all things in the universe, and the interaction of yin and yang resulted in the creation of various things. He emphasised that there were qualitative differences between different things that exist in our nature, with water and fire being the lowest level of existence since they do not possess life; the level of existence higher than water and fire, with life, was grass and wood; the level of existence higher than grass and wood was animals with cognitive abilities; and the level higher than animals was human beings with pneuma, life, knowledge, and righteousness (Liang, 1983). In this order of arrangement, pneuma is the foundation, while propriety and righteousness are the highest levels. By associating propriety with pneuma, Xunzi attempts to legitimise his propriety-centred political construction with objective criteria (Li, 2017).



In addition, Xunzi refutes Confucius' and Mencius' ideas of "the mandate of heaven" and "the way of heaven" from his monist ontology. Both Confucius and Mencius believed that all things in the world, including human beings, were governed by the a priori, metaphysical concept of Heaven, with Confucius suggesting that "death and life have determined appointments, riches and honours depend upon Heaven" (Yang, 2018). Mencius proposed that "those who obey Heaven will prosper, those who disobey Heaven will perish" (Yang, 2018). Xunzi, on the other hand, proposed the idea of "separating heaven and man", arguing that "heaven will not exist for people like Yao, with his noble morals and historical contributions, nor will it perish for people like Jie, who are morally corrupt and have done so much evil (Liang, 1983)". Man and nature are independent entities, that is to say that the universe, or nature, exists objectively and is not subject to human will. Finally, on the one hand, Xunzi advocates respect for the objective laws of nature, while on the other hand, he believes that man must exert his own subjective initiatives. Man must utilize his own strengths to make nature work for man's intentions, Xunzi therefore put forward the idea of "adapting the law of Heaven and making use of it" (Liang, 1983). This has a strong Marxian dialectical materialist flavour to it.

### **3.2 Xunzi and Hobbes's theory of human nature**

Hobbes started from his mechanical materialist view to suggest that human beings are natural things, and on this basis he studied human physical activity and explained human natural sentiments and desires. According to Hobbes, human beings' natural endowments can be reduced to four categories: physical strength, experience, rationality, and passions (Hobbes, 2007). And the argument for passions (which Hegel considered to be desires) is central to Hobbes' theory of human nature. In "Leviathan", Hobbes compares man, the most delicate object in nature, to a clock, arguing that the human heart is nothing more than a clockwork, the nerves are just filaments, and the

joints are just cogs. The structure of the human body is not much different from that of a clock, nor are human activities different from the operation of a clock (Hobbes, 2007).

Not only does man's physical activity follow the principles of mechanics, but also his minds, feelings and desires are governed by them. Hobbes says: "Life itself is a movement dominated by passion, and it is impossible to live without desire, or without fear, just as it is impossible to live without sensations" (Hobbes, 2007). Hobbes believed that man is by nature selfish, egotistical and endlessly power-seeking. Happiness is the constant development of desire from one goal to another, the attainment of the former merely paving the way for the latter. This is because the ultimate ends of human desire is not to enjoy everything once for all, but to always secure the path to future desires (Hobbes, 2007). Therefore, all human beings' mechanical actions and dispositions are not only aiming to obtain a satisfactory life, but also to ensure it.

Here Hobbes argues that the actions arising from the satisfaction of human desires constitute human beings' voluntary behaviour. He thus suggests that the whole nature of man's sentiments and faculties is an interpenetrating set of self-interest mechanisms. In his "The Elements of Law" Hobbes sees life as a race in which there is an uninterrupted pursuit of self-interest, where "to strive forward is desire", "to surpass others without ceasing is happiness", and "to leave the track is to die" (Hobbes, 2020). The ultimate ends of human life is to win in this "race" of self-interest. And vanity and ego are precisely the roots of human desires. Strauss points out that vanity and ego, rather than sensual awareness, are at the root of human desire, the pleasure of gaining power leads to man's irrational and endless quest for it (Strauss, 2015).

Xunzi's theory of human nature is intertwined with his natural philosophy. First, Xunzi believed that "human nature is isomorphic with heaven; dispositions are the essence of human nature; desire is the response of disposition" (Liang, 1983). However, unlike the previous Confucius and Mencius's thoughts, since Xunzi believed that heaven is only

part of our natural world, human nature is also merely a reflection of nature, and there is nothing a priori and metaphysical about human nature. Human nature is “the raw material that man is born with”, and there is no a priori morality embedded in “nature”. “Nature” is the unprocessed, pristine raw material of the human psyche, human nature is like wood that has not yet been carved, which is completely natural (Lin, 2012).

If understood from the above aspect alone, Xunzi would become a “human nature is neither good nor evil” theorist. Xunzi’s evil human nature theory is embodied in the “dispositions” and “desires” that human beings hold. Disposition and desire are the concrete expressions of human nature. Disposition and desire are the various psychological as well as material needs pursued by human instincts. Xunzi says that “people when hungry want to eat and be full, when cold they desire warmth, and when tired they want to rest, all of which are real conditions that everyone faces” (Liang, 1983). Xunzi’s human nature refers to man’s instinctive need for survival materials.

Xunzi’s assertion of disposition and desire corresponds to his idea of “separating heaven and man” in his natural philosophy. Xunzi believed that all things in nature have their own laws of functioning, which are not based on human will. Human nature is part of the natural world, so everyone’s pursuit of disposition and desire is as unchangeable as the law of nature. In addition, Xunzi also mentioned human nature’s tendency to seek benefits and avoid harm. He believed that people like to eat tasty food, smell fragrant smells, pursue things in line with their own interests, and do not want to be hurt, which are all undeniable human conditions (Liang, 1983). Xunzi analysed human nature from the naturalism and empirical positivism starting point, arguing that there is actually no good or evil in the expression of man’s genuine desires, human nature only has a tendency to develop in the direction of “evil”.

### **3.3 Similarities and differences between Hobbes and Xunzi's theory of human nature**

#### ***Similarities:***

From the above analysis we can see that both Xunzi and Hobbes try to explain human nature in the context of materialistic ontology. They both believe that human beings as objective entities existing in nature, that their movements and even thoughts are governed by objective laws. For Hobbes, man can only fulfil his prideful ego by constantly moving forward with his passions, therefore man is always on the path of chasing power and self-interests (Kim, 2011). For Xunzi, human nature as a part of the natural heaven, the desire for material goods expressed in human nature cannot be stopped. Thus we can say that both Xunzi and Hobbes constructed their theories of human nature from their empiricist standpoint by combining their respective materialist ontologies in order to derive a positivist observation of “what human being actually is”.

Moreover, neither Xunzi nor Hobbes directly concludes that “human nature is evil”. For Hobbes, there is no good or evil in the passions themselves, but the endless pursuit of passions causes struggles among people. Moreover, similar to Hume's view on human nature, Hobbes believed that the selfishness of the self-preserving individuals who seek to avoid harm and seek profit can be justified, but it will lead people to do bad things (Hume, 2021), (Hobbes, 2007). For Xunzi, man's desires come from the natural world, so there is no distinction between good and evil. However, Xunzi believed that if human nature was indulged and human desires were followed without constraints, there would definitely be conflicts and plunder, which would lead to the violation of hierarchical order and propriety and laws, and eventually chaos would result (Liang, 1983). Mou Zongsan also argues that Xunzi's theory of human nature regards human beings as bare natural creatures, thus the natural facts of human beings, namely their animal nature are restored, therefore there is no division between good and evil in human nature (Mou, 2007). It is thus clear that Xunzi and Hobbes' evil

human nature theory does not mean that human nature itself is evil, but that human nature develops according to its own rules can easily lead to evil if we left it unchecked and uninterrupted.

Finally, both Xunzi and Hobbes' theories of human nature broke with the traditional idealistic and metaphysical human nature theory of their respective times. Prior to Hobbes, the Christian view of human nature dominated people's minds. This view held that humans were inherently sinful and that only by accepting God's grace could humans be saved (Zhao, 2005). Bergson argues that while philosophy liberated human rationality in the Middle Ages, religion was able to anchor human existence in the realm of the irrational (Bergson, 2015). Aquinas, moreover, by explicating the allusion of the soul to human nature, asserts that the ultimate ends of human existence is to form a unified and eternal relationship with God (Aquinas, 1990). Hobbes' life was devoted to criticizing religion and to emancipating human nature. Hobbes therefore describes human nature's characteristics from a materialist point of view. These characteristics are derived from our material world and are therefore independent of religions, and "the human mind has no other movement than that of sensation, thinking and sequencing thoughts" (Hobbes, 2007). Hobbes's theory challenged the "metaphysical" accounts of human nature theory and enabled human beings to be viewed from the realistic and empirical ground.

Similarly, before Xunzi, Confucius and Mencius' human nature theory both attributed the essence of man to the a priori and religious concept of "heaven". According to Mencius, what heaven has given to man is his nature; to act and develop in accordance with that nature is the Way (Dao); and to develop the Way and extend it to the public is to cultivate (Yang, 2018). Mencius' reference to heaven here is the mandate of heaven, and he asserts that human nature contains the essence of "heaven", thus he proposes the idea that "human nature is inherently good". In this regard, Xunzi expounded human nature's factual characteristics by reducing heaven to a natural phenomenon. He argues

that Mencius' theory of the goodness of human nature "has no evidence and verifiable proof that fits with it, and people can only sit and talk about it, but they cannot stand up and deploy it, nor can they promote it and put it into practice, isn't that so wrong?" (Liang, 1983).

### ***Differences:***

Kim argues that in Xunzi's theory of human nature, people are always driven by material desires, which result in people's tendency to do evil things. Hobbes, however, argues that it is not the desire for material goods in human nature that leads to war between people but the desire for power and honours (Kim, 2011). Moreover, Xunzi believes that human nature was isomorphic with heaven and was governed by the laws of nature, thus it could not be changed. However, Xunzi also put forward the idea of "adapting the law of Heaven and making use of it", which means that Xunzi believed that human nature could be cultivated to satisfy our quest for social stability (Zhang, 2012). This also provides the basis for Xunzi's idea of building society through people's practice of "propriety" to nourish their desires. Unlike Xunzi, Hobbes does not believe that human nature, which is under the control of human unsocial passions, could be changed at all. Holmes argues that human beings in Hobbes's vision are essentially irrational fools who, if they had any sanity at all, would not be dominated by vanity and passions; Although people in the state of nature are eventually able to find natural law through rationality, the realisation of this rationality is still due to the fact that human beings are also dominated by their passion of the fear of death, so the nature of man to pursue self-interest never changes (Holmes, 2004). Hobbes therefore chooses a path of state construction centred on control rather than cultivation.

## **4. Hobbes and Xunzi's model for constructing society**

### **4.1 The problem of unity**

Hume saw an unbridgeable gap between positive and normative expositions as one cannot coherently move from descriptive statements (about what is) to prescriptive ones (about what ought to be) (Rachel, 2018). This is the proposition that we nowadays embrace. However, it is not difficult to see that either Xunzi or Hobbes attempted to construct their ideal society on the basis of natural philosophy: they both justified the necessity of absolute sovereignty through a positivist description of human nature based on their materialist ontology. Because of the logical inconsistency of such reasonings, there has also been an academic debate as to whether Hobbesian natural philosophy and political philosophy can be unified. Strauss argues that Hobbes' political philosophy was not deduced through natural philosophy, but through his empirical observation of the English Civil War (Strauss, 2015). Sorell also argues that if Hobbes' political philosophy is based on reflections on the English Civil War, then Hobbes does not need to derive the state formation from the laws of physics (Sorell, 2009). Gert argues that Hobbes expounded on natural law and the social contract through the psychology of man's fear of death, but there is no psychology that can actually be derived from mechanical theories, thus Hobbes' natural philosophy and political philosophy cannot be united (Gert, 1965).

In contrast to them, C. B. Macpherson argued that Hobbes's natural philosophy could not be separated from his political philosophy. Macpherson believes that in the manner of Galileo, Hobbes breaks down the state into different parts which are in constant motion, of which man is also a part, and in this way Hobbes successfully connected the state with his natural philosophy of human nature (Hobbes and Macpherson, 1972). This view is also supported by Gary Herbert, John Watkins, and others (Herbert, 2014), (Watkins, 1989).

Unlike Hobbes, there is not much reflection in the English and Chinese literature on the problem of unity of Xunzi's natural and political philosophies. However, most scholars agree that a positivist account of human nature is a necessary precondition for Xunzi to develop his propriety-based state construction model (Feng, 2014), (Hou, 1998).

To solve the problem of unity is also crucial to this thesis. A systematic and comprehensive comparison of their political philosophies is an innovative aspect of my research, as previous comparative studies of Xunzi and Hobbes' political philosophies have only tried to compare a single concept in their political thought. The philosophical structures of Xunzi and Hobbes are so systematic and vast that a pure comparison of their state-building models without reference to their philosophical systems and the context of their times would limit our understanding of their ideas. Therefore, I believe that we need to compare their political philosophies in the context of their historical backgrounds and natural philosophies, which would not only be more logically sound but would also give the best possible picture as to what Xunzi and Hobbes themselves intended to convey.

Hobbes was committed to developing his political theory based on objective science to make his theory more convincing in the face of the theocratic theory's domination. Hobbes saw his political philosophy as a new scientific study, he believed that political science could not have emerged earlier than his "De Cive" (Hobbes, 2011). Hobbes therefore described the state from the "material things" perspective, considering the state of being an artificial thing, which in effect justifies a secular state from mechanical materialism, thus bringing about the unification of his natural philosophy and political philosophy. Similar to Hobbes, Xunzi was faced with competitions from the hundred schools of thought during the Warring States period and the marginalisation of Confucianism. In order to make Confucianism more appealing to the Kings, Xunzi through his elaboration on natural philosophy, justifies the need for state regulation and



cultivating people through propriety. By presenting propriety as the highest form of natural order, it is only through each individual's practice of propriety can the unity of state and nature achieved, and a harmonious society emerges. Xunzi in fact saw the state as part of the natural world, and the unity between his natural and political philosophies can therefore be achieved in his way of reasoning. It is therefore difficult to attain a full grasp of the political philosophy of both men, if we take them out of the context of their time and their natural philosophy.

## **4.2 Hobbes's model of social construction**

### **4.2.1 The state of nature**

Ai Kewen argues that Hobbes' state of nature contains the following features: the state of nature lacks a coercive power, which is typical of its distinction from civil society; the actors in the state of nature are individuals; the state of nature is a state of equality and freedom (Ai, 2010). Unlike Locke and Rousseau, who envisaged the state of nature as a state of harmony, Hobbes' state of nature is a state of conflict between people, a state of war in which "all against all". It is exactly from Hobbes' theory of human nature that this state of war is deduced. Oakeshott argues that Hobbes' political theory is constructed from beginning to end based on his genuine experience and empathy with human nature (Oakeshott, 2014).

Hobbes believed that men in the state of nature, being equal in their capabilities, must want to be equal in their ends. In the absence of a state to regulate them, men must act in their own self-interest to achieve their ends, thus war between them is inevitable. According to Hobbes, individuals' equality in the state of nature consists of: firstly, every individual is "quite equal in their faculties of body and mind"; secondly, it means that every individual in the state of nature has the same natural right to everything, every individual wants to take as much as he can for himself; thirdly, it also means that

individuals are equal in the face of death, no one, including the strongest, can guarantee that he or she will be spared a violent death (Hobbes, 2007). According to Arendt, Hobbes philosophically interpreted human equality as an equality of capacity to kill (Arendt, 1994).

Moreover, Hobbes believed that man in the state of nature is a state of absolute liberty, which in Hobbes' words means "the liberty each man hath, to use his own power, as he will himself, for the preservation of his own nature, his own life" (Hobbes, 2007). The liberty here is the negative liberty in Isaiah Berlin's sense, i.e., the liberty of all men to act without any external interference (Berlin, 2002). Because of the competition and mutual suspicion between individuals in the state of nature, the most reasonable way for each individual to defend himself is to take pre-emptive action, that is, to control all that he can control by force or machination (Hobbes, 2007). Thus, subject to the inclinations of human nature, in the state of nature every individual is either using violence or is threatened with violence. In such a state, "there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain; and consequently no culture of the earth...and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (Hobbes, 2007).

#### **4.2.2 Law of nature**

Hobbes saw the state of nature without public authority as a state of war of "all against all". As to how to get out of this natural state, Hobbes argues that it is to be found in the natural endowments of human beings. Hobbes believes that the primary factor that makes people crave for peace is the passion of the fear of death (Hobbes, 2007). By death Hobbes means death by brute force, i.e., violent death, which is the fate that can befall every human being in the state of nature where everyone is at war with each other. Hobbes believed that death was the greatest evil. The argument for avoiding death and achieving peace fits with Epicurus's "good health" as a necessary condition for achieving "happiness" (Epicurus, 2019). Moreover, Hobbes argues that the desire for

things that are necessary for a comfortable life and the hope of obtaining such a life through one's own hard work also makes people crave for peace, although it is above all the fear of violent death that makes people realise that peace must be sought (Hobbes, 2007).

Compelled by the demand for self-preservation and the fear of death, human nature's the other endowment, rationality, makes everyone realise that it is his own unsocial passions and natural rights that keep him on the verge of violent death; thus only by creating common rules can mankind emerge from the strife and chaos of the natural state. Strauss argues that since rationality is weak, although the preservation of life as the greatest good can only be identified with rationality, it is still the fear of death that can make individuals think of the good of life and thus appeal to rationality (Strauss, 2015). The "common rules", as Hobbes called it, is natural law. In "Leviathan", Hobbes defines natural law as "a precept, or general rule, found out by reason" (Hobbes, 2007). This precept or general rule forbids individuals to do anything that destroys their lives or deprives them of the means of preserving them; it also forbids them not to do what they think is best for preserving life. Therefore, the fundamental law of nature is the search for peace and the keeping of peace. On this basis, the second natural law follows: "that a man be willing, when others are so too, as far forth as for peace and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things; and be contented with so much liberty against other men as he would allow other men against himself...But if other men will not lay down their right, as well as he, then there is no reason for anyone to divest himself of his" (Hobbes, 2007). The second natural law is what we commonly know as the Golden Rule. Hobbes believed that natural law was eternal, because man's passion of the fear of death never changes (Hobbes, 2007).

### **4.2.3 The birth of "Leviathan"**

Whereas natural law expresses general rules, contract theory expresses the way in which these rules are realised (Ai, 2010). That is, the implementation of the contract is

an effective way of realising the various principles described by natural law. In Hobbes' view, a contract-based society is not only a necessary means for human self-preservation and a universal expression of human egoism, but also the inevitable outcome and the best choice for human reason to be realized (Adam, 2008). Hobbes, however, also considered the power of reason to be weak. The second natural law requires that every individual must sign a contract to give up his natural rights for the sake of peace. This is difficult to achieve in a state of nature where unsocial passions are dominant and violent crisis is always lurking. Ai Kewen argues that in the state of nature described by Hobbes, individuals are caught in a "prisoner's dilemma" game, so contracts cannot be implemented (Ai, 2010).

Hobbes argued that without some authority to make people obey natural law and the contract itself, people could never escape the state of nature; without force, the contract would become merely a piece of paper, utterly powerless to keep people in safety (Hobbes, 2007). As for compliance with the contract, Hobbes argues that the contracting parties can only truly comply with the contract under the supervision of a third party. Only by establishing a sovereign with biblical God-like authority can the social contract be truly effective. This sovereignty makes use of people's fear of punishment for breaking the contract to make people abide by it, which is also in line with human nature's tendency to avoid harm. The most effective way to make a covenant is by people signing the social contract with each other and then "confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will" (Hobbes, 2007). This man being conferred is the king whom Hobbes embraces, and the assembly of men is the parliament. They are collectively called, in the Hobbesian sense, the sovereign. The power of the sovereign is absolute and indivisible. The powers of the sovereign include the power to censor publications, legislate, adjudicate, declare war and make peace, select officials, and so on (Hobbes, 2007). From the time the contract comes into force, the will of the sovereign, or the resolution of parliament, represents the will and

judgement of all those who have signed the contract. The sovereign also has the power to punish those contracted individuals when they violate the sovereign. This is how the Leviathan was born.

Hobbes makes it clear that the man-made Leviathan is an immortal God who walks on earth with the ultimate aim of protecting and defending human beings (Hobbes, 2007). The preservation of life is the moral spirit of the Hobbesian state theory, and individuals' natural rights developed on this basis constitute, in Berkowitz's view, the moral human being (Berkowitz, 2001). Premised on natural rights, Hobbes demonstrates, through the combination of moral and political philosophy, that Leviathan is not only powerful, but also just.

## **4.3 Xunzi's model of social construction**

### **4.3.1 Innate human nature and acquired human nature**

From the above description of Xunzi's theory of human nature, we already know that Xunzi believed that human nature is only natural desires and physiological functions of human beings, so there is no good or evil in human nature. Xunzi also believed that if people follow their nature without restraint, conflicts, war, and other unethical behaviour among people will inevitably result, which would eventually lead to chaos (Sun, 2016).

To address this, Xunzi distinguished between innate human nature and acquired human nature, which follows on from Xunzi's natural philosophy of "separating heaven and man". Xunzi believed that innate human nature is derived from the natural "heaven" and therefore cannot be changed. However, human beings can accumulate knowledge and experience through deliberate learning to develop their acquired human nature (Liang, 1983). To develop "acquired human nature", we need to rely on our innate

human nature's ability to "reflect" and "sense". Xunzi said that "feelings are created by the mind, and then mind sifts through them is the process of reflection. After the mind has reflection, the senses act on it, which is the deliberate effort of human beings. Reflections accumulate while the senses practice repeatedly, and then a pattern is created, which is called acquired human nature (Liang, 1983)". This acquired human nature can only be realised through human practice, so the "acquired human nature" of man does not arise from the natural world, but rather is the moderation of man's innate human nature.

Xunzi said that "innate human nature is the raw material of human beings; acquired human nature is manifested in "propriety, law, writing and reason". Without innate human nature, there would be no place for the "propriety, law, writing and reason" to be imposed; without acquired human nature, man's innate nature would not become perfect on its own" (Liang, 1983). To realise "acquired human nature", propriety is essential. From "obeying man's innate nature which leads to evil" to "restraining desires through man's acquired nature" requires sage king to create propriety and cultivate people. Xunzi starts from the innate human nature to find a way to solve human conflicts, which is the prerequisite for introducing "propriety" into Xunzi's state theory; The discussion of "acquired human nature" further proves the need for propriety in shaping people's moral characters.

#### **4.3.2 Able to form community and have division**

Since the essence of human nature as described by Xunzi is to avoid harm and seek profit, then survival and high-quality survival are what everyone seeks. So what is the best way for people to survive? Xunzi believed that to survive well, individuals must use their ability to form community and to live in groups (Hutton, 2016). Xunzi compares human beings with water, fire, trees, and animals, then concludes that human beings are noble because apart from having pneuma, life, knowledge, and righteousness, human beings can also master everything in the world by forming a community (Hutton,

2016).

However, the community Xunzi refers to is not a mere gathering of human beings, but a structured organization in which people of different abilities can perform their respective roles and strengths by following certain rules and regulations in that group. The principle behind this system of rules is the principle of “division”. Xunzi believed that if people in a community were not divided, and they just lived as they pleased, there would be no social order. Division has many aspects in Xunzi’s theory, including the ethical distinction between the elders and the young, the social distinction between the noble and the inferior, the professional distinction between the scholar, the farmer, the industrialist, and the businessman, the political distinction between the King, the Dukes, and the Senior Officials, and so on (Sun, 2016). But where does the standard for these “divisions” come from? Xunzi believed that the criteria came from the “propriety” created by the former sage king: “the former kings established ritual and yi in order to divide (fen) the people, caused there to be rankings of noble and base, distinctions between old and young, and divisions between the wise and stupid and capable and incapable (Hutton, 2016)”. In short, Xunzi argues that human beings must form communities in order to survive, the success and sustainability of communities must be grounded in “social divisions” that is based on propriety. In this way, Xunzi, after his theory of human nature, once again discusses the necessity of propriety by eliciting man’s need for community life, which further legitimizes his state theory with propriety as its core.

### **4.3.3 Propriety and law**

Xunzi constantly talks about the necessity of “propriety” for building a harmonious society. Lin Hongxing believes that Xunzi’s entire philosophical system actually serves the concept of “propriety” and Xunzi’s political ideal (Lin, 2011). What exactly is “propriety”? “propriety” originally referred to the rituals and ceremonies of the primitive ancestors’ religious worship (Lu, 2004). As society developed, the content

and meaning of rituals gradually evolved and expanded, from rituals to customs and traditions, and from religious sphere to political sphere, ultimately it became a set of institutional and behavioural norms. The Sage King Zhou completed the institutionalization of propriety by making it a political system. Confucius, the creator of Confucianism, revered Zhou and therefore put forward the idea of “governing the state through propriety” (Lu, 2004). Propriety in the narrow sense refers to rites and ceremonies, which are the rituals of propriety. The broad sense of propriety refers to various rules and regulations and the spiritual essence of propriety, which is the “righteousness” of propriety. According to Feng Youlan, the spiritual essence of propriety is hierarchy (Feng, 2014).

Xunzi inherited the traditional Confucian philosophy which focuses on propriety in governing the state. He advocated that propriety should be used as external standards to nurture people’s desires and eliminate interpersonal strife; propriety also provided a hierarchical order that would allow people to fulfil their obligations and make society harmonious and stable. Xunzi believed that the fate of the state rested on “propriety”. “Propriety” is the source of social stability, the standards of hierarchy, a means of strengthening the country, selecting the talents, and an intrinsic force that underpins the functioning of the state (Sun, 2016). However, unlike Confucius and Mencius’ theory, which only emphasised propriety and its moral cultivation effect, Xunzi also believed that because human nature has a tendency to develop toward evil, the law was also needed as a forceful tool to restrain people’s behaviour. In the governance of society, even in its best days, cultivation must be ensured by mechanisms of reward and punishment (Schwartz, 1989). The law is subordinate to propriety, and its enactment and implementation must be based on the spirit of propriety.

#### **4.3.4 The rule of sage king**

To be ruled by sage king was the ultimate destination of Xunzi’s political philosophy. In his view, good social order depended entirely on the emergence of a “sage king”. On



the one hand, the sage king is the creator of the propriety. According to Xunzi, the sage kings could not bear seeing people struggling with their desires, so the previous sage king created “propriety” to nourish human desires (Liang, 1983). On the other hand, the sage king is the reason why human beings were able to form long-lasting and stable communities. Xunzi believed that sage king organised society through the standard of propriety, organising people in such a way that they could effectively make the best use of their talents, the best use of the land, and the best use of resources (Hutton, 2016). In addition, Xunzi believed that only the rule of a sage king could ensure the long-lasting peace of the country. The greatest difference between sage king and hegemon is that the sage king knows the spiritual connotations of propriety, sage king must become a sage before becoming a king (Hutton, 2016). This means that the sage king understands the decisive role of propriety in stabilizing the state, thus the sage king’s rule will always centre on propriety. However, hegemons and other rulers, who were not sages and did not understand the spiritual essence of propriety, might have abolished the propriety system according to their own dispositions, thus leading to the collapse of the state (Hutton, 2016).

Therefore, Xunzi’s state system, with propriety at its core, was in fact a monarchical autocracy with the “sage king” as its absolute sovereign. The unification of the sage and the king solved the problem over the legitimacy of the sovereignty and gave the king a magnificent veneer of sanctity. Xunzi believed that in a state ruled by sage king “the norms of propriety would be enforced throughout the country, so that the scholars would not have unbridled excesses; the officials at all levels would not be lax and arrogant in their attitude; the public would not have evil and bizarre customs; crimes such as theft would not occur; no one would defy the commands of the sage king, it was the sage king who brings about social harmony” (Liang, 1983).

## **4.4 Why Xunzi and Hobbes chose different models for constructing society**

From the above analysis, we can see that both Xunzi and Hobbes constructed their respective ideal societies from human nature's "evilness" of seeking profit and avoiding harm. Hobbes' approach, however, is bottom-up. The equal individuals in the natural state, driven by their passion of the fear of death, recognised that the greatest good is to preserve their lives. Therefore, individuals choose to confer their natural rights to the sovereign through social contract, thereby gaining the protection from the sovereign and the enforcement of natural law. Xunzi's approach is a top-down solution. It is through the emergence of the "sage king" that propriety is created and a community is formed, which in turn appeases interpersonal strife and brings prosperity and stability to the state. This implies that political order and moral norms result from political organisation and power, a top-down construction by those in charge. For Hobbes, on the other hand, the sovereign is created by people contracting with each other according to natural law, rather than natural law being derived from sovereign, and kings are also not the only form of sovereigns. There are several reasons why Xunzi and Hobbes chose very different models.

### **4.4.1. The appeal of the times**

Hobbes lived at the time when the Middle Ages met the modern era. Although the Reformation had been completed in most European countries by then, the traditional idea of theocracy had not been broken. The state and the sovereign derived their legitimacy from God, and the church still retained its supreme authority, which not only still controlled people's minds but also divided state sovereignty. The civil war in England in the 17th century was ostensibly a result of the struggle for power between parliament and the king, but in fact it was also the result of Charles I's failure to deal with internal religious disputes (Qian, 2016).

Hobbes was well aware of this, therefore much of his work were centred on how to impose restraints on religion and the church. One of these was to break with the traditional theocratic state and base the state on its original secular nature. Schmitt argues that Hobbes's view of Leviathan as "the immortal God on earth" actually implies a rebuttal to the typical fragmentation of the original secular political homogeneity that Judeo-Christianity brought about, he was fighting against the "kingdom of darkness" of the Roman papacy (Schmitt and Schwab, 2008). In his theory of state construction, Hobbes thus chose a model that takes the individual's "fear of death" as its starting point. Hobbes demonstrates, with his scientific approach, that the sovereignty and laws of the state never derive from God but from human rationality. The fundamental purpose of the state's existence is not to serve religion, but to protect the safety of its citizens. In Stoner's words, Hobbes defined religion in terms of law, not the other way around (Stoner, 1992). Oakeshott also argues that Hobbes relied on the secular sovereignty's authority to resist the spiritual authority of religion, and by dismantling religion's "deceptive authority", the ultimate ends of the state and the source of its legitimacy became security and protection (Oakeshott, 2014).

Xunzi lived in the Warring States period, an era of chaos and political division. During that time, all the vassal states had adopted "great unification" as their national political goal; each state also held a realist stance, with the preservation of its own interests as the greatest good (Bai, 2003). In this era, the system of ritual and music (the narrow sense of propriety) inherited from the Zhou dynasty was no longer functioning. Rituals and music, however, were crucial to achieving social harmony in Confucianism (Yang, 2018). The urgency of reviving the ritual system led Xunzi to suggest that "the sage king created propriety", which in turn was the foundation of the state. In this way, the absolute authority and legitimacy of the king were established through propriety. Xunzi hoped that his account of the source of the king's authority would awaken the vassal states to the importance of propriety, thus bringing about the revival of the ritual system.

In addition, the cultural background of the Hundred Schools of Thought also led Xunzi to choose a top-down model. During the Hundred Schools of Thought period, each school of thought refined its own doctrine in the context of the war. They competed with each other and aspired to become the dominant school. The traditional Confucian ideas like “benevolence and righteousness”, “morality”, and “public are superior to the ruler” are no longer in line with the trend of the times, Confucianism is at risk of being marginalised (Bai, 2003). Out of the need to revive the status of Confucianism, Xunzi took the sage king (i.e. the king) as the starting point for constructing society, highlighting king’s supreme authority and his essential role in maintaining social stability. By making the king the starting point of all order, Xunzi hoped that his ideas could be adopted by the vassal states so as to restore Confucianism to its mainstream status.

#### **4.4.2. The ways to end conflicts**

Kim Sungmoon argues that Xunzi’s emphasis on material desires in his theory of human nature in contrast to Hobbes’ emphasis on power led the two men to choose different ways to construct society (Kim, 2011). Moreover, their different views on how to resolve conflicts caused by power and material desires also contributed to their different choices. Since Hobbes saw individuals as material things governed by passions that are in constant voluntary motion, the passion for power is the fundamental way in which man develops himself. Hobbes believed that there were only two possibilities for human life: to rule others with more power or to be ruled (Hobbes, 2007). Therefore, individuals’ desire for power leads to a state of war between them. Hobbes argues that the only way out of the state of nature is through rationality: each individual, through the power of reason, finds the natural law by which equality between them is affirmed. And the equal citizenship created by this equality allowed the relationship between men to be less of mutual domination in terms of power and more of mutual recognition based on equality. Hobbes believes that this was the only way to control man’s desire for

power. The only way for mankind to escape from the state of nature was by relying on everyone's equal possession of rationality.

In contrast, Xunzi believes that human nature can be gradually guided towards goodness through individual's practice of propriety. The main reason for people to struggle is due to the limited material resources. Xunzi said that "everyone desires the same things, but not everyone can obtain them" (Liang, 1983). Therefore, Xunzi believed that the only way to nourish human desire was through the "propriety" created by the sage king. A social hierarchy, based on standards of propriety, would allow everyone's desire to be satisfied to a certain extent, which would be better than a state of chaos in which everyone's desires were unchecked (Hutton, 2016). Xunzi believes that the improvement of human nature and the settlement of conflicts depended entirely on the supreme authority of the "sage king" and the "propriety" he had created, beyond which there was no other way.

#### **4.4.3. The individualist versus collectivist tradition**

##### ***Hobbes and West individualist tradition***

The Western individualist tradition can be traced back to ancient Greece. Geographically, Greece is situated in subtropical region in the northern Mediterranean Sea, a mountainous region that lacks plains and arable land. Most of the land was barren and, except for the north, no site was more than 50 kilometres from the sea (Liu, 2017). Thus, Greece began as a nation that was mainly engaged in seafaring. The coastline was the lifeline for the Greek nation. Through the development of fisheries and trade in coastal ports, commerce came to dominate people's lives. The prosperity of commerce meant that profit was paramount, which facilitated the emergence of loose political organisations known as "polis" (Liu, 2017). In polis, equality was the common pursuit, a self-centred sense of society was the basis on which individualism sprang.

Culturally, the sprouting of individualism can be reflected in many ancient Greek philosophers' ideas. Whether it was Perikles' proposition that "the human being is of primary importance" and his advocacy of democratic politics, or Protagoras' proposition that "man is the measure of all things", or Socrates' proposition that "know thyself" and "virtue is knowledge" all reflects the sprouting of individualism. Russell even argues that individualism has its roots in ancient Greek cynicism and Stoicism (Russell, 2004). As Greece was defeated by Rome, the Greeks were forced to withdraw from public life. The cynics began to investigate the possibility of "going it alone" in the small space of existence. Later, the Stoics developed their philosophy and created the doctrines of natural rights, natural law and natural equality (Cui, 2011). Individualism has been embedded in the soil of Western culture since ancient Greek era. It then developed over time and eventually matured during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment period.

In England where Hobbes lived, the idea of individualism also had deep roots. Before Hobbes, the most iconic development of individualism was the birth of the "Great Charter of the Liberties (Magna Carta)" in 1215. This was a political mandate signed by King John at Runnymede on 15 June 1215, with the aim of reaching a compromise with the nobles. The king's power was thus effectively limited for the first time, and the legal framework was more conducive than ever to safeguarding the vested political and economic rights of the nobles (Holt, 2015). Although the "free men" whose rights were enshrined in the Magna Carta were only the nobles, the spirit of individualism expressed there was the basis for people like Hobbes and Edward Coke to develop their ideas.

Hobbes is known as the father of modern Western political philosophy, and he pioneered the modern political tradition that centred on rights-oriented individualism (Ryan and Rogers, 1990). Just as the world is made up of material things moving according to rules, Hobbes believed that society is made up of individuals moving

according to their own desires. Hobbes' view fundamentally challenges what the classical political philosophy, represented by Aristotle, stood for. Aristotle saw human beings as political and social animals. Our political society derives from nature, and the ultimate ends of humans is to live collectively and happily in polis (Aristotle, 2009).

In contrast, Hobbes argues that individuals' ceaseless pursuit of personal interests is what makes them human, and that political society was derived from human construction. The ultimate ends of human beings was not to have some supreme good or virtue to pursue, but to do their best to avoid death (Ai, 2010). Hobbes believes that the state was ultimately established to guarantee the safety of individuals, meaning that individual interests were at the heart of our political life. In Hobbesian individualism, citizens constitute the centre of independent consciousness, and as independent rational beings they are the best judges of their own interests; politics is based on individual unity, government derives its legitimacy from each citizen's permission; political representatives are representatives of individual interests, and the ultimate ends of politics is to deliver individual interests. Hobbes' strong individualist stance required that individuals, not the king, must become the soul of the state that Hobbes constructed. And to achieve this Hobbes had to choose a path of social construction that began with equal individuals and took the protection of their rights as its focus.

### ***Xunzi and Chinese collectivist tradition***

The development of the collectivist tradition in ancient China was also closely linked to its geographical environment. Chinese civilisation originated in the Yellow River and Yangtze River valleys. The temperate and suitable climate, abundant water, and fertile soil gave birth to China's agricultural civilisation. The small peasant economy, based on farming, has always been the dominant mode of production in traditional Chinese society (Dai, 2010). The small peasant economy emphasises the family as the basic unit of production. The head of each family ensured productive efficiency through the

division of labour among all family members, and this was the beginning of Chinese collectivism with “family” at its heart.

In the political system, the collectivist tradition can be traced back to Qi, the son of the former king Yu. By inheriting the throne from Yu, Qi started the tradition of hereditary inheritance in ancient Chinese society, thus the idea of “family country” became central to the ancient and feudal Chinese political system (Liu, 2017). The “family country” was in fact an extension of the family-based small peasant economy. The “family country” meant that a particular family owned the state, and the state became a political organisation centred on that family (Liu, 2017). Under this system, all the land in the state was owned by that family, individuals had to obey and support that family in order to gain access to the land.

Chinese collectivism can thus be seen in two ways: on the one hand, the state-oriented tradition behind the “family country” system, where individuals must be loyal to the state, and on the other hand, the family-oriented tradition behind the “small peasant economy”, where the individuals must be filial to their parents (Dai, 2010). What this collectivism ultimately entails is that the individual has no value for independent existence. According to Zhang Dongsun, traditional Chinese society is organised as a large family with numerous small families nested within it. The king is the father of the nation, and the ministers are the sons of the nation. In such a hierarchically organised society, there was no concept of “individual”. All individuals are either fathers or sons, kings or ministers, elder brothers or younger brothers (Liang, 2018). The dissolution of individual subjectivity reflected in Chinese collectivist tradition explains the neglect of individual values in ancient Chinese philosophy. This can be reflected in Confucianism in particular.

Influenced by the tradition of collectivism and earlier Confucianism, from the very beginning, Xunzi’s vision was focused on society as a whole, individuals are not the



basis for social construction. Xunzi said that “people only need to understand and practise the propriety and norms that have been established” (Liang, 1983). The reason why people follow propriety is not for their personal interest, but for the “common good” of society. This is what Xunzi inherited from Confucius and Mencius. Early Confucianism believes that the realisation of the common good in society is the prerequisite for realising individual interest (Rosemont, 2004). The greatest common good advocated by Confucianism is harmony, which requires everyone in society to fulfil their duties and practise propriety in accordance with the hierarchical order.

Xunzi also believes that if everyone in society fulfils their duties according to their social and family status, society will function in accordance with nature (since in Xunzi’s theory “propriety” is the highest form of all natural things), and harmony will result (Liang, 1983). In order to realise the ideal of “harmonious society”, Xunzi strongly defended the hierarchical order based on “propriety” and rejected the concept of equality advocated by Hobbes and others. Xunzi argues that “If people’s power is all the same, then they cannot unify. If the people’s (status is) equal, then they cannot be employed. Just as there is Heaven and earth, so too are there the differences between superior and subordinate (Hutton, 2016)”. In Xunzi’s collectivist stance, individuals became subordinate to the propriety, and individual subjectivity was sacrificed for the construction of social order. Thus Xunzi could not have chosen to construct a political system based on individuals, but rather on the “sage king” who stood at the top of the hierarchy and the propriety he created.

## **5. Limitations of Xunzi and Hobbes’ political thought**

### **5.1 Limitations of Xunzi’s political thought**

*The dilemma of maintaining a “propriety principal -- law supporting”*

## ***structure***

Xunzi used propriety and law as the two normative means for building political order. He advocated a combination of propriety and law and gave the king supreme authority. The application of propriety and law improved Confucianism's over-reliance on morality, the idea of "respect for the king" also served the rulers' needs. However, it is extremely difficult to maintain a propriety-based structure under the premise of respect for the king. Firstly, in Xunzi's ideal state, propriety should be created and practised by the "sage king" in order to motivate people and ultimately cultivate their moral character (Sun, 2016). Moral cultivation is at the heart of propriety, control is at the heart of law. However, the sage king Xunzi expected was the perfect political leader, and in reality such a figure was hard to come by (Levenson, 2006). The ordinary king may implement the propriety created by the "previous sage king", but he does not understand the essence of propriety, nor does he understand the need to educate people through his own practice. Over time, propriety in the hands of the ordinary king would have become a mere instrument of restraint and control over people, thus losing its essence of moral cultivation. Moreover, while propriety is usually subtle and not immediately effective, law is more effective in controlling people immediately. Ordinary kings tended to favour more efficient tools, so they inevitably placed more emphasis on the rule of law, which means propriety was bound to be marginalized. This would eventually break Xunzi's ideal state centred on propriety.

## ***How can individual freedom be attained?***

In all of Xunzi's political thoughts, he never mentions the word "freedom". All the efforts of Xunzi's political philosophy were aimed at enabling people to accept a community life in which individuals were bound by propriety. At the heart of Xunzi's ideal society is propriety, created by "sage king" (Zhang, 2015). But there is no objective standard by which to measure the applicability of the propriety created by sage kings. Since the "sages" existed first and foremost as individuals, the question arises as to whether the standards of propriety as determined by some individuals are

appropriate for everyone. Xunzi also attempts to defend the sage's criteria for making propriety, saying that "the sage is one who is able to perceive the feelings of all people in the world through his own feelings" (Liang, 1983). This argument is obviously flawed in logic. Each individual has his or her own preferences and interests, the sage king could not prove that virtue, based on propriety, was the highest standard of morality, the ultimate good.

The sage king attempts to make everyone live a virtuous life in which they would follow propriety and cultivate themselves. He believes that virtue is the fundamental criterion that defines human beings (Sun, 2016). But this completely ignores the individual's other demands in social reality that have nothing to do with "virtue". Sun Xupeng argues that Xunzi replaced the diversity of interests that existed in real life with people's vague agreement on the concept of "virtue", so that the "freedom" of individuals was invisibly curbed (Sun, 2016). In Xunzi's case, all individuals become merely part of society with a common goal, guided by virtue. Thus, the subjectivity of the "individual" is completely overshadowed by the grand narrative of propriety, with only the concept of the "community" remaining. While this was conducive to achieving Xunzi's ideal of a propriety-based social order, it invariably resulted in the neglect of individual freedom.

## **5.2 Limitations of Hobbes's political thought**

### ***The limits of human nature theory***

Hobbes approached human nature through his empiricist position. He attempted to achieve a positivist account of human nature by removing all the metaphysical elements from the traditional human nature theory, which would serve as the basis for his "scientific" study of politics. However, Hobbes's view of human nature failed to empirically reflect the true state of human behaviour.

By applying his mechanical materialism, Hobbes abstracted human beings as "material

things that are in constant voluntary motion, manipulated by passions”, and he argued that man’s greedy and selfish nature could not be changed, the preservation of life was the ultimate good of human beings (Ai, 2010). Hobbes uses this as the starting point for expounding on his political thoughts, refuting Aristotle’s virtue-based classical political philosophy. Hobbes argues that his view of human nature is based on the “realities” of human beings. The greatest virtue of man is not to pursue a given “good” but to do all that he can to escape death. However, as Smith and Bauman argue, if the human nature is to escape death, if all the normative goods in the world are not in our personal interest and not worth pursuing, then how we can explain the fact that from ancient times to the present day there have always been people from families to societies to the world at large who have given up their own interests and even sacrificed their lives for the glory of their country, for their own dignity and honour, for the good of others (Bowman, 2007), (Smith, 2012)? Therefore, Hobbes’ purpose for expounding on human nature was not to reveal human beings’ objective nature, but to justify his political ideals.

### ***The dilemma between individual freedom and the freedom of authority***

In the ideal society Hobbes constructs, sovereignty has absolute freedom as the gathering of citizens’ will. But Hobbes gives no effective solution to limit sovereign’s power as he simply appeals to God who is not substantially binding in the restraint of sovereign (Lei, 2011). This absolute freedom of sovereign, and in particular its freedom to make laws, has the potential to cause harm to the citizens’ freedom. For in contrast to the absolute freedom of sovereign, the scope of citizens’ freedom is expressed as “citizens have the absolute freedom to act when the law is silent” (Hobbes, 2007). However, since the sovereign is the lawmaker, citizens’ freedom is limited by the law and therefore also by the sovereign. Hobbes also argues that because the sovereign is authorized by every citizen, all laws made by the sovereign are just (Hobbes, 2007). Thus the freedom of the citizens is in effect completely limited by sovereign.

Moreover, Hobbes argues that citizens have the freedom to defy the sovereignty for the purpose of preserving their lives (Sreedhar, 2012). But if sovereignty has really threatened citizens' lives, is it really a good option for citizens to rebel against it, to overthrow Leviathan? If citizens do not overthrow the sovereignty, their lives will not be safe; but if they do overthrow the sovereignty, they will return to the natural state in which their lives will still not be safe. Thus, even in Leviathan, individuals cannot completely avoid the fear of death.

## 6. Conclusion

Xunzi and Hobbes, two remarkable philosophers, despite the fact that one came from the East and the other from the West, and that they lived almost two thousand years apart, yet there are striking similarities in their thinking. The aim of my thesis is to be able to systematically compare the political philosophies of Xunzi and Hobbes and to answer the question of why Xunzi and Hobbes had similar starting points but ended up relying on radically different methods for constructing society. A systematic and comprehensive comparison means that we can clarify the logical connections between political philosophy and the other parts of their vast philosophical system and understand precisely the connotations that flow from their political thoughts. This requires us to provide a comprehensive overview of the logical process and related context in which the political philosophy of the two men was constructed. Therefore, I have chosen to start by comparing the historical background that underpins their political philosophies, then their related natural philosophy, their theories of human nature, and finally their state construction theories and its limitations. Such an approach will also help us develop a more comprehensive and profound understanding of Xunzi and Hobbes' political philosophies.

By comparing the historical and cultural background of their political thought, we find that both Xunzi and Hobbes lived in the process of transition in social systems. The social disorder led both men to dedicate themselves to bringing peace and stability to their times through their respective political ideals. In addition, both men's political thought was influenced by shifts in cultural paradigms. It is the Enlightenment's spirit and the competitive context of the "Hundred Schools of Thought" period that contributed to the innovation of both men's ideas.

In terms of human nature, both men sought to explain human nature by taking natural philosophy as the starting point. They both argued from their materialist standpoint that

desire (passion) is the factor that leads human nature to develop toward “evil”. It is the natural “disposition” of human beings to seek profit and avoid harm, therefore there is no good or evil in human nature. Both Xunzi and Hobbes’ views of human nature broke with the metaphysical view of human nature that dominated their respective eras. Hobbes broke with the Christian theological view of human nature. Xunzi, on the other hand, broke with the sanctity of the “religious heaven” enshrined in earlier Confucianism by connecting human nature to the “natural heaven”.

In terms of their models of social construction, Hobbes chose a bottom-up approach: equal individuals, in order to escape from the state of war between men in the natural state, eventually reached consensus on natural law through their passion of reason. In order to ensure the enforcement of the natural law, individuals confer their natural rights to the sovereign and thus create the state to guarantee their security. Xunzi, on the other hand, chose a top-down path of construction: the sage king forms sustainable communities by creating propriety to moderating human desires, thus settling interpersonal conflicts. Within the community, social harmony is achieved by individuals practising sage king’s propriety and obeying the propriety-based social hierarchical order.

There are three main reasons why Xunzi and Hobbes chose different approaches to constructing society. First, in terms of historical context, influenced by the Reformation and the Enlightenment, Hobbes was committed to breaking down the theocratic structure of state sovereignty by limiting the legitimacy of sovereignty to “individuals” in the secular sphere. Xunzi, on the other hand, out of his ambition to revive propriety and save Confucianism from marginalisation, raised Confucianism’s political practicability by stressing kings’ authority and the necessity of king’s power. Secondly, their different views on how to resolve the conflicts arising from individual desires also influenced their paths to social construction. While Hobbes believes that it was necessary to rely on individuals, Xunzi believes that there was no other way but to rely

on “sage king”. Thirdly, Hobbes’ individualist stance led Hobbes to choose a social construction model that started with defending individuals’ rights. Xunzi’s collectivist stance, on the other hand, led him to choose the path of hierarchical order in which the common good could be best delivered.

In recent years, with the rapid pace of China’s overall development, Chinese people’s national consciousness and national pride have been at an all-time high. The embrace of traditional Chinese culture has always been accompanied by a resistance to Western culture. This is a bad attitude. There is no superiority or inferiority in each country’s cultural traditions, and we should see different cultures as equals. By conducting a comparative study of the political philosophies of Xunzi and Hobbes, my aim is not to compare which tradition is superior to the other, let alone to use one culture to lead the development of the other. For different cultures to achieve a kind of resonance or dialogue, we first need to adopt an attitude of mutual respect and take an objective stand. My thesis is precisely an objective account of the political philosophies of Xunzi and Hobbes, which presents the essentials of Eastern and Western political thoughts. I hope that this will make a small contribution to the convergence of Eastern and Western cultures.



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