Unequal and Universal: The Opposition and Unity of the Confucianism and Mohism in the View of Distributive Justice

AI Lijuan, WANG Ziyan
Dalian University of Technology, Dalian, China

Among the hundred schools of scholars in the pre-Qin period, Confucianism and Mohism were prominent. From the perspective of the emotional motivation of distribution and the fact that individual love is unequal, the Confucianism believes that there is an inevitable natural and reasonable distribution gap. From the perspective of distribution results, Mohism, from the ideal inverse of overall utilitarianism, requires the group to “love without unequal”, and believes that the distribution of selfless “universal love” is reasonable. However, the Confucianism and Mohism views on distributive justice are basically the same in the following five aspects. First, equal distribution of basic means of production and livelihood; second, give priority to the elderly and other vulnerable groups in society; third, oppose extreme individualism; fourth, criticize the polarization of too large distribution gap; fifth, public power should be appropriately opened. Therefore, the view of distributive justice of Confucianism and Mohism is both opposite and unified.

Keywords: distributive justice, unequal love, utilitarianism

Introduction

For thousands of years, China, with a large population dominated by the Chinese nation, has often fallen into the dilemma of resource allocation. During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, Han Feizi had noticed that distributive justice was an ethical topic that never went out of style under the condition of large population and limited resources. How does it make sense to allocate resources? Yang Zhu, who advocated “not to pull out a piece of hair for the world”, was not praised by others. The Confucian view of “benevolence” and “propriety”, and the Mohism view of distributive justice, which was “to love each other and to benefit each other”, had a long life.

Among the hundred schools of scholars in the pre-Qin period, Confucianism and Mohism were known as outstanding learning for a time, which had a profound influence on later generations. Although the two schools of thought have sharp oppositions and have been attacking each other for a long time, Mozi learned from Confucianism earlier. Mohism developed from the criticism and inheritance of Confucianism, and there is a unity between the two schools of thought.
The Opposition of Confucian and Mohism Views on Distributive Justice From the Starting Point

From the perspective of the emotional motivation of distribution, from the perspective of the individual’s reality of “equal difference in love”, the Confucian school believes that the existence of gap in distribution is inevitably natural and reasonable.

The distribution gap advocated by Confucianism is basically consistent with the gap of emotional intimacy, which accords with the psychological characteristics of most people and is easily accepted by most people. It includes “treating others as yourself”, “loving others as yourself”, and self-centered. Human relations and emotional closeness are clearly defined. For example, relatives have the difference between close relatives, close relatives and distant relatives. As a traditional psychological accumulation, it is often regarded as natural and reasonable.

This Confucian view is similar to the “concentric circle” theory advocated by Peter Wentz, a famous environmental ethicist.

But it is also easy to create a variety of small circles and informal groups, resulting in private and public harm, and the modernization of today has an incompatible side.

From the perspective of distribution results, Mohism, from the ideal inverse of overall utilitarianism, requires the group to “love without equal difference”, and believes that the distribution of selfless “universal love” is reasonable.

Mohism thought that “love each other”, “mutually beneficial”, “no equal difference in love”, with a strong idealistic color. There are many similarities between Mohism and utilitarianism. The reason why some people choose “love without difference” is that only in this way can they maximize the utility of the whole society.

In fact, in real life, love without equality is not in line with the reality of most people’s life. It is usually applicable to two conditions: first, the distribution of basic living resources, if the reduction is not enough to maintain the basic survival and development; second, the resources are extremely rich and the consciousness is greatly enhanced, so that no one cares about the share. Of course, the first is not uncommon. The second scenario is essentially the future.

When there is a famine, is limited food and distribution justified? Is it to reach out to those closest to us, or to distribute aid equally, or to give priority to the hungrier? The quarrel between Confucianism and Mohism continues to this day, which is similar to the dispute of justice between the school that advocates the inviolability of property rights and the school that advocates the supremacy of human rights.

Confucianism and Mohism Are Basically Consistent in the Following Five Aspects

Equal Distribution of Basic Means of Production and Livelihood

Confucius said, “the allocation of resources should be in line with the etiquette”. However, the etiquette based on “The Rites of Zhou” advocated by Confucianism has both the pattern of difference and the evenness of distribution among social groups of the same status. Mencius advocated the development of small-scale peasant economy, to ensure that every household has arable land and mulberry trees and other basic means of production to ensure food and clothing. In times of famine and other disasters, the state should provide timely disaster relief to ensure the basic livelihood of the victims.

Mozi felt even more painful because of the collapse of rites and music at that time. The contention of princes for hegemony led to the “hunger, cold, and toil” of the people, while the Confucian red tape led to the
unnecessary high cost of living. He advocated “universal love”, “thrift”, and “virtue” to ensure that the people could have the most basic living and production resources.

**Giving Priority to the Elderly and Other Vulnerable Groups in Society**

Confucianism believes that “kinship is benevolence”, and advocates that “old and old, old and young, young and my young and people’s young”. In the Confucian ideal of a great society, the old are raised, the young are raised, and the widowed and the lonely are raised. In the allocation of resources for family life, priority should be given to the elderly, such as wealth, clothing, meat, etc. If family life resources are insufficient, the needs of the elderly should also be taken care of first. This is in the same vein as today’s distributive compensation justice based on historical contributions.

Although Mohism advocates that “love is equal to no difference” and has been attacked by Mencius and other scholars as “universal love without father”, Mohism believes that the family ethics of loving father and filial piety are consistent with the Confucian family theory despite the extreme offensive remarks of his opponents.

**Opposing Extreme Individualism**

As for the prevailing school of Yang Zhu, Confucianism and Mohism held a critical attitude, which advocated that the world should not be left to the Maori, and that “if the world does not belong to Yang, it should belong to Mohism”. Yang Zhu advocates extreme property rights and even sets property rights against public interests. In the long run, although it conforms to the selfish side of life, it ignores the nature of collectivism that benefits people, which will bring great harm to the whole society. Mohism advocates universal love, that is to say, like Xia Yu, “work hard, take pains, and benefit the whole world”. Confucianism advocates extending oneself to others, and holds that “the heart of benevolence is not human” and “the benevolent loves others”. Although it does not advocate that one should be selfish and devoted to others, but “the poor should take care of themselves, and the rich should help the whole world”; it is absolutely critical of extreme individualism and Mohism.

**Criticizing the Polarization of Too Large Distribution Gap**

As for the princes and their accomplices in the pre-Qin period, Confucius said that “tyranny is even worse than a tiger”. Even for his students, Confucius also advocated that “those who are not my disciples can be beaten with the drum”. Mencius attacked vassals face to face, saying, “lead beasts to eat men”, and “kind to beasts but not kind to men”; Mozi was also full of anger and disdain for the predatory vassal, satirizing the king of Chu, “this is called a disease of stealing”, even if threatened with life to prevent vassal injustice; Mozi also stipulated that his disciples should not help the vassals to exploit the men and so on after he became an official and should contribute part of his salary. Even though he was in a high position, he could not enjoy luxury and so on. These ideas are instructive in opposing polarization today.

**Advocating That Public Power Should Be Moderately Open**

Confucianism chaos laws by literature, chivalries violate the ban by force. Both Confucianism and Mohism intervened in the public power with their own power and advocated the moderate opening of the public power.

Confucius traveled all over the world, and Mencius was trying to persuade the governors to endorse and authorize the Confucian ideal of benevolent governance. Mencius and his people achieved non-offensive, to run
around to prevent the unjust war even at the cost of blood. Both schools cultivated a large number of “Shi”, or scholar-bureaucrat, and their candidates for the time and future generations.

Confucian and Mohism scholars were obsessed with the system in the era of Yao, Shun, and Yu. They advocated abdication, advocated virtue, opposed the decadent system of hereditary descent, and recognized the rationality of the revolution of Shang and Zhou.

Conclusion

Today’s world pattern and China’s pre-Qin period of the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States Period have much in common; a variety of theories about the distribution of global resources of justice are emerging one after another. Looking back on the history, the Confucian and Mohism views of distributive justice are both opposite and unified, which are quite similar to some of today’s distributive justice theories and their differences. The discussion of the two schools’ views on distributive justice is enlightening to the solution of the problem of public resource allocation in today’s world, such as global environmental justice.

References

Chen, Q. Y. (2015). Han Feizi’s new correction notes. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.
Li, X. Q. (1999a). Mencius notes. Beijing: Peking University Press.
Li, X. Q. (1999b). Notes to analects. Beijing: Peking University Press.
Li, Z. H. (2003). Historical theory of ancient Chinese thought. Tianjin: Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences Press.
Mozi. (1995). Mozi. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House.
Wentz, P. S. (2007). Environmental justice theory. Shanghai: Century Publishing Group.