

The Research of the Historical Context of Mencius' "Concubine's Principle"

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ABSTRACT. Mencius said that taking the obedience of the husband as the right path is the principle followed by the concubine. It was also considered by many people as a discrimination against female. In fact, Mencius's remarks did not focus on female. He just borrowed such a historical fact to satirize the behavior of the strategist to obey the monarch. It is what "concubines" should do, not the "real men". Behind this sentence of Mencius, it actually implies the difference between the strategist and the Confucian in the concept of monarch and minister. The strategist regards obedience to the monarch as the way of the courtier, but the Confucianists regards the courage to admonish as the way of courtier. This difference is inseparable from the historical environment of princes' separatism, political turmoil, and frequent diplomacy.

KEYWORDS: mencius, concubine; "real men"; monarchs and ministers

1. Introduction

Mencius is a representative of Confucianism and is known as "Asian Saint". The book of "Mencius" is highly respected by all dynasties, and it still has great ideological and theoretical value to this day. The essence of "Mencius" has been included in the Chinese textbooks of primary and secondary schools in China, which can prove this point.

However, Mencius has been more than two thousand years ago, and some of his views are inevitably misunderstood by modern people. For example, Mencius said that taking the obedience of the husband as the right path is the principle followed by the concubine[1]. This view has been misunderstood by modern people. Many parents believe that Mencius discriminates against female, this view should not appear in Chinese textbooks. Obviously, this is out of context and misinterpreted Mencius' original intention. Some scholars have defended Mencius, pointing out that Mencius did not discriminate against female. Mencius used the "concubine's principle" to satirize the Gongsun Yan, Zhang Yi and other strategists' behavior of catering the monarch. And it is not the actions of the "real man"[2-4].

But there are still some people who believe that if they absolutely obey the

monarch, does it violate the views of the monarch and minister advocated by Confucius? It can be seen that this issue is still controversial and needs further explanation. For this reason, this article is interested in these questions as follows: Does Mencius discriminate against female? What does Mencius mean by "real men"? Did Mencius violate the monarchy advocated by Confucianism? Discussing these issues can not only correct the prejudice against Mencius, but also better understand Mencius's thinking.

2.The real history context that taking the obedience of the husband as the right path is the principle followed by the concubine

2.1 The contextual meaning that "taking the obedience of the husband as the right path is the principle followed by the concubine"

In order to avoid getting out of context, first of all, we need to figure out the contextual meaning that taking the obedience of the husband as the right path is the principle followed by the concubine. The original text is now listed as follows:

Jing Chun said that don't Gongsun Yan and Zhang Yi be the "real men"? When they rage, the princes are afraid. When they settle down, the world goes out."

Mencius said that is it like to be the "real men"? Haven't you learned etiquette? When a man held a crowning ceremony, his father instructed him; when a woman got married, her mother instructed her and sent her to the door, admonishing her that when you arrive at your husband's house, you must be respectful, be careful, and do not violate your husband! Taking the obedience of the husband as the right path is the principle followed by the concubine. You should live in the broadest house in the world, stand in the most correct position in the world, and walk on the broadest road in the world. If you can achieve your ambition, you will realize it together with the common people. If you cannot achieve your ambition, you will practice your own ideas alone. Wealth can't be tempted, poverty can't be changed, and power can't be succumbed. And people who can do this are the "real men"[1].

Jing Chun was a strategist in the era of Mencius. The strategist is a school mainly engaged in political and diplomatic activities during the Warring States Period. They are good at diplomatic rhetoric and good at speculating on the psychological activities of lobbyists. Based on such psychological activities, they can determine the lobbying speech to draw together or differentiate, which had a huge impact on the military at that time. Gongsun Yan and Zhang Yi became famous before Jingchun, and they were the best among those in that era. Therefore, Jing Chun admires them very much and thinks that they are the "real men". Because they could change the political pattern at that time through lobbying, even the princes were very afraid of them.

However, Mencius didn't think so. Mencius believes that the strategists are blindly catering to the monarch, profit-seeking, for the purpose of achieving their own ends whatever the means. They are not the "real men". Therefore, Mencius first

asked Jingchun whether he learned etiquette. Then, Mencius gave two examples of etiquette. First, when ancient Chinese men held the crowning ceremony, his father had to discipline him. The crowning ceremony is an adult ceremony held by an ancient Chinese man to the age of twenty. After holding such a ritual, it means that the man has grown up and has officially become a member of the clan, with various rights such as governance, sacrifice, and contribution to the country. And when the adult ceremony is held, the father will be on the side to discipline. The second is the etiquette of ancient Chinese female when they get married. According to the ceremonial system, women should be disciplined when they marry. The content of the admonition includes that they need to be respectful and cautious for their husband, and don't violate their husband. Unconditional obedience to the husband is the etiquette to be followed by ancient Chinese concubines. This is what Mencius said that taking the obedience of the husband as the right path is the principle followed by the concubine. In the view of Mencius, Gongsun Yan, Zhang Yi and other strategists obeying the monarch is the "concubine's principle". How can it be regarded as the "real men"? What is the "real men"? Mencius then explained the "real men" in his mind. He believes that the "the real man" is not in his power and status, but in his spiritual character. The spiritual character of the "real man" is "wealth cannot be prostitute, poverty cannot be moved, and majesty cannot be bent."

This is the whole process of Jingchun's dialogue with Mencius. It can be seen from this that the focus of Mencius' discussion was not on the "concubine's principle", but on what was meant by the "real man".

2.2 The status of female in the Warring States period and Mencius's "concubine's principle"

In the Spring and Autumn Period, Lower-middle class women still have certain freedom in marriage. At that time, in order to promote population reproduction, the marriage system was relatively loose. The state has also actively formulated corresponding measures to encourage marriage. The book of "Zhou Li" said that on the lunar month, the country brings men and women together. At that time, the state would not ban elopement[5]. Men and women are free to choose their spouses, and they can still be recognized at that time.

However, to the Warring States period, making match by parents' order and match-maker's word, has become an inevitable rule in marriage. And all social strata attach great importance to this ritual system. For example, Mencius said that As soon as the boy is born, his parents hope that he can have a good wife for him. As soon as the girl came down, her parents wanted to find a good husband for her. This mood of parents is for everyone. However, If they don't wait for their parents' consent and the matchmaker' permission to peep through each other or go over the wall to date without permission, then their parents and the whole nation will look down upon them.[1]158 It shows that the status of female in marriage is very low. Not only that, when a woman is married, her parents must also teach the woman that "Obey him and respect him. Don't turn down the life of matrimonial cohabitation." "Encourage him and Respect him. Don't go against what you do in

your family" [6]. It means that she must obey her husband, and don't go against the husband's wishes. But wives and concubines were different at the time. "Intrigues of the Warring States" said that "my wife thinks that I am beautiful, because she prefers me. My concubine thinks that I am beautiful, because she is afraid of me"[7]. It shows that there is a relatively equal relationship between the wife and the husband, and the praise also comes from wife's heart, but the concubine is forced to say some insincere words under the pressure of the husband.

Based on the above discussion, we can draw two conclusions. Firstly, during the Warring States period, female's status was very low, which was not personal opinion, but a set of female's moral standards jointly recognized by the society at the time. Secondly, The status of wives and concubines in marriage is also fundamentally different. The relationship between the wife and the husband is a relatively equal relationship. The husband and wife respect each other and support each other. But the relationship between the concubine and the husband is completely unequal. The husband does not have to care about the concubine's feelings, but the concubine must obey her husband unconditionally. With these two conclusions, we re-examine the issue whether Mencius discriminates against women.

In Mencius's mind, female's status is indeed not high. Mencius advocated that "there are differences between a couple", "males are superior to females", and "marriage is made match by parents' order and match-maker's word", etc. But these are not Mencius' personal claims, but the code of ethics recognized by society at the time. Besides, Mencius did not use the "wife's principle" analogy to Gongsun Yan and Zhang Yi, but the "Concubine's principle" metaphor, which showed that Mencius keenly grasped the characteristics of the strategist who blindly catered to the monarch, obedience to the monarch, destiny to follow, and stabbed the point. Therefore, on the one hand, Mencius told the historical facts of the "concubine's principle" at the time. On the other hand, he mainly mocked that Gongsun Yan and Zhang Yi's political strategies was actually the behavior of "concubine", not the behavior of the "real man". And it has nothing to do with discrimination against female. People's misunderstanding of this sentence is actually caused by catching Mencius's only words and phrases without paying attention to their original intentions.

2.3 The concept of monarch and minister hidden behind this matter

The dialogue between Mencius and Jing Chun revolved around the topic of the "real man". As a strategist, Jing Chun naturally admired the senior strategists such as Gongsun Yan and Zhang Yi. In the heart of Jing Chun, the "real man" means that when they rage, the princes are afraid. When they settle down, the world goes out. And the "real man" in Mencius's heart is the man who cannot be prostituted, moved, and bent by wealth, poverty and majesty. According to the view of Mencius, the "real man" should have these qualities, and the strategists are obviously not the so-called "real man". Therefore, Mencius used the "concubine's principle" to satirize the strategist.

The contradiction between Mencius and Jing Chen on the surface is the argument of the "real man". In fact, it is the divergence of the political doctrines of Confucianism and strategists. To be more precise, it is a dispute between Confucianism and political strategists regarding the concept of monarchs and ministers. First of all, the Confucian concept of monarchs and ministers represented Confucius and Mencius. Regarding the relationship between monarchs and ministers, Confucius said that "A monarch is like a monarch, and a minister is like a minister" [8]. From Confucius' point of view, monarchs and ministers should perform their duties. How do you do this? Confucius believes that "The monarch treats his subjects with courtesy, and they serve the monarch with loyalty" [8]. "Ministers can not deceive the monarch, but they can offend the dignity of the monarch to remonstrate"[8]. A monarch is like a monarch, which means monarch must be courteous to ministers. A minister is like a minister, which means minister must be loyal to the monarch without having a double heart or deceiving the monarch. But he can offend the authority of the monarch and persuade him to do the right things. It can be seen that the relationship between monarchs and ministers advocated by Confucius is not a relationship of authoritarianism and submission, but a relative relationship. When the monarch makes a mistake, the minister should be brave enough to persuade him. This is precisely the performance of the courtier's loyalty to the monarch.

However, Confucius did not make it clear that if the minister advised the monarch, and the monarch refused to adopt it or the monarch did not treat the ministers with courtesy, how the ministers would do it. Mencius answered this question. Many people think that Mencius's view of monarchs and ministers is more radical, contrary to Confucius's viewpoint, and then lower Mencius' position in Confucianism. In fact, Mencius completely inherited Confucius' view, and further developed the Confucian concept of monarchs and ministers, so as to better serve the rulers. Mencius said that "The monarch treats his ministers like hands and feet, the ministers treat his monarch like abdomen and heart. The monarch treats his ministers like dogs, the ministers treat monarch like passers-by. The monarchs treat his ministers like mud and grass, and the ministers treat monarch like robbers and enemies"[8]. "The monarch is at fault, the minister will advise him. The minister repeatedly advised, but the monarch did not listen, and the minister left"[8]. In the view of Mencius, the relationship between monarchs and ministers is not superiority and inferiority, but relative. On the contrary, courtiers do not have to respect the monarch, and can even leave. In other words, when a monarch does not perform his duties or behave like a monarch, the ministers must dare to speak, not to fear the authority of the monarch, and to obey the monarch blindly.

The strategists and Confucians have completely different views on the relationship between monarchs and officials. The strategist is a school created by the frequent diplomacy of various princes during the war. The strategists, such as Su Qin and Zhang Yi, are mostly people from poor and humble backgrounds. Therefore, the claims of this school are full of anti-moral elements and strong utilitarianism. They publicly declared that "Although his behavior is incorruptibility, he is in a poor situation. Although he sacrifices his life for justice, he has no achievement. Even

when doing benevolence and righteousness, this is all used as a way to protect one's reputation, rather than being aggressive"[7]. It can be seen that the strategist is not constrained by traditional etiquette. Although the historical documents do not record their views on the relationship between monarchs and ministers, from the fact that almost no one in the strategists can consistently loyal to a princely state, it can be speculated that the relationship between monarch and minister in their hearts is actually a benefit relationship. Which monarch can bring benefits to them, for whom they serve. This completely violates the Confucian moral concept of "monarchs and ministers".

Knowing the views of Confucianists and strategists, we return to the debate between Mencius and Jingchun. The focus of the argument between Jing Chun and Mencius is what the "real man" is. In the mind of the strategist, a man, who can achieve hegemony, build his own merits, and be angry with princes, is the "real man", and should not be constrained by the traditional concept of a monarch. As long as he can achieve hegemony and make achievements, violating ethical standards is all right. In their minds, the ministers are to obey the monarch unconditionally, help the monarch to realize the desire to unify the country by means of conspiracy, and achieve his fame and fortune by himself. This is the "real man". However, Confucianism adheres to its moral bottom line. In the heart of Confucianism, the "real man" is not his own power and position, but possesses a spiritual quality, which is what Mencius said that rich cannot be prostitute, poor cannot be moved, powerful cannot be bent. In the Confucian heart, the duty of the ministers are to assist and admonish the monarch. When the monarch does something wrong, such as ignoring the lives of the people and trying to dominate the country by force, ministers must be brave to admonish instead of flattering flattery and letting the monarch paint charcoal. Therefore, in the view of Mencius, Gongsun Yan, Zhang Yi, and others, for the sake of external fame and fortune, "wealth can be prostitute, poor can move, and mighty can bend." This is obviously the "concubine" who was obedient to the husband at the time. How to be the "real man"?

3. Conclusion

(1) Mencius said that taking the obedience of the husband as the right path is the principle followed by the concubine. The purpose is not to disparage female, but to use this to satire strategist's behavior of blindly obeying the monarch in order to achieve his purpose, which is completely "concubine's principle". And the metaphor is accurate and appropriate.

(2) Mencius used the term "concubine's principle" as a satire to show that female's status was indeed low during the Warring States period, especially "concubine" who was taking the obedience of the husband as the right path. But this was the time people's consensus, not Mencius alone. It should not be used to criticize Mencius for discriminating against female. It should have a sense of historical context.

(3) The words that taking the obedience of the husband as the right path is the principle followed by the concubine also implies the difference between the strategist and the Confucian in respect of the view of monarchs and ministers.

The strategist advocate external power, fame and fortune. They think that it is the ministers who should do everything to obey the monarch. Confucianism respects the inherent morality and justice. They believe that courageous admonishment is what ministers should do.

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