

Similarities between Western Political Thought and Chinese Traditional

Wisdom

Xiaolei Wan

Guangdong University of Science and Technology, Dongguan, China

Abstract: In this paper, similarities between western political thought and Chinese traditional wisdom are studied and analyzed. The results show that there are indeed a lot of similarities between the western political thought and the Chinese political wisdom. This is evidence of the great saying---great minds think alike. One example, there are both great western and Chinese political thinkers who advocate equality and democracy. There are both Chinese and western philosophers who put the common folks before the rulers.

Keywords: Western, political, thought, equality, democracy.

1. INTRODUCTION

China is a great ancient civilized country with a long history dripping with great old or traditional wisdom covering all aspect of real life, politics included. There were great thinkers and philosophers like Confucius, Mencius, Han Feizi, Shang Yang etc,. In western intellectual history we could find great thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. They all had their own value system and preach their own teachings but underneath the superficial language expressions there are essential similarities between them.

2. FACTS AND ANALYSES

First of all, virtue of the rules was upheld and stressed by both Confucius and Plato. Confucius even said virtue was the basics for a ruler. For western ruling class, for the aristocracy virtue is a must quality. Mencius once said the common people must come before the government, and the government must come before the king. In other words, the king is the least important. Of course Chinese rulers hated this saying and condemned this great thinker. However, this does prove that there were Chinese political thinkers who privileged the grassroots over the crown. This thinking is basically a different version of the American Independence Declaration's "Of the people, for the people, by the people" which preaches the people above all else. The core content of Confucius's political thought is "courtesy" and "benevolence". In his strategy of governing the country, he advocates "governing the country by virtue" and "governing the country by morality and etiquette" is the noblest way of governing the country. This strategy of governing the country is also called "rule by virtue" or "rule by etiquette". In this strategy,

virtue and courtesy are given to the people, hierarchy is strictly enforced, and nobles and ordinary people are completely divided into the rulers and the ruled. It breaks an important boundary between aristocracy and common people.

2.1 Versions of republic

Confucius' highest political ideal is to build a "world for the public" Datong society. The basic characteristics of "Datong" society are: the road is smooth and "the world is public". Therefore, we can "select talents and abilities, stress faith and cultivate harmony", "not only relatives, not only sons, so that the old can end up, strong and useful, young can grow up, lonely and disabled people can support", conspiracy fraud, theft and chaos, which is an idealized legend of the Yao and Shun era of primitive social scene, but also the highest ideal society that Confucius longed for. Confucius' social ideal of "Great Harmony" and "Well-off Society" has a far-reaching impact on future generations of China. Later, in different historical periods, thinkers at different stages put forward different contents of vision blueprints and goals of struggle, which also inspired progressive thinkers and reformers, and influenced Hong Xiuquan, Kang Youwei, Tan Sitong and Sun Yat-sen.

2.2 Rule of dictation

Socrates differs greatly from other Western philosophers in his attempt to persuade westerners not to seek outside their hearts (which is the cultural tradition of the West), but to reflect and reflect on their own minds, so as to make them conform to their innate moral rationality. This is very similar to Confucius' idea in China. But ultimately Socrates was unable to reverse the direction that Westerners sought outside the hearts of the people. Socrates put forward the "rule of philosophical king", in fact, is the Western copy of the Confucian "rule of Saint king, rule of Saint inside and King outside". Socrates is against civil politics! In the Republic, Plato designed a picture of a just state: a country of moderate size, to stand in the city high enough to see the whole country, people know each other as a degree.

2.3 Classification of the people

Plato believed that the country originated from the division of labor, so he divided the citizens of the ideal country into three grades: statesman, warrior and laborer, representing three qualities: wisdom, courage and desire. Rulers rule the country by their own philosophical wisdom and moral strength; warriors assist in ruling the country and defend its security with loyalty and courage; and workers provide material means of life for the whole country. Each of the three ranks has its own position. In such a country, the statesman is a philosopher of high moral standing. Only the philosopher can understand the idea, have perfect virtue and superb wisdom, understand where justice lies, and govern the country fairly according to rational guidance. Rulers and warriors have no private property and family, because private property and family are the root of all selfish evil ideas. Workers are never allowed to own luxury goods. The Utopia also attaches great importance to education, because the quality and moral character of the people determine the quality of the country. Plato even envisaged sending all people over the age of 10 out of the country at the beginning of the founding of the People's Republic because they had been influenced by the old culture and could not be changed. From

childhood onwards, all citizens should receive life-long education from music, sports, mathematics to philosophy. The content of education should be strictly chosen. The epic poems of Homer and Hesiod and the works of tragic poets are not allowed to be introduced into the country, because they will poison the young people's hearts. Plato claimed that this was a "first class" ideal, and other regimes were the transformation of this ideal regime. The ideal regime caused three levels of confusion due to poor marriage, which led to fighting, and the rise of the military regime (Timocracy). In military regimes, a few powerful people amass wealth and form oligarchy. The sharp contradiction between the rich and the poor led to the people's revolution and the emergence of democracy. Democracy will be replaced by tyranny when it reaches its extreme. *Politicians* was written between Plato's two visits to Syracuse (367-361 B.C.). This was the period when his political practice in Syracuse was frustrated and his thoughts changed. The main theme of *Politicians* is to discuss the definition of true politicians and politics. Plato put forward the concept of political middle way and mixture in this dialogue. For the first time, he clearly discussed the role of law and took law as the criterion for dividing the regime. He believes that real politicians (philosophers) need not be ruled by law, but in reality, real politicians are extremely rare, even if there are real politicians, law still has a certain role. Because politics is not only an art, but also a science. For politicians, law is just like the training programs and prescriptions of coaches and doctors. Although it is absurd in theory, it is necessary in practice. Plato further played the role of law in his final work *The Law*. From an ideal point of view, he advocated the rule of the King of Philosophy. "There is no law or regulation more powerful than knowledge." From a realistic point of view, he stressed that human beings must have laws and abide by them, otherwise their lives would be like the most barbarous beasts. Under the guidance of this idea, he designed his "second-class" polis in the 12 volumes of "Law Chapter", including the geographical environment, territorial size, population size and source, national economic life, class structure, political system, law and other details. Because of the change of guiding ideology, the second-class good city-state differs greatly from the just state in the *Republic* in terms of concrete measures. The main points are as follows: the political system is transformed from the sage regime governed by the King of Philosophy to the mixed regime in order to prevent personal monopoly. The *Republic* advocated that the rulers should implement public property, public wife, public meal and public education system, while the *Law Chapter* restored private property and family. In the *Republic*, citizens are classified according to their innate endowments, while in the *Law Chapter*, they are classified according to the number of acquired property.

2.4 Rule of law

Han feizi's idea of rule of law is essentially a set of spells designed for the convenience of autocratic monarchy. In han feizi's mind, the monarch has absolute power and his subjects are like a flock of tame sheep. "Respecting the monarch and humble ministers" is the core of social order. Such as "minister minister, the son of the father, the wife of the husband. Three shun the world governance, three against the world chaos. This world is often road, Ming wang xian Chen and fu yi. (hanfei • loyalty and filial piety) according to the design of han feizi, the social

order with respect and inferiority as its content is endowed by god, which is as immutable as the law of nature. Thus it can be seen that han feizi's thought on the rule of law is not focused on the whole society, but a refined ruling theory conceived by the rulers from a narrow standpoint to safeguard their vested interests, which represents the interests of the emerging landlord class that grew up day by day in the warring states period.

2.5 Division of power

Separation of powers is the basic political system of western capitalist countries. The main content is that legislative power, executive power and judicial power are independent and balanced. The theoretical basis of separation of powers is the separation of powers theory put forward by John Locke, the British bourgeois political thinker, and montesquieu, the French bourgeois enlightenment scholar, during the bourgeois revolution in Western Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. The division of central power in ancient China appeared after the establishment of a unified centralized state. The three generations of xia, shang and zhou had simple government affairs, and the power of the central government, especially the monarch, was weak. After the unification of the qin dynasty, the rulers summarized the ruling experience and lessons in the history, and transferred the local power to the central government, which centralized the power to the emperor himself. Chinese dynasties, as the country's supreme ruler, emperor in the heart is to want to kiss for all things, but the time and energy are limited, and will power to an institution or individual is not assured, so will the central power according to administrative functions or administrative operation procedure, gives different department or individual, make its handling affairs already contain each other, achieve finally by the emperor himself country maximize monopolizes the power of purpose. Of course, this is only an overview of the theory, specific implementation, each period is not the same, the following are briefly discussed.

3. EPILOGUE

Due to the technological development especially the transportation technology and the internet the world is becoming smaller and people from different cultures are closer to each other than ever. In this circumstance, more time and energy should be invested in the study of the similarities between the different countries instead of focusing on the discrepancy and conflicts, harboring the cold-war monster in the heart.

REFERENCES

- [1] Wong Yank, "Traditional Western Thought", *Journal of Politics*, 2007, Vol. 6 (12), p511-523.
- [2] Jerry Faker, "Political Thought of Confucius", *Journal of Chinese Culture*, Vol. 4 (2), p51-66.
- [3] Dwayne Johnson, "A Study of Mencius' Political thinking", *The Journal of Asia Study*, Vol. 13 (8), p651-658.
- [4] David Carrier, "Plato and Aristotle", *The Journal of Philosophical Study*, Vol. 13 (8),

p651-658.