

From the "Unworthy" to the "Benevolent": How King Zhao "Knew the Great Way"

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Abstract

For King Zhao of Chu, he was regarded as a "do-nothing" ruler in the first period of his reign, but with the end of the Wu Ren Ru Ying, he was regarded as a "benevolent ruler" who could lead the Chu state to prosperity. In the process of this change of concept, Confucius, who thought that "I am a man who destroys and acclaim, but if he has an accolade, he has a proof", once praised King Zhao of Chu and called him "a man who knows the Great Way". Therefore, this paper will discuss three aspects of King Zhao's ruling behavior, namely, governance, virtue and attitude towards providence, based on the records in the unearthed documents, in order to discuss why King Zhao was praised by Confucius as "knowing the Great Way".

Keywords

King Zhao of Chu; Confucius; Knowing the Great Way; Political Thought.

1. Introduction

King Zhao of Chu was an important ruler of the state of Chu during the Spring and Autumn Period. In his History of Chu, Mr. Zhang Zhengming once commented that his reign was "harmonious internally but cautious externally". However, the research on King Zhao of Chu is mostly focused on the events before and after the Wu Ren Ru Ying, and the development of events such as "King Zhao ran to Sui" and "King Zhao restored the state". However, there is still much room for exploration in the history of thought about this evaluation. This paper explores why King Zhao was praised by Confucius for his "knowing the Great Way" and what Confucian values and political ideas were behind his "knowing the Great Way".

2. King Zhao of Chu

King Zhao Xiong Zhen of Chu, the son of King Ping and a woman coming from Qin, reigned as king of Chu in 516 BC. In the twenty-seven years of his reign, the evaluation of King Zhao appeared to be more obviously polarized. In the early years, King Zhao was considered a young ruler with no experience in the battlefield and no ability to manage the state. As the rivalry between Wu and Chu became more and more intense, the incident of Wu Ren Ru Ying became an important turning point in the loss of power of Chu. However, after the escape and restoration of the state, King Zhao became more and more mature in his administration, and the military and political order of the state was gradually restored, and the state entered a longer period of hibernation. During this period of hibernation, King Zhao not only stabilized the political situation of Chu, but also created a situation of Chu's prosperity by selecting the wise and capable, and by encouraging the best governance. The Qing dynasty's Gao Shiqi in the *Chronicle of Zuo Zhuan* commented: "King Zhao was first established, could not change the discipline of his government. He did not know how to appoint ministers, such as Shen Baoxu, Shen Yinxu, Zi Xi, Zi Qi, but believed the words of Nang Wa. He insulted Tang and Cai, guided Wu to break the Chu, which insulted the tomb of the previous king. After he was displaced, he

began to increase his virtue and wisdom", and "he cleaned the temple, expelled Wu's division, repaid Tang and Cai, destroyed Dun and Hu, resisted Yi Hu, and plotted the north, following the ways of the king Gong and Zhuang". It can be said that King Zhao of Chu was a monarch who "knew shame and then had courage" in the history of Chu.

According to the document, in the twenty-seventh year of King Zhao, there were several important events that were worthy of praise. According to the Records of *The Records of the Grand Historian*, "In the spring of the twenty-seventh year, Wu invaded Chen, and King Zhao of Chu rescued it. In October, King Zhao was sick in the army when there was a red cloud like a bird, which was flying on both sides of the sun. King Zhao asked the historian of Zhou, who said: 'It is harmful to the king of Chu, but it can be moved to the prime minister.' When the prime minister heard this, he asked himself to pray to the gods with his body. King Zhao said: 'The prime minister is the thigh of the king, if the disease is transferred to him, I will not heal either.' He did not listen to the suggestion of the historian. The divination said that there is evil in the Yellow River, the courtiers asked to pray to the river. King Zhao said: 'Since my predecessor was granted fiefdoms, the scope of governance has not exceeded the Yangtze River. The river did not commit a crime.' He did not allow it." Confucius, who was in the state of Chen at that time, heard of this and exclaimed, "King Zhao of Chu has known the Great Way. It is appropriate that he does not lose his country!" Because of these events, King Zhao's reputation as a "benevolent ruler" spread to the world. In 1649, when Lin Wanhuang, a new governor of Jianli, arrived, the figure of King Zhao could still be seen in his poems.

3. "The Great Way" in Confucius' Mind

In the late Spring and Autumn period, in the eyes of Confucius, it was a time when "there was no morality in the world, and rituals and music were conquered from the lords." Confucius, who devoted his life to reviving the rites from Zhou and restoring harmonious social order, summed up the chaotic situation of the Spring and Autumn period with the word "no way". Obviously, in Confucius' mind, the word "the Way" had a clear connotation of propriety and could express a social level of rules, norms and etiquette. In *the Analects of Confucius*, there is also: "A man who is scrupulously truthful, cultured and steadfast to his death in the path of honesty, such a man should not survey in a country where the government is in a state of revolution nor live in a country where the government is in an actual state of anarchy. When there is justice and order in the government of the world, he should be known, but when there is no justice and order in the government of the world he should be obscure." It can be seen that, in addition to social stability and harmony, Confucius also advocates "the path of honesty" at the individual level. The "the path of honesty" is an ethical pursuit of Confucius, and it is recorded in *the Analects of Confucius* that Confucius believed that Zi Chan showed himself to be a good and wise man in four ways: "In his conduct of himself he was earnest, and in serving the interests of his prince he was serious. In providing for the wants of the people, he was generous, and in dealing with them he was just." And then, Confucius remarked to a disciple, in all his life and teaching there is a principle that has always been upheld. Master Zeng follows his teacher's words by explaining to his disciples, "The principle in the master's life and teaching is comprised in the two words: conscientiousness and charity." All of these reflect that, in Confucius' view, knowing "the Way" at the personal level means that one should follow certain moral norms, and one should know propriety and righteousness, be straightforward, benevolent, loyal and forgiving. Confucius remarked, "when a man has learned wisdom in the morning, he may be content to die in the evening before the sun sets." This pursuit of "the Way" should be a lifelong practice.

In addition to the social and personal "Way", Confucius' words also include the idea of the theology. Zi Gong once said, "You will often hear the master speak on the subjects of art and literature, but you will never hear him speak on the subjects of metaphysics or theology." Yang

Bojun explained that Confucius talked little about his subjects of metaphysics or theology. In fact, this attitude often coincides with Confucius' saying that "At fifty, I understood the truth in religion." Confucius said: "There are three things which a wise and good man holds in awe. He holds in awe the Laws of God, persons in authority, and the words of wisdom of holy men. A fool, on the other hand, does not know that there are Laws of God, he, therefore, has no reverence for them: he is disrespectful to persons in authority, and contemns the words of wisdom of holy men." In Confucius' view, the difference between a wise and good man and a fool is determined by an important criterion, namely, whether one can "understand the truth in religion" and then "hold in awe the Laws of God". Confucius emphasizes "understanding the truth in religion", which is based on the principle of "not being confused when one is forty", and which can lead to the condition that "At sixty I could understand whatever I heard without exertion. At seventy I could follow whatever my heart desired without transgressing the law." Thus, Confucius' attitude is quite prudent when such a supreme abstract is combined with personal destiny. On the one hand, he believed that after people understand the truth in religion, even if they become more and more obedient, their desires will be naturally restrained and will not go beyond the laws of nature and human society, that is, the state of "hold in awe the Laws of God". Therefore, even "the Way", which has a certain religious connotation, still has an inherent "natural" law of operation in Confucius' eyes, and when "the Way" is applied to the man, it still emphasizes a kind of self-restraint and non-transgression.

As for "the Great Way" practiced by kings, Confucius' inclination can be seen in the dialogue between Duke Ai and Confucius in *the Rites of Dadai*. The Duke of Ai asked Confucius whether it was feasible for the king to observe the government by learning to debate. But in Confucius' mind, "A man who is not in office in the government of a country, should never give advice as to its policy." He believed that people with different status should learn different contents. Then Duke Ai asked, "What should I learn then?" Confucius replied, "What can a ruler learn by practicing rituals and music, and by practicing loyalty and faithfulness?"

Thus, in Confucius' thinking, if a monarch wants to know "the Great Way" and to involve with the government in this way, he must "practice rituals and music and be faithful". Confucius believed that on the one hand, by observing the rites and music to regulate human behavior, and on the other hand, by disciplining oneself through internal virtue cultivation, one could achieve the effect of internal forgiveness and external conscientiousness, so that the king could know the rule of government, officials, affairs, and preparations, and finally achieve a situation of happiness in the morality, harmony and stability.

4. How did King Zhao "know the Great Way"?

It can be seen from the above arguments that Confucius described King Zhao of Chu as "knowing the Great Way", which can be considered a very high evaluation. There is no doubt that King Zhao showed a high level of governance in the latter part of his reign, and the state of Chu once emerged from the gloom and showed a situation of prosperity. However, Confucius' high opinion of King Zhao of Chu was not entirely due to his governing ability, but rather to his own virtue, which is discussed in the following two aspects.

4.1. The rituals does not cross the territory

Confucius praised King Zhao for "knowing the Great Way", as recorded in detail in *Zuo Zhuan*: "At the beginning, King Zhao was ill. The divination said that there is evil in the Yellow River, the courtiers asked to pray to the river. King Zhao said: 'Since my predecessor was granted fiefdoms, the scope of governance has not exceeded the Yangtze River. The river did not commit a crime.' He did not allow it." Confucius, who was in the state of Chen at that time, heard of this and exclaimed, "King Zhao of Chu has known the Great Way. It is appropriate that he does not lose his country!"

On the sacrifice of mountains, rivers and valleys, *Rites* has a clearer record: "mountains, forests, valleys, hills, which can give birth to clouds, wind and rain, see the monster, are said to be God. Those who have the world can sacrifice all the gods. The vassal in its place can sacrifice, the death of its place can not sacrifice." Thus, according to the scope of Chu's territory, King Zhao was not qualified to sacrifice to the Yellow River. However, in the history of Chu, where witchcraft and complicated rituals were prevalent, there was already a precedent of King Zhuang's return from the Central Plains with a sacrifice to the river God. In contrast to King Zhuang, King Zhao followed the rituals of the Zhou Dynasty despite his health problems and did not violate the rituals for his own personal desires. In fact, this behavior could be considered a special case in the middle and late Spring and Autumn period. Due to the rise of the vassals and the decline of the royal family, there were already a large number of ritual violations or breaches of rituals in society by the time of Confucius. Confucius, whose mission was to uphold the Zhou rites, deplored the situation, and he once lamented to his disciple Zi Gong, "I love the rites while you love the sheep". Out of his mission to save the social reality and his sense of responsibility to preserve the rites, Confucius not only actively studied rites and asked for advice on the details of rites, but also made rites a subject of education for his students and actively spread them. The Book of *Rites* records, "When the death of Xu you occurred, the Duke of Ai made Ru Bei learn the funeral of the educated gentleman from Confucius, and *the funeral rites of the educated gentleman* were then written." The ruler of the state of Lu, which was known as "the Zhou rites is all in Lu", sent Ru Bei to learn the funeral rites from Confucius because of the practical needs. Therefore, in the face of King Zhao's act of restoring rituals to himself, it is no wonder that Confucius sighed, "He knows the Great Way".

4.2. Do not use courtiers to eliminate disasters

In addition to this, there is an account in *Zuo Zhuan* of King Zhao's reluctance to transfer his illness to his courtiers, which states: "In this year, there were clouds like red birds, which caught the sun flying for many days. The viscount of Chu sent an envoy to ask the historian of Zhou, who said: 'It is harmful to the king of Chu, but it can be moved to the prime minister.' The king said: 'The prime minister is the thigh of the king, if the disease is transferred to him, what benefits will I gain? If I do not have a great fault, how could God punish me? If I have the fault, how can I move it?' So he did not use courtiers to eliminate disasters."

In this material, for his own well-being, King Zhao thinks that if he has no major faults, God will not let him die young, and if he is punished for his sins, where can he be transferred to?

This view of providence is very similar to that of Confucius. Confucius once claimed, when he was being pursued by Huan Tui, "his person from an enemy, was heard to say, "God has given me this moral and intellectual power in me; what can that man do to me?" When he was besieged by the Kuang people, Confucius believed that he was carrying the inheritance of culture granted by God: "Be not afraid. Since the death of King Wen who founded this civilization is not the cause of this civilization with us here now? If God is going to destroy all civilization in the world, it would not have been given to a mortal of this late generation to understand this civilization. But if God is not going to destroy all civilization in the world, what can the people of this place do to me? " But this kind of "destiny" cannot completely dissolve the impermanence of life's destiny. When Yan Yuan died, Confucius also lamented bitterly: "Oh! Oh! God has forsaken me! God has forsaken me!" What's more, An officer in a certain State asked Confucius, saying, "what is meant by the common saying 'It is better to pray to the God of the Hearth than to the God of the House?', Confucius said frankly that this was not true: "a man who has sinned against God, it is useless for him to pray anywhere at all." Therefore, when it comes to the attitude towards the relationship between God and man, Confucius advocates: "I do not repine against God, nor do I complain of men. My studies are among lowly things; but my thoughts penetrate the sublime. Ah! There is perhaps only God who understands me."

King Zhao said, "If I do not have a great fault, how could God punish me? If I have the fault, how can I move it?" From this record that he was ill and did not blame God, the words and actions of King Zhao were very much in line with Confucius' belief of "understanding the truth in religion" and then "holding in awe the Laws of God", obeying the Laws of God and being naturally restrained.

In the record of *Zuo Zhuan*, King Zhao not only frankly faced the trial of fate, but also stressed that "Do not use courtiers to eliminate disasters", King Zhao thinks the prime minister is the thigh of the king, the monarch suffers from a heart disease, but if the disease is transferred to the ministers, for the country, it is also a disaster. This kind of practice of King Zhao of Chu, who loved his ministers and cared for his people, has been seen repeatedly since the restoration of King Zhao, from listening to the advice of Zi Xi to reflect on himself, to Qian Yinwen breaking the flag in accordance with the rituals and King Zhao being elected as the magistrate of Jiangnan. The fourth of the Shangbo bamboo slips also contains material of "King Zhao and Gong Zhizhun": after the Wu's army entered Ying, when Gong Zhizhun was driving for King Zhao, King Zhao learned that he was only wearing a thin cloth in the middle of winter and gave him a robe to keep the cold out. When he saw Gong Zhizhun, King Zhao thought of more of his people who had suffered during the battle of Wu's invasion. Similar material can be found in "King Zhao Destroys the Palace" in the fourth of the Shangbo bamboo slips: King Zhao's new palace was built on the grave of a commoner's father, and for the sake of rituals and burial, the commoner wore mourning clothes and asked to see King Zhao, who, upon learning of this, ordered the palace to be demolished after the completion of the ceremony.

This shows that King Zhao's virtue is not only in politics, but also in the governance of the country. This praise by Confucius is not only approval of King Zhao's virtue, but also an acknowledgement of his ability to govern.

In summary, from the material before and after Confucius' praise of King Zhao's "knowing the Great Way", it can be seen that King Zhao was relatively consistent with the political ideas advocated by Confucianism, both in terms of the concept of God and man and in terms of the political governance of the state. In addition to being virtuous in political governance and caring for the people, King Zhao was also able to be virtuous in his personal conduct and not to blame God when his personal fate was changed, which shows that Confucius' evaluation of "knowing the Great Way" is very appropriate.

5. Conclusions

The evaluation of King Zhao of Chu can be divided into two distinct phases starting from the Wu's invasion. Before the Wu invasion, the state government was controlled by Zi Chang, and King Zhao was young and inactive in the state government, which led to the political chaos of Chu. When the Wu invaded Ying, King Zhao, who was escorted out of Ying by his people at the risk of their lives, lamented that "I am unworthy and have lost my predecessor's fief" in the face of his country and people in danger. With the help of the Qin army, King Zhao returned to Ying, and at this time, he gradually showed his talent in ruling and governing. In the state affairs, he is open-minded to admonition, appointing the wise and the capable; in virtue, he sticks to the rites of Zhou, loves his people and understands the people; in the view of the God and the destiny, he faces his own destiny calmly and frankly, not to harm people with selfish desires. In the eyes of Confucius, he could be considered as a kind of "benevolent ruler", and thus he praised King Zhao as "knowing the Great Way".

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