

Cognitive Background to Flood Control Work

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The greatest opposition in the cognitive background to water control of the Yellow River was the opposition to both the proposal for a water control policy and the main motivation for its implementation; in other words, opposition between the civil government's viewpoint and the military and national security viewpoint.

The water control work by Wang Jing during the Hou Han Dynasty was primarily to create the infrastructure for facilities that would be indispensable in stabilizing and improving the lives of the local people and the shipping and irrigation waterways of the Canal Bian, the provision of a water source for its irrigation system (namely, facilities taking water from the Yellow River), and construction to assure a stable waterway to prevent against flood damage, which threatened the entire plains region. The civil government's ideas of a primary motivation for stabilizing and improving the lives of the local people drove the planning and implementation of this construction work.

On the other hand, during the North Song Dynasty, the attempt to return the flow eastwards by changing the natural northwards flow of the river by force and thereby assaulting the residents along the riverbanks with massively profligate costs, ultimately exhausting and devastating the local economic society, arose from the central government's desire for a policy whose primary motivation was national defence and a military strategy against invasion by the Khitai people. From this viewpoint, considerations for the local people were eliminated.

Further, the start and maintenance of a southwards-flowing waterway during the South Song and Jin Dynasties was also born from measures and policies taken from the national defence and military viewpoint. The south-flowing waterway was unnatural from the start when viewed from the properties of the sinking on the geology of the North China Plain. Consequently, in the year Xianfeng 5 of the Qing Dynasty (1855), the south-flowing waterway was unstable right up until its diversion along the north banks of the Shandong mountain mass, and despite the attempts to shore it up using embankments, its destruction, flooding, and diversification of tributaries were never-ending, indicating a striking contrast with the stability that lasted 800 years of the waterways built by Wang Jing.

After the opening of the Jing-Hang Canal during the Yuan Dynasty, scrutiny fell on the maintenance of these canals from a desire for national sovereignty, which strove to maintain the capital, which was located where Beijing is today, through the bales of rice transported from the south, and river control policy was promulgated from that viewpoint. Locating the capital on the northern tip of the North China Plain, very far from the economic hub, was probably because in the midst of a geopolitical understanding that broadly divided into the North China Plain southwards and the northern plains, which could be seen from the Great Wall of China dating from the Ming Dynasty, the land was considered from the perspective of bases from which to mobilise armies and bases of political power from which both regions could be viewed. To protect the main food supply routes to the capital, Beijing, or to protect them as far as possible, work to control the rivers was promulgated as an antidote.

The river control work of Pan Jixun during the end of the Ming Dynasty, and Jin Fu and Chen Huang at the start of the Qing Dynasty, was unable to stray greatly from this framework. This is because in all cases, they were working to the basic wishes of the central government to maintain the south-flowing waterway at all costs. As understood from

historical records the plans for river control that Pan ji-xun, Jin Fu, and Chen Huang had, however, it is possible to point to the influence of passionate Neo-Confucian ideas of encouraging work by the civil government with all its might in the execution of human wisdom and consideration for the local people in attempting to achieve some sort of hard labour.

Neo-Confucianism was a type of local social revolutionary movement in which appeared the inherited idea of a “civil government state” reborn by the people, as typified by Fan zhong-yan and others; a renaissance during the North Song Dynasty of the ideas of civil government that had been crystallized by the Emperor Xuan during the Qian Han Dynasty and the Emperor Guangwu during the Hou Han Dynasty. These passions and ideas were adopted by Pan Jixun, Jin Fu, and Chen Huang, and can be said to have been brought to life through them.

The Yellow River forms a great fan and the North China Plain while changing its flow within a broad framework of sinking on the North China Plain due to neotectonic movement. Where should this natural change and humans compromise? The river control work of Wang Jing, which considered a local government that elevated consideration for local people to the highest, is one such response. On the other hand, the south-flowing waterway, which is a route maintained since its start artificially and which from the first began as ideas born of national defence and national sovereignty, did not compromise by distancing itself from nature, but instead maintained ideas of artifice and control that attempted to wrestle nature into submission. The economy and society of the people living on the North China Plain was pressured and ultimately ruined by exorbitant demands for manpower, materials, and funds for this reckless construction work against the Yellow River.