

Confucius' Thoughts on the Relationship Between Morality and Politics

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Abstract

Confucius is the founder of the Confucian school with many prominent and influential ideas not only in China but also in neighboring countries. In this article, we will focus on clarifying Confucius's thoughts on the relationship between morality and politics through a number of issues such as: unity; interweaving; complementarity and harmony. In order to clarify the relationship between morality and politics through the above relationships, the article will explore the Rectification of Names of Confucius, the ideology of governing the country by morality of the authorities through the fundamental relationships. On the basis of stating the points of view, the article also discusses these views from a philosophical point of view.

Keywords: Relationship; morality and politics; Confucius; Confucianism

Introduction

Confucius' ideas about the relationship between morality and politics emerged in the context of the decline of "*the eldest son inheritance system*"¹ of the Western Zhou, "*the early feudal system*" being formed. The old social institutions and moral standards have decayed, new moral codes are emerging. The transition between the two regimes has created profound upheavals in economy, politics and society. It was within that society that a variety of thinkers arose. History has called this the period of "hundreds of families". The sects of this period stood on different positions and offered different solutions to solve social problems in order to save lives. Among them is Confucius, a prominent politician and cultural scholar in the Spring and Autumn period - the Warring States period, the founder of the Confucian school, who advocated using the "rule of virtue" approach to govern the country and keep the people safe. To rule the country, Confucius believed that it was necessary to harmoniously combine morality and politics. The reason why he advocates combining politics and morality is because it suits China's historical and cultural conditions. Politics is a reflection that exists between class and class relations. Politics is most concentrated in the economic interests of people in a class society. It is a system of ends and means of classes and groups of different people in society. Morality and politics are unified, intertwined, and complementary in the thought of Confucius. Confucius' thought on the relationship between morality and politics was born under certain historical conditions, so it is inevitable that limitations, but it still has historical significance till now.

¹ Chế độ "tông pháp"

Research Methods

On the basis of elucidating the historical condition and the relationship between morality and politics of Confucius, we will make assessments about this relationship. In order to well accomplish the set goals, we stand on the point of view of the worldview, the methodology of dialectical materialism and historical materialism for research. At the same time, we also use a system of methods such as: analysis and synthesis, deduction and induction, logic and history, to research and present the article. In these methods, we are interested and mainly use the principle of approaching historical philosophy and political philosophy.

Results and Discussions

The Unity of Morality and politics in Confucius' Perspectives

Chinese history has shown that, at the end of the Spring and Autumn period, the change in production relations in the mode of slavery began to lead to a change in the superstructure of society. A series of different theories was born and accompanied by different laws and rules issued by the aristocratic slave-owner class to maintain their position in society. Starting from the point of view that all things have the same origin, the complex arises from the simple, Confucius believes that the change of society that makes people confused is not an overnight cause but a process originating from the corruption of the ruling forces, making "name" not be "right", ie "name" does not match with "real". To match "name" with "real", to educate people and stabilize society. To cope with the fluctuations of that time, Confucius advocated "Rectification of Names", that is, advised each person to know how to properly handle his or her position in society" (Te, 2000, p.309).

What is "Rectification of Names"? "Rectification of Names" is a category of Chinese philosophy, in addition to its political and social significance, but also its moral, ethical and cognitive significance, which has had a profound influence on the history of Chinese thought. According to Confucius, each thing, each person in society has a certain use, position, and duty, and corresponding to it is a certain "name". Each "name" has its own standard, which person or thing has a "name" that must fulfill the standards of that "name", so it is called "rectification of names". On the contrary, if "name" does not "rectify", it is "wrong name". Confucius explained that "righteousness" is to do everything right, "the king must act like a king, servant must act like a servant, a father must act like a father, and a son must act like a son". That is, "Rectification of Names" is someone who has his or her rightful position and duties, behaving rightfully to the others people to the order of social distinction, and that is a prosperous, civilized, virtuous, and full-fledged country. *"If the name is unjust, then the words will not be right, which will lead to wrong doing. At that time, people in society will no longer respect each other, no longer have peace, the law will be loose, and people will lose their place of trust and help"*. For the king, performing "Rectification of Names" is to strengthen his position. *"He thinks that governing the country is like ruling a family, and a king is like a father"* (Dung, 1999, p. 79).

When considering the political thought of Confucius, many researchers have commented that: *"One of his main principles and one of his great discoveries is the theory of "Rectification of*

Names" (Le, 2006, p.149). When Confucius arrived in Wei, Tử Lộ² asked Confucius what was the first thing he did in politics in Wei? Confucius told Tu Lo that the first thing to do was to make Wei stay in peace, that is, to make another son King Wei, but it would not be enough to let Xu Cong Triep not be able to welcome Khoai Quy back; Khoai Quy is guilty of wanting to assassinate his mother, Triep is guilty of resisting the king, both are lacking in qualifications. When they govern the people, the "name" is unjust, the "speech" is not, the people do not obey, the country will be in chaos. He said that "name" and "reality" must match, if they don't match, people won't understand when calling out their names, reasoning won't work, everything won't work, rituals and punishments will not be determined, leading to society. Society will be in chaos. According to Confucius, Khoai Quy and Triep were not "righteous" kings.

According to the doctrine of "Rectification of Names", Confucius divided society into five main relationships (five forms) including: 1) subject to ruler, 2) son to father, 3) younger brother to older brother, 4) wife to husband and 5) younger person to older person. In the five forms, the first three of these were viewed as intrinsically hierarchical. These are the three most basic relationships (Ruler - Minister, father - son, husband - wife). Especially in the field of morality, Confucius ethics always emphasizes two relationships: Ruler - Minister relationship and the father - son relationship.

In *Analects of Confucius*, Thien Nhan Uyen, section 16, when Quý Khương Tử asked Confucius about politics, Confucius replied: "The word "rule" comes from the word "righteousness": to rule is to take care of the people to become righteous. Now that the ruler is the leading person among the people, who can correct himself, then people who dares to behave unjustly (Chi & Le, 2004, p.190 – 191).

The *Rectification of Names* is the "name" and "rectification" must match, must be consistent with each other. In which "name" is the name of each person's position and position in society, "rectification" is the duty, responsibility, rights and obligations corresponding to "name". In order to implement this theory, Confucius built an ideal model of "gentleman" with the policy of "virtue rule". A gentleman, according to Confucius, must have all the following qualities: benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, and faith; must pay attention to study the ways to cultivate *humanity, wisdom and courage*.

The theory of "Rectification of Names" was first proposed by Confucius in the "*Analects*" and the "*Spring and Autumn*". It has a very great role, the reason Confucius advocates "rectification" is because: First, the social order of the Spring and Autumn - Warring States period was reversed, this is the disintegration period of the Zhou dynasty. The early feudal system was forming, and the decentralized society was in chaos. Secondly, the rituals is decaying, the rituals of the community, the standards of the way of life and moral behavior of people degrade, the treatment and communication between people has been disappearing, the rules of political and cultural activities are becoming more and more undisciplined. The third is that morality and politeness are degraded, but new moral standards and politeness orders are emerging, not yet formed, and people are immoral. Therefore, Confucius introduced the

² Tử Lộ: a famous student of Confucius

doctrine of "*Rectification of Names*" in order to restore the order and political and social institutions of the Zhou Dynasty, with more or less, because society and times have changed. The doctrine of "Rectification of Names" plays a very important role, so the content of the doctrine is very useful to people and society not only in the Spring and Autumn - Warring States period but also in later eras.

When he proposed the doctrine of "*Rectification of Names*", Confucius tried to show it through his actions. It also reflects Confucius' attitude of respect for order and discipline. According to Confucius, to realize "*rectification*" we must go through "rites". People are born, live, and grow up in complex types of relationships, and ceremony plays an important role in ensuring these relationships being maintained. "rites" is one of the behavioral principles that have the power to "restrict" human behavior, towards harmony in social relationships. Ceremonies help to overcome ethical violations when they are not performed. For Confucius, the ceremony is essentially a kind of social contract that regulates the rights and obligations of each member of society. An orderly society is a society with rules, rituals, clear upper and lower levels, in which it prescribes specific standards for each relationship such as: The king must be generous and tolerant towards his ministers, always behave politely; and a minister (ie a subject) must respect and be absolutely loyal to the king; Parents must be kind to their children, and vice versa, children must always be filial to their parents. He introduced ethical standards and norms in the father-son relationship in order to maintain order and hierarchy in the family, as well as contribute to strengthening order, discipline, social stability and binding responsibility between people. In this relationship, he asked for "kind father - filial son"; Husband and wife must love and care for each other. The husband is the breadwinner in the family. The husband's responsibility to love and take care of his wife. However, the wife helps her husband in all areas, must know the secret, listen to her husband wholeheartedly, focus on family happiness; Brothers are those who born from the same parents, must really love and care for each other like hands and feet, live in harmony, unite to help each other. He said: "*With friends earnestly love each other, sincerely advise each other, sincerely advise, with brothers, keep a peace and joy*" (Hy, 1998, p.522). Brothers are people of the same blood, must live in sincerity with each other, create a harmonious atmosphere, respect the upper and lower, you are the person ranked in the upper position, so the "*rectification*" is that the brother has the responsibility to love, and care for the younger brother. Thus, in addition to being affectionate, with his superior position, the brother's religion must also know, be tolerant and generous to the younger brother. Moreover, in his opinion, the older brother, especially the eldest brother, is the person who replaces the father (when the father dies) to be the head of the family and run everything in the house, so the younger brother must not disagree, but to respect him and follow all his arrangements, including personal things such as getting married, choosing a career, etc. Friends are people who are not related by blood, coming to each other to "*create a long lasting relationship with various purposes*" (Phi, 2011, p.287). Regardless of the purpose, as friends, there are always reciprocal relationships, complementing each other to complete all aspects. As friends, they must sympathize, understand, care for each other, help each other, respect each other in the spirit of equality, friendship and solidarity. Reaching that level means having a mutual

friendship, mutual trust. In making friends, sincere and mutual trust is the top standard. You should not be friends with bad people, that is, you must choose friends among virtuous people who are like-minded. Morality is as a premise to make friends. Never compete with each other. If you can do that, anyone will be sociable and friendly to you.

"*Rectification of Names*" is not only the political method of Confucius, but also a moral principle, a moral requirement of man. "Rectification of Names" is the first step leading to the policy of virtue, the condition of virtue. Confucius said that people who govern the people must have virtue, then the people will follow, to create happiness for the people. It is the duty of the rulers to educate the people to be good people. Only then will the country prosper. He did not separate morality from politics because they were jointly governed by a certain economic base, which was classified in a class society.

The interweaving between morality and politics in Confucius' thought is reflected in the view of morality

In a class society, morality serves the interests of the class. Any classed society forms two types of morality: that of the ruling class and the ruled class. In Confucius' point of view of governing the country, the method of human rule, also known as the rule of virtue, is given top priority. Confucius's consistent political ambition was to inherit the career of King Wen, King Zhou, and restore the discipline of the Zhou dynasty. In order to realize that ideal, Confucius built the ideology of morality on the basis of the unity between the Heaven Way and the Humane Way. Upholding ethics in governing the country.

Confucius especially believed in the destiny of heaven and made the point that "life and death are destined, to be rich or poor are arranged by God (Heaven)". Therefore, he explained that the arbitration of right and wrong is decided by heaven, which is the fairest way of arbitration. According to Confucius, politics plays a very important role for people, making people human because it has a direct relationship to social activities and determines the value of people's lives. He believes that politics is morality, politics must originate from way of life and people. Political activities, according to the principle of morality, are activities aimed at creating the unity between "Heaven Way" and "Human Way". Confucius requires political people to specifically know God's Way to obey, not paying attention to obscure the purity of Heaven's nature; Always cultivate virtue" to be worthy of heaven, to be blessed by heaven; Live and act in accordance with their current position; Every action must be respectful.

The unity between the Heaven Way and the Humane Way is also reflected in the fact that Confucius upholds the conduct and morality of the people who govern the people rather than the law and the regime. If the ruler is good, even if the regime is bad, it can still be changed to make it good. On the contrary, if the regime is very good, and the rulers are immoral, the results are also very bad. The decisive factor for success or failure in governance is not policy but people. According to Confucius, a politician, a king must also be a teacher of the people, must be the most virtuous of the virtuous people. He often said, if you do politics with virtue, then people will support you and the world will be at peace.

In order to practice the way of virtue ruling, Confucius said that a ruler must first cultivate himself, study hard, cultivate morality, and conquering himself means conquering what is in people that is hindering him to returns to all the original good qualities that God gave. The morality of the ruler will become a shining example for others to follow and a driving force to achieve political goals.

Thus, social existence is a reflection of the morality of the aristocracy, the prosperity of a nation completely depends on the virtue of the ruler. Therefore, those in power must constantly cultivate and practice morality in order to nurture and educate the people. That's why Confucius called for ruling the country by virtue or "**Rectification**", it can be said that this is the point of view throughout his entire thought of governing the country.

In his view of governing the country, Confucius was especially interested in discussing the word "filial piety", the second relationship in the five forms, that is, the father-son relationship. Although not really perfect, but he is very interested in the filial piety of children to their parents. He believes that just taking care of one's parents can't be considered filial, but also respectfully serving one's parents, that's filial piety. Therefore, this view of his is not only reflected in the one way that children do not necessarily obey their parents if it is the wrong view of their parents, but children want to show their filial piety as well. They need to know how to dissuade parents at the right time and do it gently. He believes that parents also need to treat their children properly. According to Confucius, the task of morality is to have a favorable effect on the happiness of society, while politics and science are the art of stabilizing society. And morality would not be possible if it were not mixed with politics.

Confucius thought on the complementarity between morality and politics

In his ideological system, Confucius did not emphasize moral or political factors, but placed them equally and complement each other. Both are one of the important factors of authority because moral judgment is based on determining the intention and motive of action. Ethical behavior, after all, is always governed by the motive of benefiting society, and this motive in practice is realized by the creation of a certain value. The results and motives of action are equally important in terms of practical politics. Thus morality and politics complement each other in Confucian thought. According to Confucius, a ruler must have both morality and political ability, he always upholds virtue, using the morality of the ruler to educate the people. "Ruler is a man with ideals, ambitions, noble personality, the image of those who wholeheartedly serve the country for the people, know suffering before the world, happy after the people" (Phi, 2011, p. 47). In it, he set requirements for the rulers to have: benevolence, wisdom, courage. It can be said that these are the basic standards to become a gentleman and a measure of the rulers in the society at that time. People in power must have benevolence and have faith in virtue to become a powerful driving force from within for all their actions. From a solid moral belief turned into strength for them to realize their political goals.

Humanity manifests its existence through contact and communication between man and nature, between man and man, between the individual and itself. These relationships are so rich, varied, and complex that, despite many mentions, Confucius was unable to give a complete definition. However, based on Confucius thought, it can be affirmed that the main

content of the human being is as follows: For oneself, benevolence is to constantly study, cultivate, and train to overcome personal desires and do the "Rectification"; To people, being kind means loving them. Confucius not only taught his students to love people as their own, but he was also the bright spot of loving people. According to him, human life is the most important, so in politics he always asks the authorities to pay special attention to and respect human life and condemn the kings, vassals, and mandarins pursuing power expands war, causing death and chaos. Humanity is loving people, but not in an abstract, unconditional way. Love for people must be built on the basis of morality and wisdom. Therefore, Confucius expected the ruler to have a deep understanding of morality because it is the source of all good things.

In Confucius' thought, benevolence is not only loving people but also knowing how to "hate people" to do evil things. For him, only people with benevolence know to "love people" and "hate people". Thus, humanity does not just stop at the aspect of morality, humanity is the foundation of morality, a very important element for the rulers to implement political ideas, to change the bad in society; it also means real social transformation; answer the question "how to make society from chaos back to peace". A benevolent person for Confucius must be a pioneer in all circumstances, actively face all difficulties and hardships, and bring joy and happiness to life. A benevolent person not only trains himself and helps himself succeed, but according to Confucius, he must also help others succeed as he or she wishes; taking the success of society as his own progress, taking everyone's happiness as a goal to strive to achieve humanity. In political work, it is only through wisdom that the rulers are wise enough to be able to clearly perceive objective reality and no longer have doubts. Since then, they have always been wise, not dogmatic, using their understanding to benefit society. Wise people always clearly understand virtue, understand the laws of life, and apply knowledge to benefit themselves, their families and the community. People who live according to virtue will have a harmonious society, and people with wisdom will make the society constantly move forward.

Human understanding does not come naturally, it is a process of constant learning. Learning to reach wisdom is a long process, it requires a learner's effort, persistence and continuity.

A wise person must be someone who knows how to bring his or her understanding to help others, to help the world, which means to do politics so as not to waste effort in learning and training; is a person who knows humility, is careful in every word, does not offend or harm others. The purpose of learning is to understand, to change and to perfect oneself. But for Confucius, the ultimate goal of learning is to bring that knowledge to the service of society; studying to him is to do mandarin, to do politics. According to Confucius, it is possible to have a wise person without being benevolent, but it is not possible to be a benevolent person without wisdom. So in order to accomplish what you want to become a perfect human being, you must learn. Confucius advises: "you should put your mind to the Way of Heaven, firmly grasp the virtues, follow benevolence, and delight in the six arts" (Hy, 1998. p.346). Learning from him first is to grasp the laws of heaven and earth, to gain virtue, to know social discipline, then to bring out the knowledge to help the king manage the country. This is an indispensable quality of a ruler.

In addition to benevolence and wisdom, those in power must be brave, resilient and courageous to overcome challenges in life. A person in power must have benevolence to exercise his emotions, wisdom to exercise his intellect, and courage to exercise his will. These three virtues are closely related and inseparable, in which the human being plays a decisive role.

Confucius taught, those in power must be cautious while working, should not break promises, must be thrifty, love everyone, give works to people at any time but avoid busy times. If the government wants to let the people love and submit to the people, it must know how to select righteous and virtuous people and eliminate those who flatter and have nefarious schemes: directing, slandering, and disobeying the people. The authorities must set an example for the people in all respects, such as: being dignified in manners, being filial to parents, loving towards children and everyone else. Good and talented people should be used, and those who have no knowledge or experience should be taught. The ruler must be decisive, what needs to be done, let the people do it.

Harmony of the relationship between morality and politics

According to Confucius, in order to make people have a better life, the rulers must build a complete government apparatus, the rulers "want to win the hearts of the people, that is, to rule for peace and prosperity, then the authorities should select people who are upright and virtuous and eliminate those who flatter and slander" (Con, 2006, p.25). If you want people to respect you, you must first be serious with yourself. If you are strict with yourself, others must follow. The government must set an example for everyone to follow, such as being filial to your parents, getting along with your brothers and sisters, doing politics from home, and then coming to the world.

In politics, the emperor must respect the virtuous, talented and generous people. For the authorities, they must do the following three things: First, they must assign work to the officials under their command. After they have finished, the authorities will review it. Second, whoever makes a small mistake forgive them. Third, appoint people who are virtuous and talented. Confucius believes that the power of the ruler is the synergy of the helpers. Therefore, using people plays a very important role in building and maintaining the country. Usually, each person only develops in a certain aspect, can only take on a certain function. Depending on the ability and level of each person, they can be divided into many classes, corresponding to each class will take on different positions. Therefore, it must be according to the ability and level of each person to assign work.

Confucius emphasized that when choosing his collaborators, he must choose those who are talented, virtuous, then the people will always do good, and the bad ones must be taught. When coming to the people, the authorities must keep the core in a dignified manner according to the ceremony. If you want people to respect you, you must first respect others. In order for the people to listen to and support them, the ruler must first love his father and mother, love the people, and take care of the people

On the contrary, the people and servants should treat the king as they were their parents. You must show your loyalty to the king, but the people like what the king likes to follow. The people hate what the king hates according to that. Confucius also realized the role of the masses of the people, whether the ruler can maintain his position or not depends on the people. Confucius set forth requirements for the head of a nation, which most included was the attainment of humanity and the divine way.

According to Confucius, in order to have good and wise politics, the rulers need three things: Abundant food, strong military power, and the people's trust. Of these three things, if forced to give up one thing, give up the army; if forced to give up one more thing, give up food; if the people lack the trust, sooner or later the government will collapse. Because, the rule of the country won the trust of the people, will create a power that no enemy can break. Not only that, the king must know how to make the people rich and educate the people.

Confucius advocates that the ruler must know how to use politics and ethics flexibly. He said: "The gentleman does not carry out a dictatorial policy" (Con, 2006, p.55). Do not use your own will but decide the fate of the whole society. The king in his heart, always took care of the people and the country, when doing anything, he kept his integrity and love. If the government remains clean, the people will become clean. Confucius also said, "If above, the king shows compassion for the people, but below, they do not worship the king with loyalty, such a thing has never happened" (Con, 2006, p. 33). But when the king orders unjustly, the people will protest. In order for the people not to oppose the king, it is necessary to make everyone happy and free from suffering. A rich country is a country with a rich population. When the country is rich, the state will become strong. If you want to make the country strong, you must "make sure that each person fulfills his/her position; The king know all the duties of the king, mandarins know all the duties of mandarins, father know all the duties of father, son know all the duties of son" (Con, 2006, p.198). If the top and bottom people do not do their duties at their best, they will cause chaos in society. When the society is in turmoil, although the storehouses are full of rice, and the houses are full of jewelry, people can't enjoy.

According to Confucius, there are three most important things in politics: population growth, economic development, and intellectual development. Therefore, the main task of the ruler is to nurture and educate the people. If the people in power are well nurtured and educated, the rulers will gain hearts and strengthen their positions. On the contrary, if people go hungry, society is in chaos, sooner or later, the government will be overthrown. Therefore, those in power must love and care for the people and must know the people.

Conclusion

Confucius' thought on the relationship between morality and politics is expressed through the doctrine of "Rectification of Names" with the ideology of morality, the ideology of the ruler's qualities, and the relationship between the rulers and the people. In that relationship, morality always holds an important position, which is what regulates human behavior in social relationships. Confucius takes Taoism as the root, takes filial piety - obedience, and music as the basis for education, takes "rule" as the basis for the way of governing the country, and

takes the role of exemplary qualities of rulers as an example to govern the country, in order to create an orderly and stable society. However, politics also plays a very important role in the practice of morality. Through social relationships, Confucius has set relatively specific ethical requirements, clearly specifying the individual's responsibilities towards himself, his family, society and the state, and with the policy of upholding ethics, educating people so that people can appreciate themselves and perform their tasks. Through politics that is directly the ruler, Confucius advocated flexibility in the exercise of the role of the ruler.

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