

Caring and Sustainable Government: An Examination of Political Vision of Jeong Do-Jeon

Authors : Hyeon Sop Baek

Abstract : This paper will briefly investigate Jeong Do-jeon's political philosophy. Jeong Do-jeon was a Korean Confucian philosopher and politician during the turbulent 14th Century who revolted against the old order, founded Joseon Dynasty, and significantly impacted the development of Korean culture. Jeong's vision of an ideal state involved a polity that has its roots in the people -that is, an ideal government prioritizes caring for the welfare of the people, respecting and attending to the diverse opinions and concerns of the people, and relies on the genuine, voluntary support of the people. With the neo-Confucian worldview in mind -that every human being has the equal potential to become a moral person- Jeong sought to create a world suitable for everybody to contribute to the decision-making procedure and be able to realize their potential fully. This paper will first examine his works and present a quick overview of his vision of the ideal government. Then, it will examine the Confucian virtues of ren (仁) and yi (義) and how they formulate the basis of his philosophy, and then discuss the central features of his vision of government: popular mandate, equity of wealth, promoting freedom of expression and political participation, and elevating caring disposition as the paramount quality of the political leaders. Furthermore, this paper aims to analyze the element of care inherent within his political philosophy, namely his view on the dynamics of power, nurturing the people, and noncoercive justice. Finally, a discussion on why his philosophy is still relevant in the contemporary context will be provided. Jeong's view aimed at building a sustainable model of government, by proposing that the people should be the foundation of a state and that they need to be carefully nurtured so they can realize their inborn potential and continue to contribute to the sustenance of the world, is the focal point of Jeong's philosophy. Just as he sought to rebuild his world following the turmoils of the 14th Century, his philosophy still has a substantial implication on how we should strive to rebuild our society today.

Keywords : Korea, Confucianism, Jeong Do-jeon, Joseon, Korean philosophy, political philosophy

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