

The 04th Century

The Micians, though not themselves exactly commoners (they were the entrepreneurial sub-elite who later entered public service, and finally became assimilated to the Confucians), were near to ordinary life. Much of the impetus for what we call populism comes from them. Their influence as a movement, in this and other areas, begins to be felt in the 04c, and on the populism issue they are presently joined by the Dzwǒ Jwàn group.

Populism is the theory that the people are part of the state; that the state in fact exists for the people. First we need a model of the state in which the people have a secure and recognized place. This is provided by the Micians, at the time when they themselves began to enter state service, and were concerned to emphasize their own subordination to authority. But they also emphasize the requirements in the other direction. If the state is going to run by something other than total compulsion, there must be a ground of participation for those below. The Micians here transport the old military virtues *jūng* 忠 “loyalty” and *syìn* 信 “fidelity” into the social sphere. The people’s loyalty must be earned by benefitting the people, and their trust must be gained by concern for their welfare, not sporadically, but consistently:

6:15 (MZ 21:1, excerpt, c0367). The reason wise kings and sages of antiquity could possess the world and bring order to the feudal lords, was that their love for the people was very loyal, and their benefits toward the people were very substantial. Loyalty 忠 led to trust 信, and was made manifest by benefit. Thus it was that the people all their lives did not flag, and til the end of the age they did not weary.

Rebellion. Minor incidents of popular unrest might be imagined by a nervous elite . . .

6:16 (DJ 9/23:2, excerpt, c0358). The people were repairing the walls [of the Ch’vñ capital], and a plank fell down and killed someone. The workmen took cause together 相命 and each killed his overseer . . .

. . . but there were no popular rebellions. The people lacked the essentials for rebellion – organization, unity over distance, ideology, theoretical spokesmen.¹³

But populist theory did make a place for action from below against an evil ruler. Here is a Dzwǒ Jwàn story which turns on the idea that the ruler is liable to the judgement of the people, and that a ruler who fails that test is not properly a ruler at all. Such a theory was dangerous to express in direct terms, and the DJ makes its suggestion as a story about the past.¹⁴

¹³For these factors, see the German Peasant War of 1258 (Pirenne **Europe** 2/283f). When these factors came to exist in China, there followed the Yellow Turban Rebellion, which in effect brought the Latter Han Dynasty to an end (Levy **Yellow**).

¹⁴The sometimes populist Shū are of course stories about an even more remote past.

6:17 (DJ 9/14:6, excerpt, c0350). Master Kwàng was attending on the Lord of Jìn. The Lord of Jìn said, The people of Wèi have expelled their ruler, is this not too much? He replied, Perhaps it was the Wèi ruler who was too much. A good ruler will reward the good and punish the profligate; he will nourish the people as his own children, covering them like Heaven and supporting them like Earth. Then the people will uphold their ruler, loving him as their father and mother, looking up to him as to the sun and moon, reverencing him as the gods and spirits, fearing him as the thunder and lightning – how should they expel him? The ruler is the chief of the Spirits, the hope of the people . . .

This follows from the basic idea that the people are constitutive for the state, and that their welfare is the test of good government in the state.

Now appears the idea that the people are capable of advising government:

6:18 (DJ 8/5:4, excerpt, c0356). Lyáng-shān collapsed.¹⁵ The Lord of Jìn sent word of it and summoned [Jìn noble] Bwó-dzūng. Bwó-dzūng found his path blocked by a heavy cart, and said, Make way. The carter said, Rather than wait for me, it would be faster to take a shortcut. Bwó-dzūng asked where he was from; he said, “I am from Jyàng [near Lyáng-shān].” He asked him about the affairs of Jyàng. The man said, “Lyáng-shān has collapsed, and they are summoning Bwó-dzūng to consult about what should be done.”¹⁶ He asked what should be done. He said, “When a mountain has a fault and collapses, what *can* be done? Mountains and rivers are the state’s major concern, so when a mountain collapses or a river runs dry, the ruler accordingly has leaner repast, plainer robes, and slighter music; leaves his residence for a temporary one, makes prayers and invocations, and has the Astrologer write out a text for a ceremony. That is all. Even were there a Bwó-dzūng, what else could be done?” Bwó-dzūng asked permission to present him at court, but he would not permit it. Subsequently he reported all this, and the court followed it.

. . . or (add the Micians), even being in sole charge of the government:

6:19 (MZ 8, excerpt, c0340). Tāng [the founder of Shāng] raised Yī Yǐn from the kitchen and gave him charge of the government, and his plans were successful. Wǎn-wáng [the moral founder of Jōu] raised Húng Yāu and Tàì-dyě from their snares and nets and gave them charge of the government, and the Western Regions submitted . . .

There can be no argument against success. Especially legendary success.

¹⁵This much is given in the CC entry for 0586. Bǐng 崩 “collapse” is the term for a mountain landslide. It is also the polite way to refer to the death of the King, and in the CC it is reserved for that situation; deaths of lesser persons have other verbs.

¹⁶The carter’s insolence, and his uncanny knowledge of Bwó-dzūng’s errand, are typical of these stories: humble persons are brash, and know more than elite persons. See also the Tsáu Gwèi story, #6:25, where the low character gives his counsel directly.