

The similarities and differences between the "way of the king" politics and the "philosopher king" system: A comparative study of *The Book of Documents: Hongfan* and *The Republic*

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Abstract: *The Republic* makes an ultimate imagination of the ideal city-state in the form of dialogue. The rulers of an ideal city-state need wise men and philosophers to take on the role. Socrates regarded philosophers as the ideal rulers. The "Hongfan" is a relatively systematic document in the *Book of Documents* that argues the politics of the state, expounding the institutional politics of "the way of the king". This article will discuss the similarities and differences between the "way of the king" politics and the "philosopher king" system based on *The Book of Documents: Hongfan* and *The Republic*.

Keywords: *The Republic*; philosopher king; "Hongfan"; the "way of the king" politics

1 Introduction

This article will take the "philosopher king" system in *The Republic* and the "king's way politics" in "Hongfan" as the research objects. By comparing and analyzing their philosophical foundations, norms for rulers, and practical feasibility, it will reveal the similarities and differences between the two ideal political models and explore their implications for political practices throughout history.

2 The exploration of the essence of the "philosopher king" system and the politics of "the way of the king"

Socrates said in *The Seventh Letter*: "Only correct philosophy can distinguish for us what is just for society and the individual." Unless true philosophers gain political power, or by some miracle politicians become true philosophers, humanity will not have a good life [1]. It is necessary to "observe whether their innate talents can withstand all kinds of the most important and difficult learning" (503E) [2]. From Socrates' perspective, philosophers possess extraordinary learning abilities, are adept at exploring the world of ideas, and have a profound understanding of goodness, justice, and so on. Through long-term philosophical speculation and study, philosophers master the ability to perceive the essence of things and grasp the eternal and unchanging truth. This "Philosopher King" system is based on Plato's ideas, which hold that the real world is an imitation and possession of the world of ideas. Philosophers can grasp the truth of the world of ideas through philosophical speculation and thus are qualified to rule city-states. This thought is strongly metaphysical. "Hongfan" is centered around the politics of the king's way throughout. It begins by stating, "天乃锡禹'洪范'九畴，彝伦

攸叙". It means that "Heaven bestowed the nine great laws upon Yu, and thus the common sense of governing the country was established". The "nine realms bestowed by heaven" embodies the viewpoint that the power of Kings is bestowed by god, and political legitimacy stems from the will of heaven. The "politics of the way of the king" emphasizes the five aspects of respect and use (appearance, speech, sight, hearing and thought), advocating that the monarch can achieve harmony between man and nature by enhancing his own moral cultivation. Moral wisdom is a kind of awareness and ability to handle the relationships between man and nature, man and society, and man and himself. The "Hongfan" is based on the theory of the unity of heaven and man and the five elements. As the son of heaven, the monarch should govern the country in accordance with the will of heaven. The five elements provide a guideline for national governance, connecting nature with society and guiding the monarch to formulate policies with a systematic and dialectical way of thinking. The political concept of the "way of the king" in "Hongfan" does not exist in isolation but is based on solid theoretical foundations, namely, the unity of heaven and man and the theory of the five elements. Guided by the idea of the unity of heaven and man, the monarch, as the son of heaven, is endowed with special missions and responsibilities. The monarch must govern the country in accordance with the will of heaven, which means that the monarch's behavior and policy-making must all conform to the will of heaven.

3 The requirements for the ruler

In the process of pursuing wisdom, philosophers constantly enhance their moral cultivation. In the sixth volume of *The Republic*, it is mentioned that philosophers need to be wise and inquisitive, adhere to the good path, be courageous and fearless, have a broad vision, be well-informed and knowledgeable, advance and retreat with moderation, be restrained and prudent, and be gentle and refined. Guided by the concept of goodness, they integrated moral principles into their ruling behaviors. The moral exemplary role of philosopher rulers can create a good moral atmosphere throughout the society. They set an example by their own conduct, advocating virtues such as justice, moderation and bravery, and guiding the public to establish correct values and behavioral norms. In a society ruled by philosophers, moral education will be highly valued and become the core content for cultivating citizens' qualities. Similarly, the "Hongfan" also emphasizes the ideology and morality of the rulers. The article puts forward the concept of "the ultimate of the emperor". "Huangji" is the highest category in "Hongfan", and "Wangdao Zhengqi" is the core concept. *The Biography of Kong Anguo's "Hongfan"* states: "Huang means great"; "Ji" means "middle". When doing anything, one should follow the great way. The so-called "great and medium" here means neither excessive nor inadequate, and it is the middle way between the two ends. Zhu Xi believed that here "Huang" referred to the king. The requirements of the "Hongfan" for an ideal ruler are the moderate virtue (that is, no bias or deviation), the ability to know people well (that is, all the common people have plans, actions and observance, you should remember them), and the reverence for the mandate of heaven (that is, only heaven silently brings peace to the people and coordinates their dwellings with each other). Regarding "Huangji", Chen Puqing believed that it inherited the concepts of the Shang Dynasty, emphasizing that subjects must obey the ruler, and also put forward ideas such as "valuing virtue" and "loving the people" [3].

4 Practical feasibility

Although true philosophers are by nature most suitable to be the rulers of city-states, they themselves are actually not willing to rule. Philosophers hold a rejecting attitude towards political life: "Then, can you name another way of life that so despises the rule of the city-state, except for this one dedicated to true philosophy [4]". The pursuit of truth and virtue in the hearts of philosophers makes them reluctant to participate in the politics of the world. The true goal of a philosopher is not to obtain worldly nominal benefits such as power, money, and status in the rule of the city-state. However, a philosopher who desires secular rule cannot rule the city-state completely and purely. From the perspective of the

monarchy's political system, the authority of the monarch must be properly maintained to ensure that there are positions between the monarch and his subjects and distinctions of status within the entire system, thereby guaranteeing the execution and effectiveness of the rule. Otherwise, there will be a change of position between the monarch and his subjects, unclear responsibilities, leading to political darkness and social chaos [5]. However, the problem that follows is the high concentration of power. In the ruling system of the divine right of Kings, the personal character of the monarch holds a dominant position and possesses absolute authority. Due to the continuous expansion of imperial power, a decision made by the monarch on a whim may bring about devastating consequences, causing the entire ruling institution to be in turmoil. Therefore, on the premise of ensuring the harmony between man and nature, it is necessary to prevent the autocracy and dictatorship of the monarch as much as possible, and to prevent politics from becoming the opinion of one person and the way of the king from being unclear.

5 Conclusion

The arrangement of the philosopher's rule system designed by Socrates in *The Republic* has both advantages and many problems that cannot be ignored. Theoretically speaking, philosophers, with their wisdom, rationality and moral advantages, would contribute to social management and provide a feasible approach to addressing the drawbacks of the Athenian oligarchy and democracy. Although the "King's Way Politics" in "Hongfan" and the "Philosopher King" system in *The Republic* are rooted in different social backgrounds, they are both beneficial reflections of humanity on the ideal social system and the national governance system. Although there are similarities and differences between the two, they both provide valuable ideological resources for modern political civilization.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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