



## COMMENT ON “GOVERNANCE IDEAS IN *KONG-ZI JIA YU* AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY VALUES”


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## COMMENT ON “GOVERNANCE IDEAS IN *KONG-ZI JIA YU* AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY VALUES”

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*Kong-Zi Jia Yu* is an important literary work that documents the thoughts and actions of Confucius and his disciples, providing a significant supplement to the understanding of Confucius and the principles of Confucianism beyond “the Analects”. The present version of *Kong-Zi Jia Yu* consists of ten volumes and forty-four chapters, which reveal Confucius’s belief in the connection between humans and the divine, his concept of the “Way of the Enlightened Ruler”, and the path of self-cultivation, among other things. This study focuses on the political and governance ideology found in *Kong-Zi Jia Yu*.

Confucian political philosophy aims to construct an orderly and harmonious political order that establishes a virtuous ruler governing with benevolence and the people living in peace and prosperity. Based on this objective, *Kong-Zi Jia Yu* proposes an ideal political model and paints a vision of a utopian society. Confucius stated,

Individuals do not solely prioritize their relatives or solely treat their children as their own. The elderly is provided with proper care until the end of their lives, and strong and capable individuals are given opportunities for meaningful contributions. The disadvantaged, widowed, orphaned, and disabled individuals are all supported and provided for. People despise leaving valuables abandoned on the ground without the need to hoard them for personal gain. They dislike exerting effort solely for personal benefit. As a result, schemes of deceit and treachery are suppressed and do not prosper, and acts of theft, disorder, and banditry are prevented. Therefore, the external doors are left open, signifying the state of Great Harmony (Wang, 2021, p. 63).

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Following Confucius, subsequent philosophers have almost universally regarded attaining a world of Great Harmony as their innermost ideal pursuit. Therefore, we can consider the construction of a world of Great Harmony as the ultimate ideal of governance and political philosophy in *Kong-Zi Jia Yu*.

How can we achieve the “Great Harmony”? Confucius believed that rulers should govern political affairs through moral education. Therefore, those in positions of power must first rectify themselves and cultivate their moral character, serving as exemplary role models for the people. Simultaneously, the implementation of political measures relies on talented individuals. Thus, selecting and appointing capable individuals to assist the ruler is essential. Furthermore, the importance of the people’s role in the prosperity and stability of the country should be emphasized. Rulers should exhibit a benevolent love for the people, treating them as their children and implementing policies that benefit and show compassion towards the people. By practicing self-discipline, respecting and valuing the capable, and demonstrating love and care for the people, Confucius advocated for implementing moral governance. This approach aims to achieve stability and harmony within the nation and society, known as Confucius’ principle of “governing with virtue.”

Confucius consistently emphasized the importance of self-cultivation, particularly for those in positions of governance, as it is closely tied to a nation’s rise and fall, success, and failure. The conduct and cultivation of the ruler have a profound influence on the people’s behavior, serving as a model for their actions. If the ruler demonstrates virtuous conduct, the people will follow suit and regulate their behavior accordingly, facilitating an intangible form of moral education. However, if the ruler lacks moral integrity, they will fail to serve as a positive role model, and the people may imitate their misconduct, leading to lawlessness and disorder. This, in turn, disrupts the stability and harmony of the entire nation and society. Consequently, Confucius advocated that “a noble person must cultivate oneself” to underscore the imperative nature of self-cultivation for rulers.

Regarding self-cultivation, there is a more explicit discussion in *Kong-Zi Jia Yu*. Zhi Si: “King Wu rectified himself to rectify his country, and rectified his country to rectify the world...” This praises King Wu of the Zhou dynasty, conveying that he could govern his country effectively through his moral cultivation, thereby bringing good governance to the entire world. By praising King Wu and Duke Zhou, Confucius elucidates the close relationship between rulers’ moral cultivation and their nations’ governance.

Confucius advocated for virtuous governance and emphasized that rulers occupying central positions must enhance their moral cultivation. However, the implementation and execution of policies by the ruler also require ministers to assist. Acting as intermediaries between rulers and people, ministers should serve as effective bridges and bonds. Therefore, ministers’ competence and integrity directly impact governance outcomes. For a ruler to govern the country effectively, appointing individuals solely based on their talents and abilities is essential.

When Duke Ai of Lu sought Confucian political advice, Confucius proposed, “There are nine essentials to govern a country: self-cultivation, respect for the capable... When one cultivates oneself, the Dao is established. When one esteems the virtuous, one is free from confusion”. Among the “nine essentials” for governing the world, Confucius placed “respect for the capable” after the ruler’s self-cultivation, considering it as another crucial measure for effective governance. Confucius believed that in the governance of a nation, the utmost importance lies in respecting virtuous individuals. A ruler who respects and honors the capable will not experience confusion governing the country. When Zilu sought Confucian advice on the primary strategy for governing a nation with sagacity and wisdom, Confucius unhesitatingly declared, “It lies in respecting the capable and despising the unworthy”.

In the chapter “WE YI JIE,” Confucius categorizes individuals into five ranks: the ordinary man, the scholar, the gentleman, the virtuous man, and the sage. Confucius describes the “virtuous man” as follows:

Virtue does not exceed proper bounds, and actions adhere to established norms and principles. Words are sufficient to govern the world without causing harm to oneself, and the teachings are capable of guiding the people without causing harm to the essence. When one possesses wealth, there is an absence of excessive materialism in the world, and when one engages in acts of generosity, poverty alleviates in society. These are the characteristics of a virtuous man (Wang, 2018b, p. 32).

Confucius sets a high standard for the virtuous man. In his view, a virtuous man must possess noble character and exhibit benevolence and righteousness. If a ruler can respect and appoint virtuous talents, they will not make arbitrary and harmful decisions that bring disaster upon the nation and its people. Thus, it is evident that one of the most important measures for effective governance by a virtuous ruler, according to Confucius, is the respect for and appointment of virtuous individuals. Confucius attributes the success or failure of political affairs to the presence or absence of talented individuals.

Furthermore, when discussing the question of “Who is the virtuous minister among the present officials?” with Zigong in *Kong-Zi Jia Yu* · Jian Jun, Confucius put forward the principle that “[...] those who are capable of recommending and identifying talented individuals can truly be deemed as wise and discerning” (Wang, 2018b, p. 112). A virtuous minister contributes intelligence and wisdom in their position and possesses a broader perspective and vision. In the nation’s interest, they can identify and promote individuals who surpass them in talent to more significant positions, allowing them to showcase their abilities and benefit the country on a larger scale.

Confucius’ political philosophy also manifests in his emphasis on the importance of the people. Like many other rulers, he recognized the power of the people and emphasized the need to value and care for them. When Duke Ai of Lu asked Confucius about the principles

of governance, Confucius responded, “The ruler is like a boat, and the common people are like water. Water can carry the boat, but it can also overturn it. The danger can be known if the ruler is mindful of this” (Wang, 2018a, p. 33). Confucius used the metaphor of a boat and water to illustrate the relationship between the ruler and the people, suggesting that the people are like water and the ruler is like a boat. Water can support the boat, but it can also submerge it. This political aphorism has been highly regarded and drawn upon by scholars and politicians in subsequent generations, exerting a positive and profound influence on the development of ancient Chinese political and ethical thought.

Once the importance of the people is recognized, it needs to be put into practice. In *Kong-Zi Jia Yu* ·Xian Jun, it is explicitly stated, “The most urgent matter in governance is to make the people prosperous and long-lived.” Similarly, the statesman Guan Zhong during the Spring and Autumn period repeatedly emphasized, “In the realm of governing a nation, the path to success necessitates prioritizing the prosperity of the people. When the citizenry is prosperous, it becomes easier to establish and maintain effective governance. In contrast, in times of poverty among the populace, the task of governance becomes challenging”. He believed that “[...] when the people are prosperous, they prioritize the stability of their hometowns and place great importance on family values. As a result, they exhibit respect toward those in positions of authority and fear the consequences of committing crimes. This combination of reverence and fear facilitates the ease of governance”. Conversely,

In a state of poverty among the people, there is a risk of the community neglecting its welfare and showing less regard for familial matters. As a result, individuals may dare to disregard and violate laws and regulations set by higher authorities. This defiance of authority poses significant challenges to effective governance. Therefore, in the context of governance, a nation that strives for stability must prioritize the prosperity of its citizens. It follows that those who seek to govern adeptly must first ensure the economic well-being of the populace before embarking on effective governance measures (Guan, 2008, p. 54).

Furthermore, it is equally important to cherish the people with a heart of benevolence and virtue. Confucius proposed the concept of “Zi Shu Min,” which emphasizes that rulers should treat the people like caring for their children, demonstrating a love for the people as if they were their offspring. When teaching Zi Zhang about being an official, Confucius pointed out specific manifestations of caring for the people, stating,

Officials should not provoke the aspirations of the people through oppressive measures, nor should they incite discontent among the populace through excessive use of force. They should assess situations without being swayed by superficial rhetoric and maintain peace and stability to nurture the people. Furthermore, their love for the people should not lead to lax enforcement of laws and regulations. By adhering to these principles, one can ensure personal security and gain the respect of the people (Wang, 2018b, p. 146).

Confucius believed that those in positions of authority should not govern the people in a manner that contradicts the principles of heaven and disrespects the people; they should not use offensive language to persuade the people; they should not employ deceitful words to speculate about the people; they should care for the people without violating the agricultural seasons; and they should demonstrate love and care for the people without weakening the efficacy of laws and punishments. By embodying these principles, rulers can win the people's hearts and enable them to find joy in their lives.

Confucius' political philosophy is constructed based on the reconstruction of social values and national political systems. His original intention was to contemplate the issues of people's livelihood without altering the existing political framework. He sought to stabilize and consolidate the rulers' position through state governance. At present, Confucius' governance principles appear overly idealistic, as they need to fully recognize and address inherent human attributes such as greed, selfishness, and hedonism. Additionally, there needs to be more emphasis on the power and desire for fame and fortune among the rulers. These major flaws in Confucius' political ideology resulted in constant setbacks and obstacles in his career path. In the context of the new century, it is necessary to carefully analyze and contemplate the cultural heritage left by past sages, draw lessons from history, and apply ancient wisdom to the present to explore the modern value of their governance and political philosophy.

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