

The Interaction of Virtue and Ritual in Chinese Politics

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Abstract. The word "virtue" is the core idea in Chinese political tradition, while "ritual" is the institutional shell in which the idea is implemented into the real political order. As the primary pair of opposites in political governance, virtue and ritual have been influencing each other and interacting with each other from the moment of their creation. The abstract ideal concept of virtue is constantly externalized into a concrete ritual system, and the external form of ritual constantly acquires abstract meaning. Political governance encompasses almost every aspect of human life, and the concept of virtue eventually becomes an omnipresent spirituality, while rituals become an all-encompassing cultural system in the interaction with virtue.

Keywords: Political Tradition; Political Governance; Mandate of Heaven; Virtue; Rites.

1. Introduction

The rule of virtue is a long-standing tradition in Chinese politics, and "virtue" has occupied the discourse of Chinese politics since the earliest days of the Yin and Zhou dynasties. Chinese politics is the politics of the oneness of heaven and man, and China does not have the religious beliefs of the West, where God and man are distinctly separate. However, the Chinese have their own religious sentiments, which are diffused in all aspects of Chinese social life, the most important of which is the relationship between man and heaven. In the Western political tradition, the "divine right of kings" is practiced, and earthly political legitimacy is to be found in divine decree. In the Chinese political tradition, this concept is embodied in the "divine right of kings" or the "mandate of heaven". The phrase "divine right of kings" is more in line with traditional Chinese political theory. The most fundamental philosophical concept in Chinese civilization lies in the notion of life, that the Tao of Heaven is everlasting and the whole universe is everlasting, so there will not be a perfect world on the other side, there will not be religious fanaticism, everything is in flux, and this has created a strong sense of commitment among Chinese people, who look at the world with a simple gaze, accept the world as it is, and to transform it in interaction with it. The highest ideal pursued by Chinese politics is "to praise the transformation of heaven and earth", or in a negative direction, "to complement the nature of all things and not dare to do anything". It is important to note here that Chinese civilization pursues only "participation", "participation" after a profound understanding of the ways of heaven and earth, rather than "nurturing on behalf of heaven and earth". This relationship between heaven and man is embedded in the core of Chinese political philosophy, a reverence for all things in heaven and earth, and for communal life.

2. Organization of the Text

The emergence of "virtue" is a new idea that emerged from this change in the mandate of heaven. Guo Moruo once said that the emphasis on virtue was a new meaning in Western Zhou political thought and a new ideological element in the relationship between heaven and man. The birth of virtue was mainly in the Yin and Zhou dynasties. The view of providence since the Shang dynasty could no longer provide support for the political order on earth at the time of the Yin and Zhou revolutions. Before the Western Zhou, the Mandate of Heaven was fixed and Heaven only blessed the Shang dynasty. When King Zhou of the Shang Dynasty was attacked by King Wu of the Zhou Dynasty, he still said firmly, "Wasn't I born with a destiny in heaven?" It was the embodiment of this fixed view of the fate of heaven, and as the Son of Heaven knew this, the people were even more submissive, so when the Shang Dynasty fell, the shock to the people at that time was great. The collapse of the Shang dynasty seemed to mean the collapse of the Mandate of Heaven. For the

emerging Zhou dynasty, how to realize the rule of "small state Zhou" over "big state Shang" and how to reshape people's political beliefs in order to build a relatively stable social order became the primary task. It was in this context that the concept of "virtue and fate" was born. The emergence of the "virtue and destiny view" is a complement to the original metaphysical view of providence. In the actual political operation, the two interacted and accomplished each other. The "virtue and destiny view" is a breakthrough of Chinese philosophy and Chinese civilization in the "pre-axial period". It had a profound impact on Chinese political tradition, or, as you might say, the emergence of the virtue and destiny concept set the scale of Chinese political operation, determined the discourse of Chinese politics, and provided a new dimension of thinking for Chinese politics. The emergence of the concept of virtue and destiny at the time of Yin and Zhou determined the basic direction of Chinese political civilization thereafter. Guo Moruo once astutely pointed out that "from the Book of Zhou and Zhou Yi, the word virtue not only includes the subjective aspect of cultivation, but also the objective aspect of scale - what later people called 'rites' ". The rich development of the spirit constantly gave rise to a realistic system capable of carrying this spiritual system, and it was against this ideological background that rites arose.

In order to emphasize the importance of ritual and music, later Confucian scholars directly traced the creation of ritual and music back to the Three Dynasties and cited it as the reason why the society of the Three Dynasties was more beautiful at the top than at the bottom. Wang Guowei, in his "Treatise on the System of Yin and Zhou," takes "making rites and music" as the greatest historical dividing line between the Yin and Zhou dynasties, arguing that the replacement of the Shang by the Zhou was not only a political revolution in which a small state replaced a large one, but also an ideological and cultural revolution that established the political spirit of later China and provided a model for later China. It also provided a model "ritualistic" political system for later China. In this "ritual and music" political system, the main aspects of community life are covered, and in general terms, they can be summarized as religion, morality, and law. The Book of Rites and Rituals states:

The rituals of the world have these five functions: first, to make people remember the beginning, second, to make people not forget their ancestors, third, to develop resources so that they can be used, fourth, to establish morality, and fifth, to promote humility. The purpose of remembering the beginning is to make people drink water and think of the source without forgetting the origin. Not forgetting the ancestors is to make people know how to honor their superiors. To develop resources so that they can be used is to make people's lives secure. To establish morality is to rationalize the relationship between the king and his subjects, the father and the son. The promotion of humility is intended to eliminate disputes. Combining these five roles, they constitute the all-embracing rituals that govern the world, and even if there are still some bad people that cannot be cured, their number is minimal.

The five things that rites are dedicated to in this passage can be summarized into three aspects: to make people remember the beginning and to make people not forget their ancestors, which can be seen as the settlement of people's religious beliefs; to develop resources so that they can be used, which is the clarification of the rules that people follow in their daily lives and is inclined to the material life; to the to establish morality and to promote humility, which is the clarification of people's human righteousness and is inclined to the ethical life. If these five roles of rituals can be fulfilled, the world can be well governed. With the arrival of the "philosophical breakthrough" in Chinese culture during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, rationalism and humanism in Chinese society increased significantly, and the religious function of the ritual system diminished, but its ritual program was preserved by transforming it into a separate ritual. The ritual system became increasingly useful for settling the ethical life of people, and the tracing of rituals rose to the level of their roots.

Rites are composed of different specific rituals, but the essence of rituals lies beyond these rituals. From the Western Zhou period onward, the discussion of rituals rose from simple forms to principles

of governance with universal significance. From the ritualistic form of rituals, thinkers continued to elucidate the righteousness contained therein, which in turn guided people's political and ethical lives. Rituals and ritual music gradually evolved into ritual justice and ritual politics, and the integration of rituals and politics was further deepened. After many centuries of transmutation, rituals have gone from the minor rituals of people's daily life to the primary principles that politicians have to clarify to govern the state. In Zuo Zhuan - 25 Years of Duke Zhao, Zi Da Shu regarded ritual as a general principle that unites heaven, earth, and man, and as a great scripture and law that should be followed in political governance.

When Dashu paid a visit to Zhao Jianzi, a great official of Jin, and Zhao Jianzi asked him about the rituals of greeting and circumambulation, Dashu Zi said, "This is a ritual, not a rite." Zhao Jianzi said, "Excuse me, what is a ritual?" Zi Da Shu said, "I once heard the former great master Zi Chan say, 'Rites, the principles of heaven, the laws of earth, and the basis of the people's conduct.' Since it is the law of heaven and earth, the people follow the law and implement it.

In the breakthrough of the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the rationalist component of Chinese culture developed more and more, and the rituals and ceremonies that had been preserved by relying on the aura of sanctity were reconceptualized and reconstructed. The seemingly elaborate rituals of greeting and circumlocution do not represent the totality of ritual, nor are they the core of ritual. The essence of rites and rituals can rise to the level of the scriptures of heaven, the righteousness of the earth, and the conduct of the people, and are fundamental principles of social governance with broad universality. The interaction between virtue and ritual is further strengthened. After this intended turn of events, the sanctity of rites was not dissolved by the development of rationalism, but re-established as the root of sanctity and transformed into an important tool for governing the world. The rituals also include almost all the important aspects of a person's life. The Book of Rites - Rites of Fortune says: "Therefore, the rites must be based on the sky, meat and drink on the earth, listed in the ghosts and gods, and reached to the funeral, sacrifice, shooting, imperial, crown, faint, dynasty, and hiring, so the sage shows them with rites, so the world and the state can be righted." In Chinese culture, there is no religious world on the other side of the world, and all life is centered on this world. By tracing the origin of rituals and ceremonies in life to the sky, the earth, and the ghosts and gods, it increases the fullness and heaviness of life in this world, and important moments in people's lives and in the country are guided by rituals that reach heaven and earth, which is important for the enhancement of people's happiness and for the smooth order of the country. This is important for the enhancement of human happiness and the smoothness of the national order. The politicians of the past generations saw the key role of rituals in the social life of people, and therefore rearranged and reorganized the previously scattered rituals and ceremonies. The rituals, as a holistic and overarching system, were a part of the life of the state and society, and the coherent and transcendent nature of the rituals determined that the rituals were mandatory for people's lives. One of the important roles of rites is to identify and rank the inferiority and superiority, and to distinguish different groups of people to be governed differently according to the social system of feudal patriarchy by combining the nearness and closeness of blood relations, which is said in The Book of Rites - Qu Rites: "The rites are so to determine the affinity, to decide the suspicion, to distinguish the similarity and difference, and to understand the right and wrong." Through the distinction of affinity and inferiority, it provides a set of behavioral norms for social life to follow. The same is true for political life in the imperial court, as explained in The Book of Rites, which explains the role of rituals, "the order of the ruler, the courtiers, and the court, the order of the superior and the inferior, and the division of the lower and the common people into carriages, clothes, palaces, food, marriages, and funerals. The spirit of ritual here is the same as the spirit of ritual for life, except that in politics, the order of ritual is more hierarchical. In the life of a community, a clear hierarchy is not a bad thing, but rather a guarantee of the proper functioning of the order of community life. Through such a clear hierarchy, a whole set of ethical order is established for the society, and the

conflicts between different groups are minimized, so that the whole society can move forward in the ideal direction.

3. Summary

The origins of Confucian rites can be traced back to the Three Emperors and Five Emperors or even earlier. The earliest meaning of rites originally referred to the use of vessels to hold jade vessels for sacrificing to the gods, but in later development, the scope of rites was gradually expanded to include all acts of service to the gods, and later to include primitive religious rites. The development of rituals took a big leap in the Zhou Dynasty after the Duke of Zhou organized them and formed the Zhou Rites. The rituals included in the Zhou rites went beyond the scope of religious rituals and included the order of group activities in religious rituals as well as the way of getting along with individuals, encompassing the whole society. The Zhou rituals cover everything from the political order of human society, social hierarchy, status affiliation, and the more detailed rituals of daily food and drink. In later times, the rites were transformed by the Duke of Zhou into not only a primitive religious ritual, but also a set of political systems and cultural patterns, which were infused into people's daily behavior, a kind of omnipresent spirituality, and an all-encompassing cultural system. Rites have thus become a necessary element for human beings to maintain survival and reproduction, and to maintain community cohesion and centripetal force.

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