

On the Monarch and Reflections on Machiavellism from the Oriental Perspective

Xiaoou Jin *

School of Journalism and communication, Lanzhou University, Gansu, 401120, China

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ABSTRACT

Machiavelli, a famous Italian politician, stated that as long as the final aim is proper, a king can use whatever means despicable in order to achieve the supreme position. His thought is summed up as Machiavellianism later. His point of view fits into the dominion strategy of Feudal Chinese Emperor, which can be concluded as confucianism and legalism. Through the analysis of Machiavellianism from the oriental perspective, we find that the art of imperial rule whether western or eastern happen to share the same view. Through out the history of ancient China, analogous to Machiavellianism, Legalism had been proved useful in rule since early. Moreover, different from the west, Chinese dominator used confucianism ethics on the surface for morale, and applied legalism in practice.

"Machiavelli's exposition in *The Prince* freed political theoretical views from morality, and took power as the basis of law, thereby turning the basis of politics from morality to power."

-Karl Marx

1. Political Reform--Machiavellianism

In the history of political science in Europe, starting from Aristotle, politics has been considered as a branch of ethics, which is the practice of ethics.

In reality, politics has always been treacherous and callous, especially in Italy. But in theory, scholars always describe politics as something solemn and sacred, requiring politicians to pursue purity in perspective of morality. As if politicians can govern the country well as long as they cultivate good morals without considering political reality. This kind of argument is a bit similar to what Confucian-

ism calls "sageliness within and kingliness without".

Machiavelli changed this tradition. He separated ethics and politics upholding a cruel spirit of realism, and developed political science into an independent discipline. Instead of what the ideal king should do, he only discussed what the monarch in the real world should do.

In the political theory of the Middle Ages, dominion is seen as "blessing from God", that is, "Divine Right of Kings", which means that the king's power of ruling the secular country comes from God's permission. This custom has a profound relationship with the doctrine of Christianity. It is clearly stated in the Bible that "all secular rule comes from God." This is why in the medieval Christian world, the king must be crowned by the pope. Because the king must be authorized by God before achieving secular dominion. Moreover, authorization can only be implemented by the pope---God's agent in the sec-

*Corresponding Author:

Xiaoou Jin,

School of Journalism and communication, Lanzhou University, Gansu, 401120, China;

Email: jn2702037@163.com

ular world.

By the time of Machiavelli, with the development of Renaissance and the prosperity of commerce in the Italian states, it was difficult for the statement like "Divine Right of Kings" to convince the public, especially the wealthy and prominent clans who developed by means of industry and commerce during the Renaissance, such as Medici which Machiavelli depended on. These clans were particularly dissatisfied with this serious of political theories. The reason is simple---the church has completely monopolized the authorization of secular rule, so that the burgeoning families cannot obtain the rule that matched up with their strength. Therefore, as a theorist, Machiavelli completely overthrew the statement of "Divine Right of Kings" in his works, and proposed that the dominion should be obtained only through power. In Machiavelli's own words, the study of right to rule should not chase the "illusion", that is, the authorization of God, but "the real essence", which refers to power, in particular, refers to the military power mastered by an individual ^[1].

In this serious of new theory, elements including morality, tradition, and religious piety etc. which directly affect whether a person can achieve the right to rule, in Machiavelli's view, only have practical significance. That is to say, one should observe moral rule, traditions and religions, when these are useful for a king to gain real power. Nonetheless, once such observance weakens king's power and threatens his rule, then these constraints should be discarded. This is why there are mountains of descriptions of conspiracies and tricks in *The Prince*. The starting point is that Machiavelli believes that power is the only source of dominion, while the means used by the king is an application of this power ^[2].

The starting point of *The Prince* is that people are evil at birth, so what he advocates is not kingcraft but arbitrariness, which is a bit like legalism of ancient China. Machiavelli believes that it is better to be feared than to be respected and loved. But sometimes it is necessary to convince the people that the monarch is a person combines of all kinds of virtues in one. That is to say, the ruler should behave humanely and clemently as well as pretend to love the people as his children. For this reason, on the one hand, people should be punished by others rather than monarch himself. Moreover, in the end, the atrocity can be blamed on others and the king would find scapegoats to avoid being condemned as tyrant. On the other hand, benefits should be personally granted. In summary, give people favor bit by bit, so that he will look forward to more; give people a blow fatally, so that there is no possibility to revenge. The monarch should usually keep silent, pretend to be indifferent to anything, and avoid being pried into

the heart. But the monarch, in turn, should know his own subordinates well, be able to manipulate them at any time, and use the power of killing if needed. Machiavelli believed that the monarch should absolutely control a well-equipped army.

In addition, the prince must never trust anyone, never confide his sincerity to others in order to maintain the supreme position, and never tie his destiny to others. All people should be suspected. Henchmen should be organized to spy on them secretly. Besides, the prince should bother to organize groups to exclude dissidents, and set up different jobs to restrain each other. In short, in order to protect the position of supremacy, any means are acceptable.

Machiavelli discussed is political strategy on the basis that human beings are stupid, always have endless desires and expanding ambitions; they are always pursuing advantages and avoiding disadvantage. People's occasionally doing good deeds are seen as an approach to gain fame and profit. People have the natural instinct to submit to power. What the monarch needs is cruelty, not love. Man should be cruel like a lion and treacherous like a fox. The monarch may as well take evil habits as usual, and don't worry about being blamed for cruel behavior. Compassion is dangerous, and human love can even destroy the country. As long as the final aim is proper, you can use whatever means despicable in order to achieve a noble purpose ^[3].

He abandoned the medieval scholastic philosophy and dogmatic method of reasoning started from human nature rather than Bible and God, and studied social and political issues based on historical facts and personal experience. He regarded politics as a practical discipline, distinguished politics from ethics, and regarded the nation as a purely power organization.

His theory of the state is based on the theory of evil nature. He believes that people are selfish, and power-and-reputation-oriented. Therefore, there are often fierce fights between people. In order to prevent the endless combats between human beings, the country emerges as the times require, enacting laws, restraining evil, and establishing order. The country is the product of human evil.

So as mentioned above, Machiavelli's *The Prince* is a book that teaches people, to be precise, rulers, elites, monarchs, and civilians who have the ambition to become leaders of the country, how to better govern the country. On this basis, any method can be used as long as it is furthersome to the country and the happiness of people. This is the core of Machiavelli's ideology, that is, using unscrupulous means to achieve goals.

2. Machiavelli's Personal Portrait -- Birth of The Prince

Only by living in a chaotic society and experiencing the cruel official career can he write such classic *The Prince*. The era he lived was the end of the Renaissance that originated in Italy, but Italy was still in a state of disunity. Therefore, from his own perspective, Machiavelli strongly advocated ending the state of division and establishing a strong centralized state, so that the great majority of Italian people, including Machiavelli himself, can live a happy life.

To achieve extraordinary accomplishment, what you need are remarkable people, using unusual means. In fact, it is commonwealth that Machiavelli really yearns for. But for the sake of unity of Italy, under the circumstances at the time, great cause had to be done by a strongman. Machiavelli was willing to give counsel to such a person, which coincided with the hundred schools of thought in the Warring States period.

Machiavelli had high hopes for Cesare Borgia, and later for Lorenzo de' Medici--heir to the Medici family, for whom *The Prince* was created, hoping to get his family's favor. But Lorenzo also died soon. As Russell pointed out in *A History of Western Philosophy*: "It is true that there are many points in his thought that really need to be criticized as that of most ancient politicians, some parts are superficial."^[4]

But these points are nothing but the performance of his time. In the final analysis, it was the time that created Machiavelli's ideas.

3. Oriental Perspective--Confucianism and Legalism in Feudal China

In the distant eastern countries, as early as The Spring and Autumn and the warring states period, the morality opposed by *The Prince* in the political field has been denied in practice.

The last politician who governed the country with moralism was the famous Duke Xiang of Song--- one of the Five Hegemons of the Spring and Autumn period.

During the battle of Hong River, the army of Song vassal state had already arranged array, while the army of vassal state of Chu just began to cross the Hong River from the other side. The Prince Mui suggested attacking the enemies when half of the army of vassal state of Chu crossed the river so they could defeat the enemy army in a run-off. However, Duke Xiang of Song said, "We are the army of justice. How can we do this?" He insisted on waiting for the army of vassal state of Chu. After the army of vassal state of Chu crossed the river, another minister,

Gongsun Gu, persuaded Duke Xiang of Song to attack the enemy while the hostile force was not ready. Duke Xiang of Song still stuck to benevolence and refused to start first. It was until the army of vassal state of Chu was arrayed that Duke Xiang of Song waged the war against the enemy. As a result, naturally, the army of vassal state of Song was no match for the army of vassal state of Chu, which was beaten to pieces. Duke Xiang of Song himself was hit in the thigh, fleeing back to vassal state of Song destructively^[5].

Although Duke Xiang of Song has been ridiculed by people for thousands of years, what Duke Xiang of Song embodied are nothing else than the ancient etiquette, virtue and morality. Despite the small scale of the battle of Hong River, it is one of the signs for propriety disintegration in the Spring and Autumn and the warring states period. Since then, there's no vassal state adhering to the ancient etiquette any more. The mode of operation coming down from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties --beating a drum after arranging array, has been completely replaced by a more agile combat method that pays attention to strategy since the war.

Among the thinkers of the "Axis Age", Confucius and Mencius called for Rites of the Zhou as well as righteousness and virtue, but no country dared to try to govern the nation with justice and morality.

However, a group of legalists, including Shen Dao, Shen Buhai, Shang Yang, and Han Fei Tzu, put forward a realistic strategy of ruling the country similar to that of *The Prince*. Han Fei Tzu summarized his theory of governance to "shi"--power, "fa"--regulation and "shu"--method. He added that a king's calamity lies in being credulous. Once the king trusts others, he will be controlled. He advocated strongly that being too kindhearted is forbidden for a prince. If not, regulations will be difficult to establish and it's hard to generalize and apply laws. Moreover, laws should be promulgated to the people. While strategy should be hindered in king's mind, using to control the officials in secret^[6]. In the end, the State of Qin, which implemented the legalism, unified the six vassal states.

In the following history--July 626 AD, Li Shih-Min launched a mutiny at Xuanwumen, shooting his brother and prince Li Jiancheng to death. His younger brother Li Yuanji also died in this mutiny. In order to remove the source of the trouble, he killed all the children of Li Jiancheng and Li Yuanji. At the end, he obtained the throne of the empire and through this foul method. But after that, he worked hard to rule and created Golden Years of Zhen-Guan for the Tang Dynasty, becoming famous Emperor Taizong of Tang in the history. The example is enough to prove that no matter how cruel the methods a king uses in

the eyes of others, as long as he is able to defeat the enemy and obtain the throne, any strategy are acceptable and excusable. The ethical tragedy that he killed his close kin has faded to "war for winning tomorrow". Similarly, there is Emperor Yongle--Zhu Di who launched the campaign of Jingnan and seized the throne of his nephew.

However, it is impossible to govern the country solely by legalism. The Qin Dynasty ended in the second emperor's hand for the sake of the bloody, violent rule.

People always take it for granted that history advances in the dialectical cycle like "positive-negative-combination". In the Han Dynasty, on the one hand, the rulers adopted Confucianism to decorate their governing strategy. On the other hand, they continued to rule the country by legalism in practice--that is, confucianism within and legalism without.

The well-known scholar Qin Hui believes that "China has a political tradition of "confucianism without and Legalism within". Using confucianism ethics on the surface for morale, and applying legalism in practice. To be precise, the ruler carry out both etiquette and law at the same time. Outwardly the prince raves about justice and morality, while practicing legalism in fact, which fits neatly into what Machiavelli advocates: "The monarch does not necessarily have to possess all the qualities that are considered good, but it is indeed necessary for him to be considered that he has all the qualities mentioned above in people's eyes."

There is also an interesting case in the Han Dynasty: Wang Mang.

Before and even during the early days of Wang Mang's accession to the throne, he won the devout support of almost the entire elite class of Confucian scholars. All the words and deeds of Wang Mang corresponded to Confucian standards, which is the sole example in Chinese history. Wang Mang was regarded as the "new saint" after Confucius. From the era of Confucius to the end of Han Dynasty, only Wang Mang has verily completed the in-

dividual fulfillment road in the sense of Confucian from cultivating the self, regulating the family, governing the state to leading the world to peace. All his reform measures were extracted from the Confucian doctrine, and corresponded to the mainstream Confucian ideas at that time, which were policy of benevolence in the real sense. But things go contrary to his wishes. What the Confucian sages said were ill-timed in terms of specific policies. In the end, Wang Mang died and the country was destroyed.

4. Conclusions

The Prince is a book written by Machiavelli based on his political experience, focusing on the political situation in Italy in the sixteenth century. He identified some fundamental general principles about human life from the time he lived in, which are still applicable today. As long as humanity remains the same, the power tactics described in *The Prince* will not be invalidated, and this book will never fade into history.

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