Analysis on Ye Shi’s Outlook on Righteousness and Benefit

Ya-Heng YANG
China Jiliang University, College of Humanities and Social Sciences, Zhejiang, Hangzhou, China
286865508@qq.com

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Abstract. Ye Shi advocated the combination of righteousness and benefit. Ye Shi himself did not refute morality and his main objection was towards the empty talks of Taoism and Mind-philosophy. They rejected the utility and diametrically opposed Righteousness and Benefit. During the criticizing process of Taoism and Mind-philosophy, Ye Shi gradually established his ethical thoughts system and advocated the combination of righteousness and benefit’s relationship, which therefore developed a school of his own during ideological battlement in Southern Song Dynasty.

Introduction
Ye Shi (1150-1223), courtesy name Zheng Ze, famous ideologist in Southern Song Dynasty, representative personage of Yongjia School. He used to live in Yongjia (today Zhejiang, Wenzhou) at his old days teaching in Shui Xin village outside town, hence called mister Shui Xin. Based upon ideological foundation of ancestor Xue Jixuan, Chen Liang, Ye Shi emphasized on the righteousness and benefit of Yongjia School and put forward to the ideologies of “Righteousness for Benefit” and “Adore Righteousness to Cultivate Benefit”.

Ye Shi’s Righteousness and Benefit Unity
Relationship between Righteousness and Benefit
Concerning the problem of righteousness and benefit, Ye Shi’s claimed that “Benefit-tending and Harm-avoiding” was human nature. He said, “People’s mind, the reason that common people’s mind tending benefit and avoiding harm is as common as living and death. The mind is nature but not restless. What makes it rest is Taoist mind which balances benefit and harm, live and death.” What this quote means is that everyone has the sense of benefit and harm, called “people’s mind”, which is fixed and nature. “Taoism mind” adjusts and rests the impact of “people’s mind” on benefit and harm. Therefore, Ye Shi held that “Benefit-tending and Harm-avoiding” was nature as long as not going too far.

What Ye Shi discussed the most was about benefit and harm in nation. At awareness level, he considered that “Knowing the harms all over the world can lead to all the benefits, as the harms ended and benefits follow”. This point differed from Taoism: Taoists believe that everything as long as starts with “righteousness” will bring about “benefit” which costs no concern. But for Ye Shi, one needs to handle from “harm” so can to know where “benefit” belongs. Only to remove “harm” so can to reveal “benefit”. Therefore, for Ye Shi, only talking about “righteousness” and no “benefit and harm” was nonetheless. Knowing from “harm” to “benefit” can make one realizes world’s “righteousness” which was the practical action.

For this reason, Ye Shi recommended Emperor Xiaozong “to study the changes from ancient to today, using all the benefits and harms to fully understand and solve the difficulties to prosper the nation”, which means reforming the old policies to strengthen the country. Ye Shi’s reforming ideology to Southern Song dynasty was to cut the harms and thrive the benefits, to change the weak and strengthen the tough to finally reach the revenge righteousness. In Southern Song dynasty, to cut harms and thrive benefits was an efficient path to realize revenge and regain the land at which point “righteousness” and “benefit” were the same. He said, “One revenges for nation’s justice and returns the land for nation’s pride”. Although Taoists surely affirmed this, they merely wanted to
realize justice through moral level’s teaching and objected the thought of harms and benefits. But Ye Shi handled the bad sides of current politics and put up with reforming politics to promote the beneficial and abolish the harmful, so as to realize the revenge which was the reflection of combining “justice” and “interest”.

“Adore Righteousness to Cultivate Benefit”: Righteousness and Benefit’s Combination in Notion

Ye Shi advocated “promote the beneficial and abolish the harmful” was not just to find purely “benefits” but to combine “benefit” and “righteousness” and using “righteousness” to regulate “benefit”. His basic point on this is “to adore righteousness to cultivate benefit and prosper etiquette to promote capabilities”. At this problem, he objected two extremes: “righteousness is hard to maintain and generally submitted to benefits which is an unbroken law since ancient times; the mediocre stick to their guns that only the saint can choose justice which is also since ancient times; scholars must be cautious about it.” These two extremes stoke to their points and neither of them can combine both, which was unacknowledged by Ye Shi.

Ye Shi said, “ the ancients once said:’ interests, the sum of justice’, then said:’ justice, the root of interests’, and later said: ‘Why mention the interests? Although all justice is no pure justice and no interests remain the only interests which is the difference of ancient and present times. “In other words, at the premiere time, justice and interest were altogether but later generations separated them so came the “distinction between the ancient and the present”. The distinction manifested two extreme views which Ye Shi held critical attitude and said, “Shabby scholars built the war seeing nothing and talking no interests while money talkers have no justice and seeing no crowd.” From this quote we can learn that Ye Shi objected the empty talkers’ “only benefits but no righteousness” attitude and the benefit talkers’ too. Meanwhile, Ye Shi was emphatically opposing Dong Zhongsu’s view of “Holding justice for no interest and raising mortality for no benefit”. Ye Shi pointed that at the first sight it might look proper but a second peak contains too much careless omissions. The ancient gained benefits for people but asked for no interest themselves which is honorable. The later generation do as Zhongsu’s words but make no profit so the justice make no sense, however they think they have already attributed a lot to the world. In other words, it repelled the interest and morality became useless empty talks do not accord to the Tao of sages in “Shi” and “Shu”. Ye Shi criticized Dong Zhongshu with it to denounced the Song Taoist “later generations scholars”.

Dispense on Righteousness and Benefits in Reality Level

In ideal society of Ye Shi’s imagination, “People and emperor are altogether”, “Emperor can breed, cultivate and govern the public”, “The ancient saints taught the public got food and clothing as the common was not able to”. To see the relationship between emperor and the public, “Emperor sees the public first and vice versa”. In conclusion, breeding and cultivation, basic necessities and righteousness, nourishing and mortality were bonded; mortality and interests were united which is called “life-preserving benevolence”. However in reality the circumstances were quite the contrary.

As we can see the ideal world of “life-preserving benevolence” that Ye Shi imagined had great contrast with the real society of “fishing-eating tyranny”, which caused sharp contraction. On one hand, people’s basic necessities were not guaranteed which led to no faithful actions; on the other hand, among scholar-bureaucrats, there were noble characters who never talked about benefits and meanwhile some other snobs had no morality always accumulating fortunes. Ye Shi once said that “The noble avoid the fame and the snobs have the power to use the fortune. The noble do not really understand the meaning of justice while considering themselves noble who differs from the ordinary. So they neglect the fortune. The snobs have no mercy and accumulating fortunes for that is beneficial and delighting to themselves. So they are doing all this positively. Although all above were not acceptable for the noble, they knew the nation’s plans were under control of the snob which were great injustice to the dynasty. But they still ignore it and assuming this as an absolute. The noble avoid managing money matters and the snobs take the power. But the emperor feels no guilt for using the snobs which would cause great damages toward the public and the dynasty. When will all these end!”
During this discussion, Ye Shi revealed the relationship between the “no benefit but for the righteousness” noble and the “no righteousness but for the benefit” snob, which coexisted and complemented to constitute a super ironic current social situation and to reveal the flaunting moral hypocrisy acts of those noble characters. For Ye Shi, “accumulating fortunes” was snobs actions but the emperors who using them and the noble characters who avoiding them have inescapable obligations. Therefore, to get rid of this current situation, Ye Shi believed that in ethical aspect they should unite mortality and profit; in economic aspect they should separate money arrangement and accumulation. He believed that, started with the thoughts of “righteousness” and “fraternity”, they would achieve “all the civilians arrange nation’s fortunes” goal. It was “accumulation” management pattern that he advocated that accorded with interest-justice pattern.

As to the upper class, who were ruling class, Ye Shi pointed that “When people breeding the animals, they would feed them and give them sty to get benefits”. However, how the upper class rule the public would be like “scrambling people’s food and houses and giving the public no good, which is worse than the animals we breed”. Therefore, he advocated that the upper class should have some abstinence to change the old policy to guarantee basic necessities and to bring out “etiquette and righteousness”. He maintained that if “etiquette and righteousness” were to adjust “benefit” like a dam followed the road and dredged, then “benefit” and “righteousness” would be united and every part got this benefit. That was accord with the “etiquette and righteousness”.

Ye Shi’s Righteousness and Benefit Outlook’s Philosophy Basement

Tao is within Material

Ye Shi believed that Tao was within Material. He said: “Where material is then Tao asides. Material has an end but Tao does not. If not knowing enough of Tao then you will not be able to generalize material which vice versa. Tao is extensive and generalize all the truths and matters. But all came back to material so that it won’t dissociate. Tao is within material and cannot leave it.”

To Ye Shi, everything contains two sides, opposite is ubiquitous. Therefore you must recognize two opposite parts and you cannot just notice one part to be one-sided. Meanwhile, Ye Shi believed that there was an eternal tunnel surpass the contradiction, which was called “moderation”. He said, “the reason each other go through all things on earth without forbiddance and burdensome. Hard to pass down to the world, does it? Is it the so-called moderation? The moderation, can have both but do the same pattern”. He believed that moderation was to properly settle the two opposites which relies on each other but surpass the opposite. The “moderation” he meant, is two opposites’ compromise and balance.

Taoist idealism concentrated on cultivating temperament, while maintained reflecting on introversive intuition and neglected knowledge of objective matters. Ye Shi claimed that you must inspect everything in detail to correctly understand the so-called justice. He said, “To compromise every righteousness in the world costs inspects on everything in the world in detail to make sure the correctness.

Humanity and Gifts

Ye Shi held that humanity was gifted. Gifts were given by nature but not god. Therefore, gifts were meant to be. He said, “according to Shu: “only emperors give mercy to the public but cannot say give gift. Everything and human being were born between sky and land. They were both given life.” What differentiates human beings to other living things is that people can know the nature of the matters with free wills but others only have their nature essence.

About the dispute upon good and evil in humanity is a long-term question. Ye Shi assured that Mencius found the supreme good in humanity when people were fighting. And the reason why people fight is that they cannot maintain the basic living standard. However, Ye Shi also believed that Confucius’s standard was the right one to follow, which is “Human nature is similar, practice made them apart”, “Only kindness cannot generalize everything”. Kindness cannot generalize humanity. He also criticized the later generations scholars who did not researched on Mencius’s
history background. That’s why he said that all their studies were meaningless.

Likewise, Ye Shi also believed that humanity cannot be generalized by “evil”. He said, “If one were born evil, later he changed to be kind. Then his nature was really bad?” It contradicted to the theory of original evil of human nature. Meanwhile, Ye Shi demonstrated with Confucius “Human nature is similar, practice made them apart” theory. He insisted “The ancient do not judge humanity with good or evil”. It also illustrated that the theory of original evil of human nature was wrong. In a word, to Ye Shi, human nature was gifted without goodness or evilness.

**Unity of Righteousness and Desire**

Ye Shi distinguished human nature and etiquette. He was sure both of the nature and etiquette existed with a reason. He rejected to elevate one or belittle another meanwhile rejecting to use one to forbidden another. Therefore, Ye Shi objected the taoism and mind-philosophy. Both of them rejected desire at that time. He pointed that it was a contradiction that some common ethical principles were not adopted to the saint. Tao was from material and human beings were also one kind of material. Human’s desire and material’s Tao were based upon nature and both of them could not be separated. We cannot use one to repel the other one.

Ye Shi believed that the difference between human being and nature stuffs were that human could work to get material and utilize them. He said, “Everything in the world all can be used as long as human beings are hard-working”. It means that humans can change their actions to put matters into use which are artificial. Ye Shi affirmed that material desire were human nature which should not be forbidden. But he also believed that material desire should under control of social order and moral rules. Restrain means etiquette. It was used to adjust one’s emotions and desire in order to make it reasonable.

Ye Shi began his study with “Tao started with two but success with one”. He illustrated the unity of “righteousness” and “desire”. He thought that if one against law of the unity of opposite, everyone stoke to their thoughts would uphold the normal steps how things go. Therefore, he believed that moderation should adjust to the reality so to make supreme saint suitable for ordinary people.

**Summary**

In general, Ye Shi’s outlook on Righteousness and Benefit maintains the unity. This utilitarianism affirm people’s personal benefits while stress out more benefits of the nation. From this standpoint, it is not an egoism but a public good principle of Neo-Confucianism. Ye Shi emphasized on unity. It was a reflection of his philosophical thought. “Tao origins from one and made from two”. His view objected the asceticism of “Keep the natural law and abolish the selfishness”. It directed his reforming proposition on “Promote the beneficial and abolish the harmful” in practice. When it comes to the traditional Confucianism, his outlook is not heresy at all. On the contrary, he enriched Confucian’s outlook on Righteousness and Benefit with his own practice.

**References**