

A Look Into History: Causes Behind Disasters

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Stories from the past have helped to shape many cultural traditions of the world. And very often, they can help guide us out of desperate situations whenever we choose to view them through the lens of humility and sincerity.

Humanity has been no stranger to natural disasters throughout history. Floods, droughts, earthquakes, cyclones, and plagues, are often viewed as “acts of God,” “blameless misfortunes,” or are attempted to be explained away with a wide array of reasoning and theories.

In ancient China, one such explanation is that natural disasters often result as a consequence of gross injustices.

In ancient Chinese culture, whenever natural disasters occurred, emperors and court officials would reflect upon their governance and check to see if they had done something wrong, if there were cases of injustice that needed to be addressed.

Such a concept had become a common practice by the Han Dynasty (202 BC - 220 A.D.). In The Book of Later Han, a book that records the history of the Eastern Han period, there are a number of incidents during which severe droughts suddenly gave way to pouring rains after emperors redressed cases of injustice and released people who had been wrongfully jailed.

It was recorded for example, that the capital city suffered a severe drought in the sixth year of the Yongyuan era under the reign of Emperor He of Han (88 - 106 A.D.). The emperor decided to reopen cases where the convicted were given heavy sentences and allowed them to appeal for their innocence. Consequently, those who had been wronged earlier were rehabilitated, and justice was restored. Heavy rains poured down even before the emperor got back to the palace.

Another incident was also recorded: In the second year of Emperor An of Han (106 - 125 A.D.)'s reign, the empress-dowager redressed misjudged cases, and again, torrential rains fell in the drought-affected regions almost immediately.

The He Tu, which consists of cosmological diagrams used in ancient China, was said to offer clear indications for the causes of natural disasters. A locust disaster, for example, was said to be the result of the tyranny and greed of officials, who would have most likely put many innocent people in jail. In such situations, natural disasters would occur as warnings and punishments by the divine. When court officials reflected upon themselves and amended their wrongdoings, the natural disasters would disappear accordingly.

The Story of Zhou Qing in the Han Dynasty

This is a true story documented in The Book of Han.

It happened during the Western Han period (202 B.C. - 9 A. D.) in Donghai (today's Shandong Province). There was a young widow named Zhou Qing, who continued to look after her mother-in-law for more than ten years after her husband passed away. Her upstanding character and filial piety earned her high praise from the local people. Her mother-in-law tried to persuade her to remarry a number of times so that she could make a new life for herself, but she always refused to and kept taking good care of her mother-in-law. In order to relieve the burden on her kindhearted daughter-in-law, the elderly woman committed suicide by

hanging herself while Zhou was out. Zhou was heartbroken when she saw what had happened and wailed in grief. However, her sister-in-law accused her of killing her mother-in-law and reported her to the local magistrate office. The magistrate refused to listen to Zhou's appeal for her innocence and ordered Zhou's execution. Even though the local people knew she was innocent, nobody stepped forward to seek justice for her, except for one prison officer, who later resigned in grief when the magistrate rejected his repeated appeals for Zhou. On the day of her execution, Zhou proclaimed her innocence to heaven, saying if she was not guilty, there would be snow in June and a three-year drought. Indeed, it snowed in June that year, and for the next three years, the region experienced a severe drought with no rain and little agricultural produce, devastating the locals' livelihoods. When the new prefecture magistrate learned about Zhou's case from the resigned prison officer, he realized that the three-year-drought was a form of punishment for the gross injustice done to Zhou and the silence of the local people. So, he immediately organized a memorial ceremony before Zhou's tomb to sincerely redress her grievance and to apologize to her on behalf of the people. As he repented, dark clouds built up, and before the ceremony was finished, it began to pour. That year, the region had good weather for the crops, and the people enjoyed a prosperous harvest.

Consistency Is the Touchstone of Virtue

Even though it is understood that bad conduct and moral decline would result in disasters, people still make the same mistakes again and again.

Emperor Taizong of Tang, one of the greatest leaders in China's history, wrote in *Di Fan*, a set of books, about how emperors should behave. In it, he included a line, which, translated, means roughly, "It is not difficult to understand good reasoning, but difficult to put it into practice, and even more difficult to always stick to it."

Emperor Taizong of Tang also reminded his court officials of proper behavior: "As court officials, you should attend state affairs with intense conviction. If you don't speak up when you see things that I did not do properly, how can you assist me? If you keep a blind eye, injustice would occur and would bring harm to the world."

Emperor Taizong was always careful to use his power righteously and always encouraged his ministers to point out his shortcomings so that he could correct them. Under his incorruptible reign, the Tang Dynasty flourished economically, militarily and culturally, and was considered an exemplary model for all future emperors and a golden

age in Chinese history. The people lived under peace and prosperity.

In contrast, the Ming Dynasty fared worst in terms of governmental corruption, with the abuse of power reaching an unprecedented level. Eunuchs gained unparalleled power over state affairs and established the first secret service in Chinese history, known as Dongchang (Eastern Depot) and Xichang (Western Depot), which had absolute power in the suppression of “unfavorable” court officials and commoners. People were living in fear and a large number of innocent people were wrongfully tried, tortured, convicted and died.

Correspondingly, the Ming Dynasty also suffered the most frequent natural disasters. According to historical statistics, out of the 276 years of the Ming Dynasty, at least 168 were recorded to have disease breakouts, and there had been 330 instances of plagues over the entire dynasty.

As usual, when there were severe droughts, floods, or earthquakes, emperors would tell their subordinates to speak up about what had gone wrong. The Ming court burned incense, offered sacrifices to the divine, and issued a rescript for penitence. However, it still ruled the people

with an iron fist and was not above using violence to consolidate its power.

How could the divine possibly offer any help and protection in such circumstances?

History Keeps Repeating Itself

This pattern of injustice followed by a natural disaster of some sort can be found even in contemporary times. Let us take a look at the events which led up to the outbreak of SARS in 2003.

In 1992, Falun Gong, a spiritual practice based on the principles of “Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance” started to spread rapidly from Changchun in Northeastern China. Within seven years, the number of people practicing Falun Gong reached nearly 100 million in China alone.

However, due to the popularity of the practice and his fear of losing control of the Chinese people, then-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader Jiang Zemin launched a nationwide crackdown on Falun Gong practitioners in July 1999.

At the end of 2000, the “China Anti-Cult Association” (CACA) organized an anti-Falun Gong “one million signatures” campaign, originating from Beijing University on January 11, 2001. The CACA distributed 100 hundred-meter-long petition scrolls to various places, and the local CCP departments organized the local people to sign these petitions. As of February 26, 2001, the organizers claimed that the number of signatures had exceeded 1.5 million.

Those who signed the petition included relatives of Falun Gong practitioners who had benefitted from the practice both physically and mentally themselves, as well as their neighbors, friends, colleagues, classmates—many of which knew that Falun Gong is good, but signed the petition to toe the Party line.

In March of the same year, the CACA representatives took the signatures to the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva in order to deceive more people in the international community.

Although the 610 Offices, the police, courts and public prosecutors played a key role in the persecution of Falun Gong, those who signed anti-Falun Gong petitions could not absolve themselves from the blame of aiding a tyrant in his draconian rule.

With the momentum gained by the “one million signatures” campaign, the CCP was able to intensify the persecution of Falun Gong on a broader scale. To date, several millions of innocent practitioners have been subjected to unlawful arrests, detention, forced labor, imprisonment; thousands of them have died as a result of torture, and many more were killed for their organs.

In addition to physical persecution, the rounds and rounds of propaganda campaigns put out by the CCP to demonize Falun Gong as a cult only added magnified the hatred against the peaceful, virtuous practice in the general public.

While such a gross injustice was raging across China, SARS broke out in 2003. For many Chinese who were well-versed in Chinese history, it was a divine warning to people to stop such crimes against humanity.

Many people panicked and started to reflect upon themselves in fear. However, as soon as the epidemic subsided, they forgot the pain and continued with their wrongdoings. The persecution of Falun Gong continued.

In 2007, a new persecution campaign to force families to sign the “Reject All Cults” family commitment card was

launched in Guangxi Province, which soon spread all over China. Residents were encouraged to monitor and report on each other; some people even reported their own family members, who were then sent to brainwashing centers to be “transformed.”

In August 2011, the central 610 Office launched a nationwide promotion of the “Guangxi experience.”

In 2013, the CCP carried out another nationwide brainwashing campaign to defame Falun Gong, mainly targeting family members of Falun Gong practitioners, women in rural China and primary and secondary school students as their brainwashing victims.

On September 22, 2017, the CCP conducted an online signature activity, urging netizens to sign to “Say No to Cults.” A large number of people who did not know the truth about Falun Gong fell victim to the brainwashing activity, and at the same time helped the CCP commit further crimes.

After the devastating coronavirus pandemic started in Wuhan 2020, many have regarded it as another warning to human beings. People have realized that humanity is in a

critical moment of history, and everyone is facing, among other things, a test of conscience.

<https://en.minghui.org/html/articles/2020/8/5/186195.html>