

Confucius's Viewpoints on Leaders

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Abstract: *This paper aims at analyzing Confucius's viewpoints on leaders and requirements for leaders. First, Confucius required leaders to respect and treat his followers with compassion. Second, Confucius attached great importance to the role of morality in the state management. Confucius stressed that in order to obtain political objectives, leaders must exercise self-discipline. Leaders would lead by positive example. When leaders have good moral qualities, they will win people's trust. Leaders could motivate their subjects to follow the law by teaching them virtue*

Keywords: leaders, ethics, moral qualities, capacity, self-improve, self-discipline

1. Introduction

Confucius (551-479) was a founder of the Confucian school, and a great Chinese philosopher, politician and teacher of the Spring and Autumn period. He was born in the state of Lu. He was orphaned and lived a hard life from the early age. At the age of 51, Confucius served as a magistrate, then as a minister of justice in the state of Lu. However, after being presented musical instruments by The King of Qi, the King of Lu paid much attention to music and dance and neglected the court work. Confucius had repeatedly dissuaded him but failed, so he resigned from the office. He left the state of Lu and travelled around the vassal countries

This paper aims at analysing Confucius's views on leaders and requirements leaders must meet in order to lead their country well.

2. Confucius's view on requirements for good leaders

The Chinese history of the Spring and Autumn period was a transition from the slave-owning system to the feudal system. The corruption of rulers and the harsh rule of policy made the people resent. Their protest made the society in turmoil. The big question for thinkers at that time was how to bring people from rebellion to obeying rules. Many schools appeared to deal with social problems. If Legalism advocated for rule of law and it was supposed that "there must be cruelty in politics" (Pham Hong Thai & Luu Kiem Thanh, 2001, p.65), the core content of Confucianism was restoring the social order by peaceful measures on the basis of moral education and under the guidance of a ruling official or a wise King. This thought advocates the connection of moral values and political capacity. That thought represents a rational social order. "Taking ethics as a rule, taking self-improvement as a root, taking ethics as a basis for political practice, taking the mind itself as the root of political insight" (Lin Yutang, 2012, p.12). Confucianism appreciated the spirit of tolerance, placing people's interests to be important, building an ideal social model with an ideal model to serve the people and society.

Confucius thinks that human nature is honest and identical at first, but due to the impact of external factors that make a person different from another. Therefore, in education, it's necessary to change people's behaviors by teaching them

about the righteousness. Discussing about politics with the King of Qi, he states that "Politics is righteous. If you take the righteous thing to lead people, then nobody dares not to be upright (Zhu Xi, 1998, p.478). On the contrary, "If you are not upright, people will not follow your order". (Zhu Xi, 1998, p.502). Good or bad politics is due to the decision of leaders. According to him, it is necessary to take what the people trust as the reference point of the judgment of the virtues and talents of leaders. When leaders win people's trust, they will have everything. In education as well as politics, if we are not righteous, we cannot make others upright. Resulting from that fact, he proposed managing the country by education, bringing people back to their original nature, using the policy of taking ethics to regulate human behaviors instead of using law to enforce them. According to Confucius, leaders must first exercise self-discipline and set good examples for people to follow- "it is the head of the state who do not maltreat the homeless, not to abandon the poor". The leader must be a man of merit who always love, appreciates and takes care of his people and brings happiness to his people. Since then, Confucius set the requirements that the leader must meet including both moral qualities and political capacities. Therefore, he made very high and strict requirements for their efforts. "Despite having good talents like Duke of Zhou, but being arrogant and stingy, such people are not respected" (Zhu Xi, 1998, p.385). Confucius said that all things in the world are constantly changing in an irresistible order, but the ultimate foundation of that order is virtue. He is always interested in moral issues. According to Confucius, being far away from original nature is the cause of the reversal of social order. Confucius thought that leaders must always be free from the constraints and temptations of everyday life, as well as clearly realize their social responsibilities.

Confucius attached great importance to the role of morality in the state management. For leaders, their virtue is the most important factor. He supposed that leaders must have good moral qualities so that they will have enough power to make people better. Leaders must take their virtue as a motivation for people to live well. According to Confucius, leaders must first exercise self-discipline and study hard. The leader's virtue will become a bright example for people to follow and become a driving force to carry out political goals. Therefore, Confucius required leaders to respect, educate and preserve the lives of people. Confucius criticized the kings who only tried to achieve political

Volume 8 Issue 8, August 2019

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purposes by the way of violence, that's why he angrily left when Duke Ling of Wey asked him about battles. He answered: "The sacrifice I often hear, the military I have not yet learned" (Zhu Xi, 1998, p.563). Stemming from the view that everything has the same origin, people and things in the universe are the results of the inheritance, the air of heaven and earth and the combination of yin and yang. Human nature is endowed from the God and the responsibility of leaders is to obey the God's will. If leaders violate the God's will, they will lose their country. Therefore, in building and developing society, he required leaders to respect people and treat them with compassion. Shih Ching wrote: "What people like, leaders like. What people hate, leaders hate. Leaders must become people's parents" (Zhu Xi, 1998, p.53).

People are the major components to form a society. People are the subjects of every ruling policy. Without people, leaders cannot be existed. People not only serve but also protect leaders. Thus leaders must love people like their children and protect them by any way. A nation is a combination of many families. If in a family, parent considers their children's interests as their happiness, that family will be happy.

To obtain political objectives, leaders must improve themselves. Confucius required both Kings and people to improve themselves. Self-improvement is strict with ourselves, overcoming shortcomings, constantly learning, thereby improving ourselves to become honorable men. Honorable men employ their virtue to serve people. Referring to the model of a honorable man, Confucius affirmed:

The Junzi (gentleman) should have 9 qualities:

- 1) When seeing something, he expects to see clearly
- 2) When hearing something, he hopes to hear clearly
- 3) He hopes to have a peaceful face
- 4) He expects to have a humble appearance
- 5) When saying something, he hopes to be honest.
- 6) When doing something, he hopes to win respect.
- 7) When having a doubt, he considers asking questions.
- 8) When being angry, he thinks of the difficulties.
- 9) When having benefits, he thinks of meaningful things (Zhu Xi, 1998, p.105-106)

Thus, a junzi is a comprehensive and noble man who understands the ethic values, has the virtue and employs it in the right direction and being happy with the religion" (Yinzheng, 2009, p.563). It also means that the model of the leader in Confucian conception is a symbol of the unity of moral qualities and political capacity. With a desire to build a prosperous society thriving by political motivation established on moral principles, that's why Confucius always emphasized the leading role of morality in establishing political principles.

According to Confucius, the leader is an intermediary between the saints and ordinary people, connecting the past to the present. The leader understands ritual propriety because he comprehends the Doctrine of Mean. He understands the fate and tries to reach the state of perfection and make others

more perfect to govern the family, govern the country and make the world peaceful. From Kings to ordinary people, everyone must consider self-improvement as the foundation. If you cannot improve yourself, you cannot help other people, you cannot fulfill your duty to people. Confucius said that:

"The old kings and saints wanted their virtue to shine, first of all, they had to care about governing their country. To govern the country, first they had to govern their family. To govern their family, they have to improve themselves by understanding ritual propriety and being honest (Yinzheng, 2004, p.80).

If the Kings want their virtue to shine brightly, they must build a peaceful society. In order to build a peaceful society, they must improve themselves, behave morally and consider morality as the foundation of the society. The King must be a bright example for people to follow. Therefore, when the King Improves himself, people will follow him and the whole society will be peaceful. The king should demand good things from him before he demands good things from people. If he does not do anything wrong, he can blame others. If he is immoral, he cannot teach other people to be moral. Thus the Kings must consider the issue of exercising self-discipline seriously. "Express yourself with sincerity, face to the South properly" (Ly Minh Tuan, 2010, p.378).

Emperor Yao, Emperor Shun regarded the self-improvement as the model, made the world peaceful by humanitarian leadership. Therefore, the issue of improving and ruling the country aim at building a prosperous society. In this view, the leaders improve moral qualities in order to carry out political purposes. Between ethics and politics, there are differences in form, but their purposes are related.

In fact, Confucius and his students also joined in the administration and they played many key roles in the administration at that time. From his experience in governing the country, he asked leaders to achieve 3 goals: "The food is adequate, the military is strong and getting people's trust" (Zhu Xi, 1998, p.478-479). Yet when Duanmu Ci asked if Confucius had to give up two things in the above three things, he answered that he would give up food and military and retain people's trust. According to Confucius, leaders of the country "Do not worry about little assets, but worry that they are divided unevenly, not worrying about the poor but worry that people cannot be peaceful" (Zhu Xi, 1998, p.593) and "when people do not trust leaders, the nation cannot be stable" (Zhu Xi, 1998, p.478-479). If people lack food, they will only be hungry and they do not lose their country, but if the authorities do not win the people's beliefs, sooner or later the government will collapse, the society will be in turmoil and human life is also threatened.

From the point of view of Confucius, leaders must attain the following values of ethics: "kindness, decorum, uprightness, wisdom and faithfulness", then extend to other areas. In other words, leaders must have both moral qualities and capacity. The moral qualities are like the light that shines the abilities, and thanks to the abilities, the qualities can be expressed. Moral qualities are the root of leaders, which are

the basis for leaders to regulate their behaviors, avoiding the wrong doing. In assessing behaviors of leaders, Confucius not only respected the form or prejudice but also their virtue. For him, he would like to hear the right words rather than the expression form. Language is an expression of the thinking, when the expression is not appropriate, the thinking of the spokesperson may be unhealthy or his speech is too naïve to convince the listener. Confucius wrote: "the person who has virtue says neatly, however, the person who speaks neatly is not sure to have virtue" (Zhu Xi, 1998, p.526). Naive and noble speeches are two opposing sides that co-exist in the subject. Leaders will have good knowledge and moral qualities through training process. Therefore, it can be asserted that the model of a leader is an entity of two aspects: moral qualities and political capacity in which moral qualities are the roots.

In Confucius's view, leaders must attain virtue and take their virtue as an example to teach other people. He also required leaders to have the ability to discover and use talented people in the ruling apparatus. Leaders must define the strength and weakness of each individual to supplement into the apparatus. No matter how talented an individual is, it is impossible to solve all the problems of the society. The power of the leader is to consolidate the power of his servants (DinhThị Kim Lan, 2019, p. 90). Therefore, knowing how to use the talents is a very important issue in protecting and building the country. In reality, there can be no one who is good at all areas, usually each person is only good at a certain field. The leader must know which people are proficient in what areas in order to assign them tasks that suit their abilities and areas. In doing so, the leader will succeed in managing the country, and will be trusted and respected by the people. "As the chief of the nation uses the righteous ones, abandons those who are bent, people will comply with his orders. When he uses those who bend, abandon the saints, the people will not submit themselves to him" (Doan Trung Con, 1996, pp.24-25). The issue of selecting the talents first came from the time of Emperors Yao and Shun. "Anyone who knows to run the business according to the season, let me use him" (Confucius, 2002e, p.237). During this period, recruitment was carried out through introduction. The person introduced must first be ethical, knowledgeable and know how to take care of the people regardless of their background. In the period of "Three big countries", the introduction and recruitment of talented people into the ruling apparatus are based on the blood system to show the distinction of social class. The King of Zhou dynasty highly valued flattering people and did not use upright ones. The "turmoil" of the late West Zhou society originated from many causes, including the loss of people's faith in the ruling class. The desire to stabilize society and strengthen the people's faith in the state urged Confucius to find a solution to overcome the challenges. He demanded not let people who lack moral qualities to participate in the ruling apparatus.

Considering the human nature is identical, Confucius did not value the background of those in the ruling apparatus but care about their virtue. In the spirit of respecting people and determining to build a political social institution based on ethics, he states that in order to have a stable society, there must be leaders with talent and virtue. According to

Confucius, a really strong nation is a nation that respects people and knows how to use talents to supplement to the ruling apparatus. He said that recruiting talents for the country must "select the righteous people", which means having to rely on their morality. He stressed that when recruiting people with enough talent and virtue into the management system, people will always do right things. Therefore, the rulers must cultivate themselves to take bright examples for people to follow. This thought has shown certain progress that the head of the state cannot be incompetent and inferior; on the contrary, they must have virtue to "love people", take care of them and have the talent to lead the country and bring peaceful life to the people.

3. Conclusion

Confucius's concept of the model of leadership is still limited due to historical regulations, however, it has important contributions in human education and training. Confucius described the model of a leader with certain qualities, through which it helped to find and discover the talents to supplement the leadership. Confucius borrowed the words of a mandarin in the state of Lu: "If you can bring your ability to help people, participate in the ranks of mandarins, and otherwise give it up" (Zhu Xi, 1998, pp.592-593). According to Confucius, the leader must first have morality and put people's benefits ahead of his personal interests. Therefore, he supported all political and social activities to focus on people, focusing on caring and educating people, considering people as the centre for all activities. This view of him progressed beyond the times when he demanded to educate moral values for people before they engage in political work.

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