

Empire of Perfect Unity

Man's life without the order of society is ruled by chaos. This simple truth is the first thing learned by all school children who reside in the Empire of Perfect Unity. For the rest of their days they will learn that this simple axiom rules all aspects of their life from when and what they will eat for their meals to who will be chosen as the next emperor. Though strict, it is not an harsh land to live in. All have plenty to eat and disease is almost unheard of thanks to the skilled medical doctors whose medicinal skills and foods have essentially eliminated illness. More crushing however is the danger of uncertainty and that fear has been eliminated for the people of the Empire. For almost all, their life shall be lived until the end of their days in happiness whether they be the lowest of peasants or the most exalted emperor himself.

Of course, there are those who will never understand the perfection of unity and order. They prefer instead to question those things that cannot be questioned and are beyond their understanding. These people do not understand that all the forms of buildings that can bring happiness and serve their function have been codified; these people desire to spend all their time making art rather than producing goods for others; these people choose to question their chosen spouses as if they could ever love another. For these people there is a place, the land beyond the North Wall. The North Wall divides civilization from those who cannot be civilized.

Beyond the wall lies chaos, wandering bands of nomads preying on those they come across, men lying with other men and strange vagabonds creating odd spots of art. As will all chaos there are portions of order within it and towns have risen up that for the most part repel bandits and invaders but they have not the wisdom of medicine and so are prone to disease and their homes are not built within the twenty two forms of excellent stability and so their households fall prey to disease and their homes perish with lightning and fire.

The History of the Empire

The Age of the Unwise

Long ago, in the time before there was an emperor, is a time known as the Age of the Unwise. It was a time of which we know little because the lack of stability meant that words were given little value over steel and historians were few and far between. Into this time came the greatest of all persons to ever walk the land, the Nameless Philosopher. The Philosopher taught many secrets as he journeyed the land and brought peace unto it. Raiders became protectors, Warriors became poets and the land was brought to peace. We have no writings of the philosopher but his sayings and teachings were recorded by many who recognize his wisdom and the Thirteen Harmonious Changes and the discipline of the Scholar Sword are said to have been taught by him.

The Age of the Separate Peace

For countless ages peace was the rule of the land. While history shows that the governing laws and philosophies were primitive in their original inception, time and the ardent work of philosophers covering every field sought to discover more perfect ways of

organizing life. Crops grew regularly, diseases were cured and life became better and better for everyone.

Sadly, not all persons could see the wisdom of this. There were those who wished to take what they wanted by strength of arms, those who would cheat from within the bureaucracy and others who would violate the integral reciprocity of society. In these ancient times prisons were the answer but the deprivation of liberty is a violation of the teachings of the philosopher on many levels. Ultimately, the final solution to the unwise was found and the Northern Wall was built. Like many city walls before it, this was a tall and imposing structure and it sectioned off the top third of the country. A massive undertaking was given to relocate all persons from that portion of the country and give them equivalent lands south of what was to be the Wall. When the project was completed the prisoners were given amnesty and released by prison. Many returned to life reformed and willing to partake in a fruitful life. Others were soon returning to their old ways and one by one they were exiled north of the wall.

The emperor at the time knew that this would, within one generation, lead to a problem for children north of the wall could not be said to have any guilt. Also, eventually those north of the wall would organize for a yearning for society dwells within each man. The Stone Lions, before then guardians of the towns from bandits and soon to be bereft of work with bandit in exile were reassigned to the wall itself. There, they would receive children to be given up to the South for a better life, converts many of whom were born north of the wall who wished a better life and to guard the world from the inevitable raiders.

Thus the years passed in peace.

The Red Hand Rebellion

This was the way of things, a stable balance between those who desired chaos and those who desired order until twenty four years ago. At that time a man call Fu Sun was exiled for arguing in the Unified and Deliberative of Days that portions of the forest should be left wild and untamed. For three years five days and two hours Fu Sun wandered the land beyond the North Wall first joining a community then when it was burned being a slave of bandits then becoming a bandit and finally challenging the bandit lord for his position taking control. As the new lord of the bandits, known as the Red Hands for the dyed leather gloves they wore, Fu Sun began amassing an army. One by one bandit tribes were absorbed under the banner of the Red Hand and soon the townships began to wander if the bandits would merely overrun them. They did not need fear for Fu Sun announced his intentions: to overthrow the Empire. With this announcement came the flocking of many young who lived in the encampments and many who lived merely as nomads to join the forces of Fu Sun's army.

Finally, on a day when a red sun rose over land his army marched on the wall. There stood the Sentinels at their posts to block the invading force when Fu Sun approached one and put before him his daughter who had been exiled for writing love poetry to a man not her husband and the mans grandchild. The man, whose name has been stricken from memory broke down and wept and after while still weeping he stood aside and let the army from beyond the North Wall pass into the Empire.

For six days and six nights the Red Hand army marched across the Empire

brushing aside the smaller forces as a mother brushes away tears from an infants face. Finally, Fu Sun and his band which a year before had been merely a dozne rag tag bandits did what no other had done before and brought an invading force to the steps of the Palace of Sublime Jade. Fu Sun demanded that the emperor come out and that if so that all his bureaucrats and courtiers would be spared but that he must come with the Golden Seal of Three Birds. The emperor, a man of ninety-four winters who had begun his career as a doctor in the southern most province walked down the thousand and one steps of the Palace of Sublime Jade holding the Golden Seal of Three Birds in his left hand and in his right a sword of meditation. With a voice that echoed with the wisdom of the ages he asked that Fu Sun stand down in his foolish bid for the throne. Fu Sun laughed a reckless laugh and proclaimed that a new day had dawned upon a red sun and that an empire of the red sun would be the new order of the day.

With that Fu Sun rushed upon the Emperor and drew his chopping sword. Steel clashed with steel and the emperor felled Fu Sun with three quick strokes from his thin and balanced blade. A great cry went up from the army of the Red Hand and they surged forth and though they lost many men the emperor was eventually slain on the thousand and one steps and the Golden Seal of Three Birds taken from his hand. The army invaded the palace ransacking its treasures and after three days of chaos a new emperor of the newly proclaimed Red Sun empire was proclaimed and it was a woman known as Wan Bei.

Immediately a new government ran the land. Wan Bei had been a lieutenant of Fu Sun and did her best to implement his vision to her as the original followers of the philosopher had implemented his vision. The members of the Red Hand were now dubbed to be Samurai, a new class of person that would be the rulers of all for their right of conquest. Now there were only three classes of persons she proclaimed, the People, The Samurai and the Empress. No longer would manifold layers of beauracracy be necessary to implement plans or come up with new ways.

For five years Wan Bei ruled and gave greater freedom to all people in the empire and placed many from the army in positions of power especially those who had been exiled for being dissenters within the Deliberative. For five years much was chaos and improper plantings led to famine across the land. For the rebels it was a time of awkward adjustment. No longer could hunter track a beast that was his prey and delight in victory for now all animals were behind fences. No longer could a woman pick up a sword and know that no one around her would cast disapproving glances. For many the loss of their world, a place of freedom where choice had determined destiny and fortune favored the bold seemed to be lost.

It was not long before these samurai began to become anxious and jealous of one another. Many raided others lands following Fu Sun's own example of right by conquest. Most abused the people who were now beneath them. Sometimes to make them work but often for bitterness of their exile.

As the five years ended Wan Bei announced sweeping reforming and adoption of some of the old ways. Her Glorious Redemption of Fives Summers would bring peace to the land. During those second five years the empire had many problems, most of which were in some way created by the new policies. Wan Bei cut these programs one by one proclaiming each a success in that it had tried something new and it was learned that it

would not work and why. Slowly, the laws and order of the Empire of the Red Hand grew closer and closer to the ways of the Empire of Perfect Unity and with each passing month of new laws the Empress Wan Bei grew more sullen and distant from her court. Finally, at the end of five summers Wan Bei made an announcement that shocked the entire empire. On a day on which a red sun rose and the people of the City of Golden Papers were going to celebrate the anniversary of the Empire of the Red Hand Wan Bei introduced the world to Li Kao, the next emperor of the Empire of Perfect Unity. Li Kao had granted absolution to all involved in the overthrow and the empire would begin once again. All save Wan Bei who was to face death by burial alive, the traditional punishment for those who are regicides. No longer would famine plague their lands from poorly managed crops and horrifying government programs without order be tested upon them. For the rebels it was a time of great celebration as well though in different and active ways. For ten years they had labored to create a place that was at once an empire with all of things that come with that and in the process they had given up their freedom.

Within one turning of the month the Empress of Wan Bei, only monarch of the Empire of the Red Hand was buried and most of those who had gone south of the wall had returned. Since that day ten years ago a malaise has grown over the land beyond the North Wall. Many had lost hope that there would ever be land that was both happy and that they could call home. Even the bandits seemed struck with an ennui towards their pillaging. Some of the former "Samurai" were unwilling to give up their titles and now call themselves Ronin, the outcast Samurai. Some have tried to establish towns north of the wall to reenact the vision but in all cases the towns have been razed by bandits within six months, as was typical before the rebellion.

It was at this time that far in the northern mountains near the land of frozen rivers that a doorway was discovered. Now, the exiles of the north can choose a new land, though it be as unruled as the one they left, and for many that is enough to hope and to dream again of an empire where differences make one the whole stronger.

The recent tales that have spread across the land

Three years ago the emperor decreed that the doorways led to another land. At that time a new class was created: the Explorer. Only the most loyal would be chose to be an explorer though anyone could apply. Few were chosen.

Two years ago, the Emperor, after carefully considering the cultures of various worlds decided that none from outside the empire would be allowed into the Empire of Perfect Unity on legal terms. While this upset many who wished to learn from these other worlds the Emperor wisely decreed that the status of Explorer would be more open to all and that more official contact should be made with the Forest of Doors.

More recently an encampment has been made within the Forest as the Third Glorious Imperial Settlement led by the prudent hand of the distinguished headman Yellow Dragon Li. While it is not required that Explorers live within this settlement it is the most commonly chosen option. Several notables have come to this camp to aid in this glorious mission including the philosopher Proper Wisdom and the retired Stone Lion known as Venerable Mountain "The First Among Lions", a wizened old warrior, once the leader of the Stone Lions that guard the primary gate of the Wall. Served with distinction and honor and retired last year. He had hardly settled down to spoil his grandchildren

rotten than a letter with the Imperial seal arrived at his estate. He was pulled out of retirement to lend his services as warrior and tactician to the Third Advanced Glorious Imperial Expedition Encampment.

Disturbingly, there are rumors circulating that there is a community of exiles within the Forest banded together for "mutual protection." Many worry that this is the fomenting of a new rebellion that could strike the empire from any point that a door appears.

Honorable Life and Honorable Ancestors

From the moment that one is born the role one will play is understood. Babies understand that it is their place to eat and to grow. Children are taught games that will help them to learn and remember and mistakes are tolerated among children as it is understood that this is their role as children. As children grow older, around the age of eight, they begin the training in special schools. In some villages there is only school and in the Great City of Blue Stone by the Yellow Water there are no less than one hundred and one schools. Each child is expected to go to their local schools. Prestigious parents may have the wealth to send a child to a school that is not local. This often happens with the very bureaucrats who keep homes in the countryside and the city but wish to have their child go to one of the five great academies.

Upon reaching ones sixteenth Festival of Thirteen Moons a child is expected to take the great examinations. The first of all tests is one that is comprehensive and covers all aspects of knowledge and skill and includes the infamous five-legged essay. The five legged essay is a form by which one takes five seemingly unrelated topics and weaves them together by a harmonious thesis into a single clear intellectual vision. Most keep their essays after the test is scored and returned and many families will proudly display the essays of their ancestors. Depending on a variety of scores one is then passed on to other tests in order to determine ones vocation for life. Most take at least three tests over the course of six months but the particularly apt may spend as much as a year or two merely taking tests. Near the end the tests become more specific and numerous to the point that those who have taken tests for over a year and a half, an exceedingly brilliant breed, find themselves taking more than one test in a single day.

When the testing is done one is placed into the proper career track. From that point on one's life is predetermined. Apprenticeship will be followed by Journeyman status and finally that of Master for some. Some will relocate to other villages so that, for instance, on village will not be without a carpenter while another has three. Somewhere after one has ascended to the status of a Journeyman one's parents will choose a bride. For those no longer living in their home village a local matchmaker is often hired to consult with the parents on the best of all possible matches. Most women are relegated to the role of homemaker, though many do not enjoy this role and will push to do well on the tests and so be eligible to become monks.

Eventually the most unpredictable event of one's life comes to pass: death. Though many preparations can be made after death it is the honorable comporting after

death that is usually of highest concern. When people die one of two things will happen. Most typically the spirit will rest easy and join the Golden Hall of Ancestors. For some they become restless or hungry ghosts. This is most typical with children who still have much chaos in them and have not yet learned to be at peace within their souls. In such cases a Justicar is often called to put down the ghost and seal it away with powerful sutras. For most ghosts however they willingly accept the sacrifices of incense by their ancestors and when called upon will impart the necessary wisdom of the ages. On the night of the full moon when ghosts are at their weakest every family must make supplications to their honorable ancestors for protection and wisdom. This feeds the ghosts and insures their protection and wellness.

For those who live in exile there is no sense of this order to life. An exile may have round about skills in many areas because they are forced to be so self-sufficient. Others specialize and wait look for trade. Many are bandits who live off of the spoils of others. One could die in a battle the next day or have to move lest they die at any given moment. Nothing is certain in the chaos that is life beyond the North Wall. Since survival is at such a premium north of the Wall the ceremonies to supplicate one's ancestors are seldom performed. Even when they are the ghosts supplicated are seldom the ones who have died in their land. Thus the land Beyond the Wall is said to be dangerous not only for the packs of bandits that roam the land preying upon the unwary but also for the solitary or even mass of hungry ghosts that roam the land and cannot be sated with treasure or sport.

Society

Political Order

There exists within the Empire a strict hierarchy of who stands where. The Nameless Philosopher once stated that the worth of every person rested upon how many people they served. Surely the strength of that one person was so great to serve so many it must be a reflection of their strength both inner and outer. This is the hierarchy that governs life in the Empire of Perfect Unity and allows one to know where one stands in all social interaction.

- Exile: the lowest of all creatures, they serve only themselves and their own desires
- Child: a young one, not scorned but understood to have not yet come into the honor of adulthood, unmarried women are included in this category.
- Merchant: those that cannot serve others directly must serve them incidentally. A merchants work serves himself only. He may raise in rank by becoming a husband.
- Explorer: the youngest of all castes, they come from many walks of life from the most miserable merchant to the most honorable of all justicars. They give up what honor they had in order to become explorers of the strange new world. It is unclear what purpose they shall serve, only that they are doing their best to serve until the day comes when they return to a life of perfect unity.

- Wife: the lowest of all honorable ranks, a wife lives only to serve her husband and her children.
- Husband: he serves his wife and his family and practices a trade that gives benefit to his community.
- Craftsman: a craftman contributes to his society by transforming one thing into another.
- Farmer: A farmer receives great honor for his food provides nourishment to all who receive it.
- Soldier: a soldier defends the people of the Empire and may be called to lay down his life for the country, he serves all the people of his country with his life
- Commander: a commander must serve his country but also has special responsibilities to the men under his command. He must serve them with wise leadership and receives much honor from that.
- Teacher: Many serve the world as it stands but a teacher must also serve the future. As a teacher serves his students, he is also serving all those that the students will ever serve.
- Headman: A headman must serve the past present and future of his village. He serves the past by maintaining the traditions, he serves the present by providing leadership to his people and he serves the future by creating it with the wisdom of the philosopher. The headman serves all who will ever live in that village.
- Prefect: A prefect must serve the headmen of a province and in doing so he must serve all the people underneath that headman. He must also serve the councilman above him.
- General: a general must serve all of the soldiers beneath him and in doing so serve the citizens of the empire by protecting them.
- Councilman: A councilman serves all of the provinces assigned to him as well as all functions of the bureaucracy and in turn all the people that those functions serve.
- Stone Lion: a Stone Lion gives up much of their life so that they may serve the Empire by protecting it from Barbarians and Exiles to the north. Their service is the service of a lifetime.
- Justicar: The justicar serves all and once was a Stone Lion. Only the most competent and honorable of their number become a true Justicar and it is their task to hunt down those who do not walk the path of perfect unity and make them exiles.
- Philosopher: the philosopher serves all mankind by exploring the implications of the philosophy of perfect unity. Few become philosophers unless they have spent a lifetime serving.
- Emperor

Among exiles one's rank has far more to do with personal values than anything else. Perhaps you are valued by one for being a great baker and by another for being a good friend while a third sees no value in you. Many in the Empire have trouble fathoming the chaos that is the social interaction of the Exiles but the Exiles know it is merely the freedom to choose how to see each other. Many an exile will simply state that

such things are their opinion and an Imperial may discount it as ignorance of the Philosopher but the Exiles know better and many have stopped bothering to correct the imperials.

Cities and Locations of Empire and the Empire

Great City of Blue Stone by the Yellow Water

The capital of the Empire is at the center of its most fertile region, the Yellow Province so named for the Yellow River that flows through it. The river is yellow from the rich soil that washes down stream in it. The dazzling city is a place of blue stone towers that reach to the heavens and seem to be as one with the sky at their tips.

Five Great Academies

Within the empire there are five academies judged to be the greatest learning places throughout the Empire and placement within these academies is hotly contested. Students may only attend one school to guide their paths though the skills of some would indicate otherwise. The first is the Foundation of the Humble Cub, the place in which Stone Lions and justicars. All justicars and stone lions have attended this school. The second is the Circle of one Thousand Voices, a school to train prefects, councilmen and the greatest of heamen. Every successful politician has attended this school including every emperor since its inception. The third is Interlocking Tiger and Dragon, a school for martial prowess and military might. All of the generals in the Empire attended the Tiger and Dragon in their youth. The fourth is Sanctuary of Perfect and Golden Earth to train the greatest farmers of the Empire in the most sophisticated crop growing techniques. The final is the Island of Water, Flowers and Blood. This place is where the greatest wives throughout the empire learn the subtle arts of keeping the home, childbirth and all other duties beholden upon a wife. It is said that a man may only be great if his wife is great and all great wives were schooled on the Island of Water, Flowers and Blood.

The Northern Wall

Erected five thousand years ago, a project that was originally started to fend off the northern barbarians gradually became the prison of those who could not follow the philosophy of perfect unity. It was seen as a kinder and more human punishment than the executions that had taken place previously. The wall stretches into the sky one thousand and one feet to the heavens. It is implacable and smooth gray stone. Periodically there are small doorways the size of a man and through these gates pass the exiles on their way to banishment. The great Stone Lions guard these gates vigilantly.

Ku Ran

The humble village of Ku Ran lies near the wall. Many of the villages are descendants of the Stone Lions live in this village and make whatever trade is best suited to them. Many Stone Lions spend their vacation time in the village not wanting to spend too much time away from the wall. Some of the most obedient Imperials come from this

village and often those chosen to venture into the gates come from the village of Ku Ran. Some speculate that it is because it is easier for those people to visit their families and remain grounded in Empire.

Waterfall of Stars and Sky

Legends within the land North of the Wall speak of a Waterfall somewhere on the edge of the desert to the West. It is said that those who look into this waterfall see a blue sky full of stars and understand their place in the world. Some say that Fu Sun traveled to the west and gazed into the waterfall sending him on his journey. Others say that the Philosopher of All Ages learned his truth from gazing into the waterfall. Some claim to have been to the waterfall and returned but they cannot say what it is or what they learned.

Wooden City

Within the empire every city from the humblest village to the Blue City by the Yellow Water itself is made of stone. This is not so in the land North of the Wall. Many villages north of the wall build their homes out of whatever material is readily available whether it is stone or, more likely wood. Despite this there is one place known as the wooden city for it surpasses all other places to truly be a city not a village. Lying almost exactly between the wall and the Great Ice there is an enormous hill whose name has been forgotten and on that hill sits a city whose buildings are made of wood. Not some series of small shacks or barns but a true city with great buildings. Though the architecture is not uniform many know that this is a reflection of the individuality of the exiles and they relish in that unique beauty.

Culture in Empire

A Day in the Life

A typical citizen of the Empire is a farmer. He rises from his rest and begins his daily exercise. After eating a suitable breakfast he gives his wife proper obeisance and ventures into the fields where he will spend his day executing the days chores according to the season's schedule. Perhaps some minor disorder takes place but it is the fault of the animals or the weather and he knows how to take care of it. At lunch time he eats the meal his wife has prepared for him while still in the field and continues working. It is now afternoon and his children that are old enough to work should join him in turn according to their station. As evening sets on he returns to his home and eats dinner with his family giving thanks to his ancestors and the philosophy of perfect unity for providing him with the ability to have another perfect day. After putting his children to bed he may spend time with his wife or perhaps read up on philosophy or even do some past time such as music briefly before he goes to bed looking forward to another perfect day.

North of the wall a warrior woman rises from her sleep that night in the inn. The previous nights drinking has cost her much of the fee earned from her caravan guarding but it was well worth it. Going downstairs she settles up with the innkeeper and begins

traveling. She walks many miles and on the way sups upon the water and dried meat in her pouch. In the afternoon she comes upon a village where she discovers a pack of wild boars have been eating the crops. After negotiating with some locals she spends the afternoon setting traps for the boars. In the evening she beds down in the barn of one of the farmers drinking fresh juice and eating roasted meat. It has been a good day and she goes to sleep thinking of checking traps and roasting wild boar in the morning.

Five Legged Essay

All citizens of the empire are given a five legged essay at the time of entering adulthood. One's performance on this test determines ones aptitudes and leads to proper career placement for further instruction and apprenticeship.

The following is an actual five legged essay and a well known one at that. This was the original five legged essay written by the famous philosopher of etiquette Momo Fuku. In this essay Fuku elucidated a new basic principle of etiquette. While this principle was later to be published as the seminal work *The Four Hundred and Fifty Third Rule of Etiquette Regarding Fear of Recrimination while Socializing with Then Counter-philosophical Persons*, this essay is often distributed to small children as a primer on proper etiquette.

Assignment

The principle of Pressure

Foxes

Woodcut Ink printing

Hot soup on a cold Spring morning

Irritation caused by noisome persons

Essay

It is understood in philosophy that inaction is a form of action or at the very least a choice. When you choose to not take part in events you are nonetheless exerting an influence by a lack of participation. Similarly, if one chooses to spend one's time for instance in preparing an evening meal one cannot spend the same amount of time harvesting the leaves from a tea tree. So it is with our conception of philosophy that we live in a world that requires measured action and passivity. This exertion is not an aggressive maneuver because proper application of pressure to situation and to persons is necessary in order to achieve a more perfect unity.

Consider for a moment the fox. It is both natural and proper for a fox to hunt and kill a hare in the wood. The fox, much like most of unphilosophical nature, acts out of instinct and hunger but if he were to not apply his pressures to the hare the fox would surely die. So too it is with society and all things that we must apply pressure where necessary in order to live a fruitful life. Once again, a balance must be attained and a fox that applies too much pressure and over hunts the hares of the wood will soon find himself either hunted by humans or starving for failing to regulate how many he had killed. So too must we realize that an abundance of pressure is as much a failing as a lack of application.

Understanding of the philosophy of pressure is a necessary precursor in order to

innovate and improve using pressure. A fantastic innovation of great historical import was the development of printing by wood cut. While calligraphy is a graceful and beautiful art it is not the only way in order to portray language. By proper application of force the woodcutter carves the block forcing it into shape. With minimal pressure the brusher applies ink so that it is not too much for the paper. With measured force the printer presses the paper into the wood block so that one of many copies may be created. In this way books as varied as cooking and criminal procedure may be spread throughout the Empire with minimal use of force for the enjoyment and enlightenment of all.

Pressure can be seen in different contexts other than the strict application of force. When one wakes on a cold spring morning, the chills of winter still ache the bones like so many timbers of the house creaking in the night. Normal routine would be to ingest a minimal breakfast of leftover rice but this would not be the most ideal answer and even this small morning moment can be improved by a momentary philosophical reflection. By ingesting a cup of hot soup we may, without any overindulgence, bring a quiet to the complaints of the body and properly prepare for the day. While this may seem to be routine, realize that these small routines we take for granted are perhaps the most powerful of all pressures we exert both upon our self and on others.

Ultimately we must decide on the proper application of force in a given situation. The unfortunate failing of too many persons who would wish for a more philosophical life is that they fear recrimination of others. Consider the problem of the irritation caused by dealing with noisome persons. While it is understood that the noisome person is in the wrong by philosophy what the proper reaction by those in the surrounding vicinity. Most persons choose to follow the etiquette principle of silence to signal to the noisome person that they are in the wrong to speak so much that it does not account for meaningful dialogue.

Still others will choose to merely walk away, sparing themselves of frustration. This is perhaps the most selfish option as it allows the noisome person to continue their publication, much like the printed wood cut, to give off the same impression across the world while at the same time to suffer no slings of fortune. The noisome person becomes as the overhunting fox depleting the air of silence and giving no nourishing philosophy to take its place. Ultimately, we then all starve for want of wisdom and silence.

To this end we must eschew our habitual breakfast of silence and instead of the cold leftover rice that is custom on most spring mornings we must be as the cup of warm soup to the cold and rudely indifferent. Silence is not enough when their noise robs us all and harsher tones must be applied so that the noisome person ceases to be the chattering and unwelcome cold breakfast. Thus, the principle of pressure can and should be applied in this situation.

Names

People within the Empire have a family name and a given name. The family name is always presented first. Family name is always stated first as it is the most important thing about you as a person. Those who have the same given name as a close relative will sometimes receive a second given name. Many will state their rank after

giving their name though this is not required. Occasionally if you are under the auspice of another, such as a the soldier to the commander, then the title master is given before stating their name and they may call you student before your name. Some take on nick names that have specific meaning such as “Iron Arm” or “Three Fold Monkey”. This is especially prevalent in the land North of the wall where many will choose their own sobriquet. Following are listed typical given names for men and women within the empire

MEN

Bo, Chan, Chen, Chung, Ho, Hsin, Jin, Li, Manchu, Ming, Shen, Shing, Sun, Wang, Wen, Yuan

WOMEN

An, Bo, Chow, Chyou, Genji, Guan-yin, Heng, Hua, Jin, Jun, Lian, Lien, Mee, Mingmei, Sun, Tao

COMMON FAMILY NAMES

Ai, Bao, Fu, Geng, Gu-yu, Hei, Ji, Kang, Ke, Liu, Shei, Tan, Tong, Tree, Wang, Xiang, Yu

Holidays

Ancestor's Day

Happens in the Winter

On this day every year families gather together to pay homage to their ancestors. Local Justicars are tasked with visiting each family's home on this day to advise them on how they may better serve those that have come before them. It is customary to provide food and drink for the arriving justicar, or small gifts to thank them for their time and wisdom. Not following the advice of a justicar given on this day is considered a sign of disunity.

Festival of the Empire's Rebirth

Happens in the Spring

A day celebrating new beginnings, the new year, the surrender of the rebels, and the reemergence of the Empire. It is marked by fireworks, noisemakers, and a parade of the Stone Lions through the empire, and it is considered proper for people along the path of the parade to give small gifts to the Stone Lions as they march through the parade (usually in the form of small charms, ribbons, or tassels). Higher ranking members of the empire select this day to give larger gifts to famous or remarkable members of the Stone Lions.

On the other side of the wall this day is celebrated as simply the Festival of the New Year, and includes the exchanging of gifts, fireworks, and raucous music.

Blasphemy Festivals

No system of philosophy can survive without criticism just as no structure can stand without examination of its faults. However, rampant criticism leads to no actual accomplishment for fear of retribution. To this end there are various acceptable forms of

critique for any given moment or project. None of these are more fun than the Festivals of Blasphemy. These festivals, sometimes impromptu in rice-wine houses where the bartender is made officiator and sometimes more organized regional festivals, bring many together together for a sense of good fun that is sanctioned not to offend any. The greatest of these is the festival in the village of Hang Chow where the yearly **Hang Chow** While the formal rules for blasphemy are presented below there are certain choice principles from the legendary text of *893 Principles of the Most Biting Blasphemy and other Concrete Examples that you are Unworthy* penned by three time Hang Chow champion Crimson Anvil that an excellent blasphemer would bear in mind when constructing their comments.

- * Profanity is a sign of weak criticism and weak vocabulary of the blasphemer
- * Blasphemy is most profound when it uses the fewest words
- * No badgering

Three judges will present themselves to the crowd. One must be a master blasphemer recognized for their skill and virtuosity in the craft. For this competition, three time Imperial champion Crimson Anvil has been chosen. A second must be an amateur who has never participated in blasphemy as a competition. This person will be chose on the day of the competition from among those who are new to the Forest. Finally there must be an overseer whose personal reputation is beyond reproach. I, Venerable Mountain, have been honored with this position.

After these three have introduced themselves to the crowd, those who would participate in this competition are to stand forward and make themselves known. If there are a great many then the overseer may designate someone from the crowd as bailiff to regulate their intake.

The blasphemers are to present themselves individually as escorted by the bailiff. The blasphemer gives their name with a brief introduction and then announces their intended subject. If the person in question was named Xin then the proper address is: "I am here to blaspheme Xin." From there the blasphemer is to proceed with their blasphemy uninterrupted. Any form of profanity used in the blasphemy is considered very poor form and will make it very unlikely for that person to win.

When they are done they are to thank the judges, bow and then wait. The judges may, at their option choose to critique the blasphemy however they wish. Some years the most famous blasphemy has come not from the contestants but from the judges themselves. After finishing critique the overseer will dismiss the blasphemer who is to bow and exit from the main stage. After that the bailiff is to present the next blasphemers and so the cycle continues.

All blasphemers must remain in the area of the competition and bear witness to all blasphemies. Those that leave prematurely forsake their right to victory.

When all blasphemies have been presented the judges confer among themselves and then announce a winner. If prizes are available then they are awarded to runners up in procession of quality and availability of prizes.

While there are exactly one thousand and one criteria for judging proper blasphemy most are too detailed for anyone less than a master whose career is dedicated to blasphemy. So long as one remembers proper etiquette as outlined above, especially the ban on profanity, then one will be judged on one's merits

Food

Millet is the staple and the standard for everyone in the Empire. The lowliest peasant eats millet at every meal and even the greatest lord seldom goes for a whole week without eating millet. For those who are not merely beginning farmers Rice is either a frequent occurrence of the norm as a basis for every meal. Among the richest the base for many meals are noodles made of rice. This is true for all of the great members of the Deliberative of Days except for the emperor who, in accordance with imperial law, eats millet at every meal save for a weekly allowance of one fish that he must catch himself.

On top of the base for each meal is a mixture which varies from day to day depending on income of the person and the seasonal availability. For the poorest they can only afford a humble portion of soy sauce on top of their millet. For those slightly more affluent there are vegetables and meat with a variety of sauces and curries. Very little bread is consumed in the Empire of Perfect Unity save as sweets. In each village there is a craftsman who is the sauce man who prepares the sauces for everyone which they then use either directly or mixed with other sauces. On holidays roasted pig is a treat for all as are sweet cakes.

For those who live on the coast or rivers, fish is a treat savored quite frequently.

Those inland are most likely to get their meat from chicken or pig. For the truly poor their meat only comes in the form of tofu and some cannot even afford that and must eat nearly soy beans.

The beverage that all consume whether young or old, rich or poor is tea. No matter what the season, a cup of tea is beside every place setting in every house. Social status may determine what type of tea is drunk but the love of tea is universal. Dessert consists of fresh fruit when it is in season or small sweet cookies or cakes when fresh fruit is not available.

Soup plays an important role in the medicinal profession of the Empire of Perfect Unity. While there are many herbs and roots that can cure a given ailment it is not practical to chew tough leaves or in some cases such as nausea it is impossible to keep down the average meal. To this end, all accomplished healers are also accomplished in the cooking of soups to distill the curative essences from the various herbs and roots and make them into a flavorful broth. During seasons of wide spread cold and flu many healers will have great kettles of soup bubbling at all times so that they can readily administer them to all in need who come to their shop.

Diet among exiles is almost a polar opposite to the Empire. While some in the scant towns of the land beyond the North wall may cultivate millet or even rice the average exile has no such luxury. As a result their diet consists of a great deal of meat that has been hunted or fruit that has been gathered.

Manner of Dress

Within the Empire men are expected to wear pants and shirts with banded collars and held together by a sort of button through a loop that is actually a knot within the cloth. Women are expected skirts and separate and flowing tops. Some decorations and mantles are acceptable, especially to reflect the office of the wearer. In the winter time everyone wears a thick hooded cloak to keep warm. Neutral colors that are acceptable for every day wear are brown, blue, gray and black. On holidays women are to wear red trimmed with silver and men are to wear yellow or gold if they can afford it. For funerals one is to wear all white if a member of the dead's family and to wear all black if not a member of the family. Those who have retired into the service of being a monk wear wrapped robes at all times whether holiday or funeral. Men's robes are saffron and women's robes are forest green. For most the only cloth of choice is cotton for their every day clothes and wool for the winter cloak. For those who are rich enough a holiday or funeral outfit of silk is possessed and for those very rich they may own many outfits made of silk.

Men and women wear their hair long. Women's hair is tied back while working while a man's hair is always worn in a braid. Green jade charms can be worn at any time though they are usually prescribed by a doctor and so one who wears them constantly is considered a bit of a hypochondriac. Jewelry in general is frowned upon unless it is a holiday and even then it is considered crass to wear a large amount of jewelry.

The emperor wears imperial purple, a color exclusive to him and to him alone. The punishment for wearing imperial purple is to be stripped of one's clothing publicly and given ten lashings.

Among the exiles any and all outfits are worn. Those who are exiled for being artists are often identified by the brilliant colors that they wear. Most wear whatever clothing they can get their hands on and since the weather beyond the wall is so strikingly colder that that below furs are often worn just to keep the cold at bay. Many have but one or two outfits that they brought with them and so especially among recent exiles clothing is very similar to south of the wall. Since the fall of the Red Hand was a mere ten years ago the land beyond the wall retains many riches including silk and other forms of cloth to make a variety of clothing but some still remember how frequent it was to see an exile wearing not but rags.

Architecture

Perfect unity allows for twenty two acceptable forms for building houses. The buildings are often described as very angular or blockish though many raise up as spires to the heavens. The appropriate building material is always stone as it is the most stable and may be warm in the summer and cool in the winter. The only exception to the building of stone is paper. Interior walls may be made of paper and fitted into bamboo frames to slide back and forth. Exterior windows that are not empty may be lined with a thick form of paper to allow light but not insects in. Ornamentation for the sake of ornamentation or beauty is expressly forbidden and most walls both interior and exterior are completely plain.

The art of designing and constructing a house is known as the Art of Wind and Water. To build a house is not to manipulate the bamboo, stone or paper, but to shape how wind and water itself flow through the spaces of the house. Most houses have large open gardens interior to their outside wall. Pagodas for monks are the major exception to the general rule within the Empire. The Pagodas of the mountains to the West and the South resemble more a series of stacked blocks with curved roofs between.

North of the wall structures are ramshackle and made from found materials. Few settlements last longer than six months north of the wall and so most settlements are more like tent villages that roam as the availability of food, good seasonal weather and the absence of bandits may lead them.

Music and Art

Music and Art abound in the Empire. While almost every has an interest in art a very few are cultivated as professional artists. Perhaps the most impressive of this is the traditional imperial opera. Opera includes gymnastic dance, beautiful painted backdrops, gorgeous singing and some of the best writing that the Empire has ever produced. Most operatic groups will travel from town to town performing seasonal pieces.

North of the wall, elaborate displays such as opera would be almost impossible. This is not to say their life is without beauty but it is a more humble and rustic sort of beauty. Many a wandering swordsman has carved holes into his bamboo walking stick so that it can be played as a flute. Calligraphy is seldom on paper but could be carved into a stone carried in one's pocket. Wan Bei, it is said, was buried with a stone she had carried with her since the day she was exiled. Each year she would carve into the stone a single perfect character of a poem she was writing. Those that buried Wan Bei said that she had

finished it and could not speak of its substance without weeping for its beauty.

Prejudices and Superstitions

South of the wall it is understood that superstition is the symptom of a weak mind. While silly phrases and games made up by children are seen as amusing the same way that children's games are no adult would ever admit in public to having a superstition. North of the wall superstitions abound. Every person north of the wall has some believe such as putting their shoes facing southwest when they sleep or never salting food they did not prepare. Some claim it is because the North is the last remnant of magic in the Empire and believe that the waterfall is holy place whose mere presence changes the nature of life. Others will merely grunt and not explain why they may cut a slice from every dumpling and step on it, muttering to themselves they had to "learn the hard way."

Prejudices between south and north are rampant. Northerners consider southerners to be a lot of self-righteous preening fools whose arrogance leads them to a false sense of superiority. Southerners consider Northerners to be a lot of violent egomaniacal maniacs whose selfishness and ignorance knows no bounds.

Families, Gender Roles, and Marriage

Men are undoubtedly considered superior to women within the Empire. While women are revered for their ability to give new life to the world it is men who are the heads of households, political leaders and intelligentsia of the Empire. During the reign of Empire of the Red Hand, Wan Bei began a program to incorporate more women into government positions and to give women greater say within their own households. She soon found however that even among the most noble of women there were few who had the education and the force of personality to be political leaders. Despite her new guidelines of resolving marital disputes less than fifty of one thousand local prefects were appointments by her and so the vast majority of prefects made rulings that on paper seemed to follow the new rules but in truth retained the dominance of men in households. Among the exiles were many women who had been exiled for desiring either education or leadership and those women universally performed with splendor during the Empire of the Red Hand. These women actually were the most outraged at the last festival of the Red Sun for a return to the old ways meant that everything that they had earned would soon be taken away from them. Some have tried to start new political alliances in the land beyond the North Wall but the general sense of malaise there has meant that the most success had is in becoming leaders of a community there.

All power positions are given to men and all educated professionals are men. Women of the lowest castes work in the fields alongside their husbands, often tending to children at the exact same time. Women of higher stature are expected to keep up the household as a clean and dignified place for their husband and for guests. Wives of rich men are often little more than ornamentation and are dressed in the most rich and elaborate clothing of all the empire that they may dazzle at court or even as they walk alongside the road next to fields of rice being tended by women carrying children. There is only one craft available to women and that is that of a monk. Female monks, much like their male counterparts, spend much of their time teaching and learning. Unlike their

male counterparts female monks also serve in the craft of midwifery. Another important difference is that while a man may only join the monkhood after long years of a regular craft and even then only if his wife has predeceased him a woman may enter the order of monks at any time. Many an unruly daughter who cannot seem to attract a mate has been packed off to become a monk.

All marriages are arranged as agreements between parents and the husband and wife have no decision in the matter whatsoever. People are normally married at the age of 16.

The Justice to Adjudicate Change

Though man strives for perfection, the world itself is not perfect. Weather can change, people die according to no known schedule and ultimately crimes are committed. While many have the intelligence to recognize these problems or even to look at the source of them few have the wisdom to carry out what needs to be done to solve these problems. From the five legged essays are culled the greatest minds of the empire who have the sharpest minds and the wisest souls. This number is further pared down by testing that is rigorous in both mind and body. There is no shame in failing these tests as most fail to do so. Even after one has passed there is a rigorous period of training in the magical arts lasting four years three months two weeks and one day. Most do not pass the basic training and are returned to being among the most productive souls in the empire with a smattering of magical knowledge to show for their efforts.

Those that do pass are then sent to guard the North Wall for a period while they hone their knowledge of magic. Some never leave the wall finding that standing a quiet vigil to be honor enough for their life and their families and the library at the North Wall of the works by these great protectors, known as Stone Lions, is said to contain so much wisdom that if ever a man were to comprehend it all he could unlock the secrets of all change and the world would no longer suffer under the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

The final group who find no rest in being a Stone Lion develop their magical, physical and mental prowess and become Judges. It is the duty of the Judge to roam the countryside and act not only as adjudicator of a situation but also to be detective to the incident and arbitrator of all parties involved. Their wisdom grown from great knowledge and contemplation is accepted by all, as is their powerful magics used to enforce their decisions. Judges are known to carry with them their five legged essay and occasionally read passages when pertinent to the situation at hand. Such snippets of wisdom are sometimes quickly forgotten but some come to be repeated for generations in a village or even be respected above some laws.

When a Judge goes bad it is perhaps the worst crime of all. Only a fellow Judge would have the power and intelligence to track down such an individual and exile them north of the Wall. Even in some cases, like the Thrice Cursed Soul of Fu Sun the Red Hand can return in life to trouble many.

Travel

Travel is common for certain people within the Empire. Travel itself is not restricted or illegal but most being farmers have little time to traipse between cities for

idle pursuit. North of the wall, travel is almost a daily occurrence for most as staying on the move allows one greater opportunity to avoid danger and to look for food.

Conflict

South of the wall conflict exists mainly on a local level. Despite the prevalence of unity and peaceful society there are born into every generations those who would disrupt that peace. Justicars roam the land with the intent of acting both as investigators as well as judges for the criminals. There is officially a standing army but that army has not been deployed since the end of the Red Hand Empire. Frequently the army will be dispatched north of the wall for training and will prevent bandits from preying upon those who appear helpless. More than once this has led to a conversion by those who had once rebelled and for them to fight for redemption and to return to the Empire itself.

North of the wall conflict is a repetitive part of life and it is difficult to find someone North of the wall who does not carry a weapon. There is no justice other than exacted by an individual or by revenge. Many exiles understand that the rules of the empire are faulty despite claiming to be perfect but unless you are part of a bandit group then it is seldom wise to engage with groups of wandering imperial soldiers.

Families, Gender Roles, and Marriage

Men are undoubtedly considered superior to women within the Empire. While women are revered for their ability to give new life to the world it is men who are the heads of households, political leaders and intelligentsia of the Empire. During the reign of Empire of the Red Hand, Wan Bei began a program to incorporate more women into government positions and to give women greater say within their own households. She soon found however that even among the most noble of women there were few who had the education and the force of personality to be political leaders. Despite her new guidelines of resolving marital disputes less than fifty of one thousand local prefects were appointments by her and so the vast majority of prefects made rulings that on paper seemed to follow the new rules but in truth retained the dominance of men in households. Among the exiles were many women who had been exiled for desiring either education or leadership and those women universally performed with splendor during the Empire of the Red Hand. These women actually were the most outraged at the last festival of the Red Sun for a return to the old ways meant that everything that they had earned would soon be taken away from them. Some have tried to start new political alliances in the land beyond the North Wall but the general sense of malaise there has meant that the most success had is in becoming leaders of a community there.

All power positions are given to men and almost all educated professionals are men. Women of the lowest castes work in the fields alongside their husbands, often tending to children at the exact same time. Women of higher stature are expected to keep up the household as a clean and dignified place for their husband and for guests. Wives of rich men are often little more than ornamentation and are dressed in the most rich and elaborate clothing of all the empire that they may dazzle at court or even as the walk alongside the road next to fields of rice being tended by women carrying children. There is only one craft available to women and that is that of a monk. Female monks, much like their male counterparts, spend much of their time teaching and learning. Unlike their

male counterparts female monks also serve in the craft of midwifery. Another important difference is that while a man may only join the monkhood after long years of a regular craft and even then only if his wife has predeceased him a woman may enter the order of monks at any time. Many an unruly daughter who cannot seem to attract a mate has been packed off to become a monk.

This is not to say that women cannot do these jobs or that they are even barred from them. If a woman can prove her worth far more than a given role is expected then that woman will be accorded the appropriate position. Indeed, the fact that women must work twice as hard for any role is so universally recognized that women in any role outside of their traditional roles are regarded with a greater deal of respect and veneration than their male counterparts.

However, more important than gender is age. The elderly are considered to be full of wisdom so that even the greatest emperor will bend his ear to the wisdom of an elderly peasant woman.

All marriages are arranged as agreements between parents and the husband and wife have no decision in the matter whatsoever. People are normally married at the age of 16.

Basic Facts of the Empire

Geography

In the office of every classroom there hangs a map of the Empire of Perfect Unity. It reminds the students how vast the land is and how they learn not only for themselves but for the good of the entire Empire. To the East is the ocean the spills into the empire by way of its many rivers. To the South, West and to the North even beyond the walls lie mountains that surround the empire. Often a pagoda or two will be placed artfully nestled within the mountains representing the ubiquity of meditative monasteries within the mountains. The top third of the country, known as North of the Wall or the Cold Steppes, is divided off from the South by the Northern wall. Often the cartographer will insert a waterfall hidden within their brushstrokes north of the wall. South of the wall there exists a network of rivers, forest commons, farmland, rice patties and cities. All of the Empire has been cultivated and depending on the subject taught in the classroom a given map may emphasize one aspect or another.

Time

The years of the Empire are named post-annum by an official bureaucracy based upon what is considered to be a significant or memorable event from that year so that all other historical events can be seen in that context. The years of the Red Hand Rebellion led to them declaring it was the "beginning of history" and began numbering the years one and of course ending in ten. Officially those years are now referred to as "The First Year fo the Red Hand Rebellion" and "The Second Year of the Red Hand Rebellion" and so on and so forth. The present year is referred to as "the present year". Many North of the wall still use the numbering system from the Red Hand and call the present year (2009) as Year 24.

2005 – The Year of Three Fold Crimson Blasphemy

2006 - The Year of Open Doors

2007 - The Year of Bountiful Sea Cucumber Harvest

2008 - The Year of Glorious Exploration

2009- The Present Year

Common Aphorisms and Colloquialisms

- Curse: May you live in interesting times
- Man's life without the order of society is ruled by chaos.
- All Perfect things exist in reciprocity with their surroundings

Five Things

- 1) Five legged Essay, what you were chosen to do
- 1) Why you were exiled, why you were chosen to explore
- 1) A philosophical koan that is your favorite (South) A superstition you wholeheartedly believe (North)
- 2) Respect the honorable dead
- 3) The reasons why your parents gave you your name or why you chose the name you now go by

Inspirational Material

Bridge of Birds

History of the Five Kingdoms

Hero

The Analects of Confucius

Story of the Stone