A Study of the Statesman Kuan Chung and the Kuan Tzu

Kuan Chung (circa 720 B.C. - 645 B.C.) was a great politician ever known in the days of the Spring and Autumn Period (770 - 403 B.C.) in the history of ancient China. He held the post of prime minister in the State of Ch'i for forty years. He aided Duke Huan of Ch'i in the establishment of the hegemony. He was hailed the head of the Five Ta-heremons in the Spring and Autumn era. His illustrious achievements were not only remarkable at that time, but they also greatly influenced the way of thinking in later periods. The life story of Kuan Chung is scattered in such treatises as the Tso Chuan, Kuo Yu and in the Chapter on the State of Ch'i in the Shih Chi as well as in the Kuan Tzu. Hitherto, there was a wide talk among later scholars that the Kuan Tzu was written by someone else under his name, in the olden days of the warring States (403 - 221 B.C.). Nevertheless, one can get a full glimpse of the life career of Kuan Chung and gather the broad principles of his political concept. An attempt was made in this thesis to study the life of this celebrated statesman in ancient Chinese history and the political thoughts as seen in the Kuan Tzu.

This thesis is divided into four chapters and twelve sections. The first chapter mainly deals with the life and biography of Kuan Chung in accordance with historical facts, and evidence. He was brought up in a poor family and was most filial to his own mother. In his dealings with man, he disregarded trifles but in his conduct in political life he was noted for his impartiality. His strategic genius and far
sightedness enabled him to make the State of Ch'i strong and impregnable. He recognised the needs of that period by initiating a move to respect and revere the Chou Kings, sovereigning and also suppressing all aggression by the barbarous tribes east and north of ancient China. With his wonderful talents he succeeded to govern and lead all the feudal princes. He brought peace and order to China otherwise remaining in a state of confusion and disorder. He was able to thwart all vicious attacks from the barbarous tribes rescuing China from a critical state of peril. Even after his decease for more than a century, the great sage Confucius sang praises for his super-ability as seen by this quotation, "Were we not to have Kuan Chung in our midst, probably we would by now become barbarous people with hairs dishevelled and unkempt and using garments with a large lapel buttoning on the left hand side of the body".

The second chapter vividly describes the relationship between Kuan Chung and the Kuan Tau and the reason for writing this particular book giving full details of the writer and the epochal period the book was finally completed. Possibly the Kuan Tzu might not have been personally written by Kuan Chung himself but compiled by scholars in the State of Ch'i during the period of the Warring States. Nevertheless, it contains main viewpoints of topical subjects brought up by Kuan Chung when he held the reins of government. Together with these viewpoints are official matters contained in files belonging to the State of Ch'i. The teachings in the Kuan Tzu would afford a splendid opportunity to get into a deep insight of the achievements and
appreciations of theoretical thoughts as propounded by Kuan Chung. In all, there are 86 sections appearing in the Kuan Tzu among which 10 are void of contents save the headings. One section entitled "Mound Sacrifice" is said to have been lost prior to the T'ang Dynasty. It is also said that Yin Chih-Chang of T'ang extracted from the Chapter "The Book of Mound Sacrifice" in the Shih Chi of Ssu-Ma Chien, the sayings made by Kuan Chung and enlarged it with supplemented annotations. In actual fact there are only 75 sections in the Kuan Tzu. In 1972, China discovered through excavation made in ancient historical sites of Western Han near the Yin-chueh Shan in the district Lin-yi in Shan-tung province a number of bamboo written strips buried in coffins dug out from graveyards. Part of the writings in the Kuan Tzu were found. Once these bamboo written strips were carefully sorted out, they will become precious materials in the further research work relating to the Kuan Tzu.

The third chapter of the thesis gives an analysis of the theoretical thoughts as contained in the Kuan Tzu. There is also a discussion as to what pattern school of thought it should be classified. The contents of the Kuan Tzu are highly complicated with a mixed conglomeration of thoughts emanating from the Pre-Ch'in Taoist school, from the Confucianist school, the Legalist school, from the Logician school, the Geomancist school, from the military strategist school, from the Agriculturist school. The strict and right orthodoxy as seen in the Legalist school of thought, the widely propounded Taoist school of thought and the sincere and honest Confucionistic school of
thoughts are distinctive features that can be gathered in this book. Running through this book, it is observed that the main controlling school of thought lies in the use of legislation as a means of governmental administration. As regards classifying what pattern school of thought it should go, obviously it would fall into the Legalist’s category.

In chapter four of this thesis we give regulations relating to governmental strategy. Detailed discussions pertaining to the political system, the educational measures, the economy policy and the guide in foreign relations are all embodied in this chapter. Well, Kuan Chung applied to use this set of political theory to rule the State of Chü and the results were excellent.

In a nutshell, Kuan Chung was acclaimed as a celebrated political theologian in the early days of the Spring and Autumn period. He belonged to the rare breed. The Kuan Tzu can be regarded as a piece of masterpiece work prior to the Chin Dynasty period. At the same time, you can come to light the various shades of thinking existing at that time. As far as the history of Chinese culture is concerned, this book is considered most invaluable. Any step taken to probe deeper into this leading celebrity of Kuan Chung and the Kuan Tzu in a systematic analysis will undeniably be a most significant job.