

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: GUAN ZHONG'S SOLUTION TO THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS OF HIS AGE

Chinese history experienced a tremendous change in the period between the Spring and Autumn era and the Warring States era. The political, economic, and social structures were in a constant state of flux. These changes culminated in a crisis which required careful and skilful handling. If left unattended, this crisis would have exerted a tremendous influence on Chinese political climate and changed the path of Chinese civilization. During this critical period, each school of thought came forward with its own views and plans for overcoming the crisis. Of the various schools, only the Legalist views were found to be relevant and effective in addressing the problems of the day. This Legalist movement thus laid the foundation for the unification of China.¹

No precedent of a move to unify China was found in the history of China prior to 221 B.C. The first such movement was undertaken by the First Emperor of Qin (Qin Shihuang 秦始皇) (259 B.C. - 210 B.C.) in 221 B.C. This phenomenon was the outcome of unification under Legalist

¹ Wang Zanyuan 王赞源, *Zhongguo Fajia Zhexue* 中国法家哲学, Taipei: Dongda Tushu Gufen Youxian Gongsi 东大图书股份有限公司, 1989, p. 29.

rule. It has been pointed out in Chapter Four that the source of pre-Qin Legalist thoughts could be traced back to Guan Zhong.²

During this period of great economic, political, and social upheavals, seeking for a solution to the problems of the age was therefore inevitable. Guan Zhong, a man imbued with wisdom, foresight, and sagacity appeared at the right moment to take control of the situation. He wisely took advantage of the favourable conditions in Qi, including the maximum use of natural resources to create wealth. He also utilized the human resources available in the form of various men of ability to run the administration of the state. His remarkable achievements were more evident in his later works. He was very insightful in his political manoeuvres. One example was his appeal to the people to "honour the king and expel the barbarians" - a tactic that was successful in settling disputes among the dukes and defending the states from invasion and harassment by the barbarians. He utilized his leadership abilities, and turned Qi into a prosperous and powerful state.

Arthur Cotterell, in his book *The First Emperor of China* says: "From 685 till his own death in 645 B.C., Guan Zhong provided Duke Huan with the kind of

² See also Wang Xiaobo, *Xianqin Fajia Sixiangshi Lun*, p. 237.

ministerial assistance King Ping had yearned for... Guan Zhong more than repaid his master's clemency in guiding the state of Qi to an early supremacy..."³

Professor Feng Huxiang 冯沪祥 also stressed that if there had not been such a leading personage like Guan Zhong, the Chinese states could not be united as one. If China had been invaded and captured by foreign invaders, the whole nation would have been subjected to endless bullying and humiliation. For this, the contribution of Guan Zhong towards the unity of the Chinese states was undoubtedly great.⁴ It is little wonder that although Confucius had criticized Guan Zhong's life as luxurious, he still had the greatest esteem for Guan Zhong's dedication. Confucius said, "If it weren't for Guan Zhong, we would all be now wearing our garments buttoned down on the side and our hair down our backs."⁵

My personal conclusion about Guan Zhong is that his character and contributions to the country had found a place in the hearts of many people. This was largely due to both his political integrity and ability. During

³ Arthur Cotterell, *The First Emperor of China*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan London Limited, 1981, p. 89.

⁴ Feng Huxiang 冯沪祥, *Zhongguo Wenhua Zhexue* 中国文化哲学, Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju, 1993, p. 277.

⁵ Yang Bojun, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

his term of office, he shouldered many heavy responsibilities in his efforts to explore possible avenues for ending the crisis. He knew that although the dukes were fighting one another for supremacy, they had a common interest, which was to defend their land against the barbarians. Guan Zhong put their mutual interest first. Being farsighted, he realized how acute the problem would be if the barbarians occupied the Central Plain. Therefore, to safeguard the state's sovereignty and territorial integrity, success or failure hinged on this one action. And this action proved to have a profound historical significance.

His first step was to overhaul and consolidate the internal administration. He reorganized the central government system. Under the leadership of the prime minister, there were various government departments responsible for both the internal and external affairs. Each department had one minister who was proficient in his field. All these departments made up what was called the central government. Besides, he also established several local official institutions and administrative organizations.

Guan Zhong knew the importance of human resources in the development of a state. To form a stable government, the authorities must execute the policy of

benevolence so that the government would enjoy the ardent support of the people. In order to appease the people and reassure the public, he maintained social order through the implementation of a series of policies such as law-making, enacting of decrees, establishment of government offices, social welfare, devising sound economic strategies, and reinforcing the national defence and military strength.

More importantly, he put talented people in important positions. He appointed people based on their merits and sagacity. He knew that although he was a man of great ability, he still had limited capacity to rule the whole state on his own. In view of this, the way to succeed was to pool the wisdom and efforts of everyone. Guan Zhong attached great importance to rule by law, and laws and decrees had to be executed by trusted personnels.

After securing a firm foundation in the internal affairs of the state, Guan Zhong proceeded steadily in establishing diplomatic relations with other feudal states. His major principle in interstate relations was to bring about peace and order in the country. To instil perfect order across the whole land was his biggest aspiration. Therefore, armed with a well-founded internal administration within his own

state, a well-equipped military, rich human and material resources, and abundant financial resources, he kept all the states in perfect working order. To safeguard the interests of the weaker states, he severely punished any enemy who dared to intrude, hence the unity of the states was upheld. Duke Huan of Qi thus won high praises from the other dukes as a consequence. Of course, assisting the neighbouring states was one of his diplomatic strategies. One by one he made alliance with the various dukes. This harmonious relationship made those who benefitted from his policies feel inclined towards Qi. Consequently, when he went a step further by making an appeal to "honour the king and expel the barbarians", all the dukes in the alliance willingly and generously supported him. This success we attribute to Guan Zhong and his policies.

The background during the Spring and Autumn period was a constant scramble for supremacy among the states; the Zhou royal house was unable to control the dukes, every state strived to become stronger for fear that they would be destroyed. This state of affairs prompted the search for leadership, unification and hegemony.

Guan Zhong had immense political power to regulate and enforce the law in the country. In order that the government affairs ran smoothly and were not affected by

personal bias or change in personnel, Guan Zhong formulated that the law must have the following features: (1) it must be documented in writing; (2) it must be objective; (3) it must be equal; (4) it must promote stability; (5) it must be suitable for its time; and lastly (6) it must be mandatory.

These concepts of law were actually innovations which replaced the outmoded regulations and irrational practices of that time. The new laws obviously yielded the desired results because prior to that Qi was on the wane. After Guan Zhong wielded his power as prime minister, Qi became strong politically and economically. Qi's power and influence also spread across the country because it maintained a strong diplomatic relationship with the other feudal states. These and other factors paved the way for Qi to attain hegemony. ⁶

Guan Zhong's innovations yielded great successes. The system of law advocated by Guan Zhong produced a marked effect on the political scene of the Spring and Autumn period. It also influenced later Legalists in varying degrees. Guan was therefore regarded as the pioneer of the Legalist school although strictly speaking he did not adopt Legalist measures totally. There also existed differences between the thinking of

⁶ Yang Youjiong, *op.cit.*, p.138.

Guan Zhong and the later Legalist thinkers. Owing to the fact that time had changed we find that the Legalist mode of thinking was different during the Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States era. The Legalist thinkers of the Warring States period were more inclined to strengthen their political power and to use it to defend themselves against their enemies, or to capture other states. They had lost the noble spirit of Guan Zhong who used power notably to safeguard the stability and unity of his state, and to fight the invaders. But we know that the change in political inclination is unavoidable, and more importantly, Legalists have always prided themselves for their adaptability to changing historical and political trends.

The two ingredients that make a great nation - state sovereignty and territorial integrity that Guan Zhong advocated, had helped to preserve the culture and civilization of Zhou. The call to "honour the king and expel the barbarians" came at an opportune time in the history of China. This call brought unity of thought and unity of action among the lesser dukes who paid homage to Duke Huan's commands. Apparently, these were the first signs of the trends towards unity and unification in China, which was finally accomplished by Qin in 221 B.C. Before this great event took place, Guan Zhong's efforts in bringing about unity among the

dukes had brought upon him the commendation of Confucius:

Guan Zhong, as prime minister to Duke Huan, assisted him to become the powerful chief of all the dukes and set everything right throughout the country. Even down to the present day, the people are still enjoying the benefits he conferred.⁷

Of the later scholars, Chen Liang 陈亮 (1143 - 1194) for example, had praised Guan Zhong as a heroic symbol of social achievements, a champion whose virtues Confucius himself had praised.⁸ It was through the influence of Guan Zhong that Duke Huan became the renowned ancient ruler. During this crucial period of China's history, the guidelines that Guan established in 650 B.C. for the feudal lords had brought stability to the political and social situation of the day.

⁷ Yang Bojun, *op.cit.*, pp. 151 - 152. The translation is from *The Analects of Confucius in Translations of Confucian Classics*, translated into modern Chinese by Bao Shixiang 鲍时祥, translated into English by Lao An 老安, Shandong: Shandong Friendship Press, 1992, pp. 241 - 243.

⁸ Hoyt Cleveland Tillman, *Utilitarian Confucianism - Ch'en Liang's Challenge to Chu Hsi*, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 1982, p.26.