

Confucian Political Philosophy in the Book of Rites

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Abstract: Confucian political philosophy is embodied in the Book of Rites, a classic literature of Confucian thought, which reveals the Confucian political pursuit. From the perspective of the historical origin of the theory, Confucian political philosophy has a complex historical background, which are the social structure and state form of the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, the political form of the kingly governance of all under heaven as a family, and the internal contradictions between clans and emperors. In addition, the Confucian social and political ideals are also reflected in the Book of Rites, which are humanistic ideals, social ideals and ideals about etiquette and criminal law. Finally, as a leading thought in ancient Chinese society, Confucian political philosophy is both practical and restrictive.

1. Introduction

To some extent, the pre-Qin Confucian philosophy can be regarded as the earliest political philosophy in ancient China, which is also described as ethical political philosophy because of its extraordinary ethical and moral connotation.

There are many special political concerns in Confucianism. Admittedly, these concerns are based on the status of power in social life and the importance of function to the realization of meaning. The persistent pursuit of politics is the characteristic of Confucianism, which makes it submit to the enormous inertia of the established political background of autocratic rule.

Confucian political philosophy is embodied in the Book of Rites, a classic literature of Confucian thought, which reveals the Confucian political pursuit. In the following, the author discusses the Confucian political philosophy from the two aspects of possibility and restriction.

2. The Historical Background of Confucian Political Philosophy in the Book of Rites

The political ideality in Confucian philosophy is not a kind of simply rational design, but also reflects the dual relationship between social background and realistic conditions. Therefore, the study of political philosophy in the Book of Rites should begin with the investigation of the background of Confucian political philosophy.

2.1 The Social Structure and State Form of the Xia, Shang and Zhou Dynasties

When Confucius elaborated on the culture of the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, he said: “Zhou

had the advantage of viewing the two past dynasties. How complete and elegant are its regulations! I follow Zhou.” (Book III. Pa Yih, The Confucian Analects)

The Master also said: “The Yin Dynasty (another name of the Shang Dynasty) followed the regulations of the Xia: wherein it took from or added to them may be known. The Zhou dynasty has followed the regulations of Yin: wherein it took from or added to them may be known. Some other may follow the Zhou, but though it should be at the distance of a hundred ages, its affairs may be known.” In fact, the inheritance of the so-called three dynasties not only shows a continuous phenomenon, but also coexists in the sense of kinship and state. Before the Zhou Dynasty replaced the Shang Dynasty, it was already a powerful and relatively independent regime. the same was true before the Shang Dynasty replaced the Xia Dynasty. As a result, in addition to the succession of time, there is also a spatial interaction between the two successive dynasties. The political ideal of Confucianism came into being under the background of this pluralistic ideology and culture.

However, at that time, the social structure of ancient China was still a unified society, and the state form of these three dynasties is basically a country of “integration of politics and religion”, and its greatest feature is that the emperor, the owner of the greatest political power, is also the greatest priest. In the book *Confucianism and Taoism*, the author and German scholar Marx Weber believes that the whole ancient Chinese society is basically a country of “the integration of politics and religion”. The best result of this “integration of politics and religion” is to reduce the religious wars caused by different religious beliefs, but the worst result is that any possible acquisition and use of power can be proved by the will of God. In this political and social atmosphere, the rites system in the patriarchal society was placed in a prominent position.

2.2 The Kingly Governance of All under Heaven as a Family

The system mentioned in the Book of Rites, whether real or ideal, for us, should be brought into the scope of system design as far as possible. The difference is that in a stable social environment, the existing system can strengthen the existing society because of its strong replicability. However, if the ideal system is not a supplement to the real system, it is expressed as a criticism of reality. In ancient China, the patriarchal clan system only had a mature form in the Western Zhou Dynasty, which is the consensus of the academic circles. From the perspective of the actual rites system, the provisions of the patriarchal clan system can be said to be the core of the whole rites system.

In the political structure of the patriarchal clan system, there is an inevitable relationship between patriarchal rule and imperial rule: the reason why an emperor is an emperor is not only the so-called “Tao” and “virtue”, but also, more essentially, the clan forces that play a decisive role. Gong Jianping, a Chinese Confucian scholar, believes that, without the backing of clan power, an emperor cannot sustain his power as an emperor.

To a certain extent, in ancient Chinese society, the country was the magnified home. Due to the competitive pressure within the clan of the emperor, the cohesion of the whole clan must be enhanced, which is the endogenous driving force for the development of this clan. Therefore, The interests of the clan as a whole will make the clan continue to integrate, thus forming a community of blood relation, faiths, interests and morality.

The specific situation of the Western Zhou Dynasty and the Spring and Autumn period is that several aristocratic patriarchal families with blood relationship unite, which is called “the large family”. And several “large families” related by blood unite to form phratry, which is called “the clan”. With the establishment of the patriarchal clan system in the Zhou Dynasty, the sacrificial content of the clan was socially linked with the blood relationship. Thus, the emperor was the great patriarch of the world, and the princes were the great patriarchs of a country, and their clan power was the most powerful among similar clans. At that time, the state was a network of constraints and

norms dominated by patriarchal clans. The political hierarchy is closely integrated with the patriarchal structure of “family-large family-clan”. The individual belongs to the family, the family belongs to the larger family, while the extended family belongs to the clan, progressive and well-organized. The political hierarchy is closely integrated with the patriarchal structure of “family-big family-clan”. The individual belongs to the family, the family belongs to the larger family, while the extended family belongs to the clan, progressive and well-organized. In view of this, in ancient China, the relationship between imperial rule and clan rule was intrinsically unified.

2.3 Clans and Emperors: the Growth Space of Confucian Political Philosophy

As mentioned above, the ancient Chinese society was a society with clans as the basic unit. There were two central points of clan society, one was “clan rule” and the other was “imperial rule”. The former refers to the patriarchal system formed with blood relationship as the link and ancestor worship as the faith. And the latter means the political system formed by taking the imperial political power as the center and the relationship of administrative power as the connection. So the traditional Chinese autocratic monarchy can be understood as the balance of power on the basis of the contradiction between clans and emperors. Therefore, the ethical and political concept of Confucianism arose from the realistic ideological form of the clan society, and the moral ideal it pursued formed the spiritual force to restrict the autocratic power.

Clan as a relatively independent kingdom, compared with the general sense of the country, it has a stronger cohesion. Chinese scholars Tian Changwu and Zang Feizhi believe that, in China, whether in the past or at present, clans are organized with the belief of ancestor worship as the source of spiritual strength and consanguinity as the connection of natural emotion. It is not uncommon in history for the patriarch to bully the clan, however, the clan cohesion is often consolidated and strengthened by the stimulation and pressure of the external environment. The clan's ability of self-development and reproduction can be so great that it threatens the imperial power and takes its place as soon as there is an opportunity. Marx Weber thinks that, in China, the influence of clans continues to grow until it can compete with the ruling power of the government. In fact, the clan has the right to legislate for its members, which not only has the effect of transcending the law, but also has the effect of resisting the law in some cases, such as on the issue of religious etiquette.

The paradox between clans and emperors can also be explained by the dominant power from imperial rule. According to the Book of Rites, princes are the sons of concubines and cannot have ancestral temples like emperors, while scholar-officials are the sons of concubines and cannot have ancestral temples like princes. It is not in line with the etiquette to set up the ancestral temple in the house of the common man. (Book XI. Jiao Te Sheng, the Book of Rites) This old saying illustrates that political identity should not be blurred by blood relationship, and political rights must be higher than natural blood relationship. The clan itself needs to develop, and compared with the imperial power, the clan power has more realistic appeal. Thus, Confucius, the founder of Confucianism, and Mencius, the important interpreter of Confucianism, both stood on the side of patriarchal clan system and believed that the ethical belief based on blood relationship and transformation was more practical and fundamental than political and military power. The patriarchal clan concept itself has more elements than the natural emotions among ordinary family members. This is the sustenance of people's ethical affection similar to religious feelings in the patriarchal society. Therefore, as the staunch supporter of the patriarchal clan system, Confucianism, represented by Confucius, clearly put forward the tendency of political philosophy based on benevolence, that is, the so-called “仁 (Ren)”.

3. Confucian Social and Political Ideals in the Book of Rites

There is a set of incomplete but systematic political theories in the Book of Rites, which determines that the Confucian ideal of the Book of Rites is not a simple theoretical self-perfection as the ideal pursuit, not the so-called “Utopia”, but a practical theory. As a result, specifically, the political ideal in the Book of Rites is a kind of enlightenment, a kind of ethical and moral ideal and cultural and political ideal.

3.1 The Humanistic Ideal of Confucian Political Philosophy

The so-called “civilizing government by enlightenment” means to regulate and restrain political rights and political behavior by enlightenment. The so-called “enlightenment” of Confucianism is not an independent external force opposed to political power and corresponding material facilities, but an essential feature of Confucian ideal political form. In other words, politics and enlightenment are essentially two-in-one cultural politics. The Confucian culture of etiquette and music with ethics as its essence is the most important rationale for its political philosophy, and its fundamental purpose is to “civilize government by enlightenment”. However, the theory can not be put forward only on the basis of moral preaching, but must be established through clan entities, ethical emotions, cultural classics and even religious activities. The Confucianists believe that the so-called “Politics” refers to the rights of emperors and the corresponding material facilities. Indeed, after the emergence of class, power has become a powerful monster that controls life and death and the distribution of social resources. Confucius once said that politics is the most important, and the Confucianists realized the importance of power, but this should be achieved through a “humane” approach. Thus, the Confucianists did not regard power as divine worship, indicating that although power is important, it is not the power above all else. The most essential point in politics is whether it is appropriate or not.

Confucianists believe that from the perspective of enlightenment, the purpose of enlightenment lies in politics. From a political point of view, politics depends on enlightenment. Therefore, as far as the Confucian thought in the Book of Rites are concerned, politics and enlightenment are unified, and the two are conditions for each other.

Under the domination of the purpose of “civilizing government by enlightenment”, the belief in God, the ancestor worship of clans and some egalitarianism thoughts of primitive clans are all used by the Book of Rites as resources to control the possible expansion of the regime. Confucius said that, in ancient politics, caring for others was the most important. For benevolence, the rite is the most important. And respect is the most crucial for rite. So benevolence and respect are the foundation of politics. In this way, the contents of benevolence and respect, which belong to moral emotion, are regarded as the basic connotation of political philosophy, which is full of typical characteristics of Confucianism.

The keys of politics are benevolence and respect. From an unbiased point of view, Confucianism builds politics on the basis of human emotions. Only on this premise can we understand the connotation of Confucian ethics and politics. And only in the system of “civilizing government by enlightenment” can we realize the true significance of etiquette and music culture. This clarifies the essence of Confucian political philosophy, that is, the Confucian ideal political model is politicized morality or moralized politics.

3.2 The Social Ideal of Confucian Political Philosophy

Confucian political philosophy can not be understood as just needed to maintain the order of reality, it also contains some criticism of reality, but this criticism is not negative, but in the way of

ideal and active construction. In the Book of Rites, the first half of the chapter Li Yun outlines the blueprint of the Confucian social and political ideal, which can be regarded as the development of the Confucian ideal into a new era. This ideal blueprint is the famous “Universal Harmony”, and the core of this society is “the world belongs to all”.

As a realistic theory, Confucian political philosophy has realistic considerations. The “Universal Harmony” with “the world belongs to all” is only as a distant historical existence, which reflects its light to the reality. On the other hand, the real society is a society with levels of etiquette. In other words, the ideal model of real society is “a Society of Modest Prosperity” put forward by Confucianism. Therefore, chapter Li Yun proposes that “the world belongs to all” as the ideal direction of its social model. However, the basic content of the Book of Rites is still to demonstrate the system of “a Society of Modest Prosperity”.

The Confucian ideal in the Book of Rites is originally intended to be realized in reality, but not the so-called “Utopia” that is simply idealized. However, a well-off society should be maintained through the relationship of etiquette. From this, it can be concluded that the reality of Confucianism is based on ideals, or at least in part. The editors of the Book of Rites are soberly aware that the ideal of the “Universal Harmony” most fully embodies the highest ideal of Confucian political philosophy, however it is too idealized to a great extent.

On the other hand, such an ideal social model lacks the supreme program of “sacrosanct property”, but regards “the world is shared by people” as a sacred principle. If it is impossible to draw a clear line between objective necessity and people's moral ideals, then the logical result must be as follows: it can make many people feel that they have been “chosen by God” and that they must “do justice for God”. It has become excuses for many unjust acts such as crime and war. At the same time, in reality, it is difficult to get rid of the bad results of either foolish monarchs or treacherous courtiers who participate in the management of state affairs.

3.3 Etiquette and Criminal Law

The institutional norms in the Book of Rites is an important part of a comprehensive understanding of Confucian political philosophy, and its content is extremely complicated. Meanwhile, there is not only the description of the ancient institutional norms, but also the assumption of the ideal system, which is often difficult to distinguish. Besides, in the political philosophy of “civilizing government by enlightenment” in the Book of Rites, there is a close relationship between etiquette and criminal law.

In ancient China, the so-called “integration of the family and the country” makes the etiquette plays the unique function of replacing the law in the governance of the country, but the rule of etiquette still has some limitations from itself. For example, the rule of etiquette pays too much attention to enlightenment and is not enough to fully serve as a means of political governance; moreover, the focus of etiquette is harmony on the basis of social hierarchy, which can not fully reflect the competition and motivation needed for social development, and the problem about equality that comes with it.

In the Book of Rites, criminal law is a supplement to etiquette, because moral etiquette is limited in the way it plays its role. The Confucianists believe that in reality, there are a lot of evildoers who “return evil for good”, so the existence of criminal law is necessary. (Book XXIX. Biao Ji, the Book of Rites) In the eyes of Confucian scholars, etiquette is the purpose of criminal law, and criminal law is the final guarantee and bottom line of etiquette. The way in which etiquette works is different from that of criminal law. The enlightenment of etiquette is subtle, strangling the signs of evil in the bud. Criminal law talks about things on a case-by-case basis and on phenomena. However, etiquette pays attention to the trend and possibility of the development of things. Laws forbidden criminal

behaviors, while etiquette is penetrable to emotion and control people's desire. Emotion is the motivation of behavior, and controlling behavior by regulating emotion is the special function of etiquette.

To sum up, the theory in the Book of Rites still inherits and carries forward Confucius' thought of "giving priority to morality and supplemented by punishment". It holds that the basic purpose of criminal law is the same as that of etiquette, which is to correct the evil behavior of human beings. Furthermore, etiquette is the foundation of humanity, and criminal law is not enough to make people feel ashamed, so etiquette must be given priority. The Confucian social and political ideal is reflected in this unity of etiquette and criminal law. That is, the "Kingly Way" or "Benevolent Governance" advocated by Confucianism.

However, although the Book of Rites thinks that criminal law is indispensable, it does not really realize the connotation of "fairness" implied in "rule of law". Evenly, etiquette may hinder the implementation of criminal law to some extent. It has to be said that this is an inherent contradiction in Confucian politics of etiquette.

4. Conclusion

Admittedly, some parts of Confucian political philosophy are based on ideals, but it is not groundless that a theory can become the dominant component of a national ideal and deeply influence reality. Therefore, it is possible to realize the ideal of Confucian political philosophy.

In the Confucian view, home is a condensed country, and a country is an enlarged home. Etiquette requires people to take ethics and morality as the basic principles of self-cultivation. To demand oneself and construct the reality according to the principle of etiquette is the character of a Confucian gentleman advocated by Confucius. There is no doubt that people tend to pursue a gentleman's personality, and etiquette is the medium for a gentleman to achieve a positive personality. Etiquette, as social norms or propriety, mainly realizes the coordination of "public" and "private" by emphasizing responsibility and obligation. In the Book of Rites, the Confucianists think that etiquette has become a flexible coercive force for clan social groups to assimilate other individuals. To agree with etiquette norms means to assume responsibilities and obligations. And to assume responsibilities and obligations means to be supported by clans. As social norms or propriety, etiquette can maintain the order of clan cohesion, so etiquette is both an amulet and a pass for individuals who conform to and identify with it. The attribute of the difference of etiquette may limit people's cognition of self-identity, but with clan consanguinity, the power of natural feelings, common interests and common beliefs can resolve the alienation caused by this difference. As a result, from this point of view, Confucian political philosophy is practical and possible.

However, because of the way it adopts, the ideal of Confucian political philosophy not only has the possibility of partial realization, but also has some restricted aspects. As we know from the above, the specific way of Confucian political philosophy is "civilizing government by enlightenment". There are ideals of political system with the help of clan power and according to the patriarchal social structure, in principle, however, there is no entity that can compete with political power, thus, "enlightenment" is subordinate to "politics". In addition, the Confucianists wanted to realize the political ideal, repeatedly emphasized the moral basis of politics, as Confucius said, "to govern means to rectify". (Book XII. Yen Yuan, The Confucian Analects) And they proved and reformed the etiquette handed down from history, believing that it was the the norms for managing the society, and the standard of governing the country and the people. Meanwhile, there is a corresponding implementation and necessary supplement to the thought of the rule of etiquette in the relationship between the official system and etiquette. But generally speaking, these all belong to the category of social governance or control, and there is no convincing argument for the

rationality and legitimacy of the regime itself. Besides, in ancient China, although the morality of politics is beyond reproach, as far as the Book of Rites is concerned, especially in the patriarchal society it reflects, there is no system of fairness that can make the society more complete and just. Therefore, there is no doubt that the realization of Confucian political ideals is limited.

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