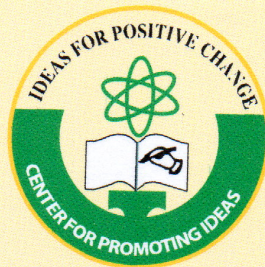


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Chinese Humanist Thought on State and Society- Is There Something to Learn from Ancient Chinese Philosophical Writings for Modern Governments?

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Abstract

Modern day understanding of political terms like sovereignty, nation-states, liberty, property, law, power, justice, rights, as well as systematic reflection on the influence of such concepts as liberalism, materialism, utilitarianism, Socialism, Marxism, nationalism on the complex dynamics of state-society interactions are being shaped much through debate and discussion in present-day global academia. It is important to note here that although most of these aforementioned political terms and concepts seem to have emerged only lately through the nineteenth and the twentieth century, the science of politics, not in the modern sense of the term in the context of academic discipline as it exists today, but as an intellectual enquiry of any political phenomenon, has had an evolutionary history over centuries across the globe. Philosophical speculation of the organic articulation¹ of humankind colors the history of human thought. Political theory, a relatively new academic discipline is concerned with the study of the phenomenon of the state in both philosophical and empirical terms. However, this analytical eclectic subject under the influence of empiricism and logical positivism today relies too heavily on methodology, clarification of concepts, and logic of political appraisal only, while distancing itself from its sub-domain of classical political philosophy, despite the fact that the latter deliberates on some of the most fundamental issues of political organization. The study here argues in favor of the relevance of classical political philosophy in obtaining a profound understanding of contemporary political theories, with special reference to ancient Chinese political philosophy. Ancient Chinese Classics arguably dating around the 3rd century BCE reflected on the nature and purpose of true government, harmonious social relations, rights and duties of citizens, political democracy, social justice. This paper proposes that few of the underlying Confucian principles of political philosophy such as those concerned with humanitarian government, rule of righteousness, propriety, and benevolence, moral cultivation of the individual as the origin of a harmonious state-society relation, might offer useful insights to modern-day governance. Such principles are quite universal in nature and therefore can be applied to all forms of governance, irrespective of whether it is a parliamentary democracy or an authoritarian dictatorship.

Introduction

“...We should integrate the rule of law with the rule of virtue, intensify education in public morality, professional ethics, family virtues, and individual integrity, and advocate traditional Chinese virtues and new trends of the times. We should press ahead with the program for improving civic morality, exalt the true, the good, and the beautiful and reject the false, the evil, and the ugly. We should encourage people to willingly meet their statutory duties and obligations to society and family.

¹ The term ‘organic articulation of mankind’ has been borrowed from Otto Gierke. See Gierke. 1900. p. 98.