SHEN FU-HAI: HIS STATECRAFT (SHU) AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Shen Fu-hai was a native of the state of Han (403 B.C.-230 B.C.). The date of his birth is unknown. He died in 337 B.C. He was a minor official at the court of Cheng (806 B.C.-375 B.C.) in his early career. He later sought appointment to Lord Chao 鄭 of Han. Because of his shu 術 or statecraft, he was promoted by the later to be the premier of Han. He was in office for fifteen years when he died. Shih chi, or Historical Records speaks highly of his performance in politics and government:

He introduced many changes in national policies. He also improved external affairs by dealing very well with the feudal lords of the neighboring states. After serving fifteen years for the state, he died in office. Because of his statesmanship, Han finally became well governed and the army strong. It had not been invaded by any other states.

Shen Fu-hai lived in an age when the feudal government was beginning to collapse, and the totalitarian and authoritarian government was growing. Following the radical changes of social structure, the traditional concepts of morality and value could no longer hold the mind of the people. Instead, the concepts of "profit" (利) and "power" (力) dominated the thought of the time. Looking for a strong and centralized government, all states alike competed with each other in employing wisemen and seeking innovations. It resulted in the formation of a new situation that the four powerful states, i.e. Ch'u 楚, Wei 魏, Ch'i 齊 and Ch'in 秦, fought for empire and supremacy. The Legalists who were realistic and practical, met the need of the new situation. Therefore, they emerged as the most influential school of thought.

Historical Records mentions that there were two pieces of writings written by Shen Fu-hai. These writings
has been lost. What we have today is the version compiled from fragments by a scholar of the Ch'ing dynasty. The motive and objective of Shen Pu-hai's official career were to achieve something concrete by action. To write down his doctrine of politics and government should not be his original intention. Therefore, I believe that the writings mentioned by Ssu-ma Ch'ien were only records of the achievements of his performance in politics and government.

New situations brought with them new problems. Shen Pu-hai developed a realistic program for dealing with the new situations. His new program operated according to three principles: (1) law (fa 法); (2) statecraft (shu 衛); and (3) power (shih 势). Among the three, the shu was the most important factor.

The concept of shu proposed by Shen Pu-hai has threefold of meaning. First of all, there is the distinction between the superiority of the ruler and the inferiority of the minister. The rule of "punishment and reward" of the Legalists should effectively implemented. With these conditions, Shen Pu-hai put the doctrine of "seeking the practical effectiveness according to name" of the school of Names into practice. As a consequence, the ruler was able to enforce his orders on his ministers with law and authority. By doing so, he achieved the final goal that the ruler was not occupied with problems and that the ministers were able to fulfill their obligations and duties. The second point demanded that the ruler should be "knowing nothing" (wu chih / 無知) and "doing nothing" (wu-wei 無為). Because of this reason, the ministers could not know how did the ruler rule, and thus they could not use the ruler's undertaking as a means to achieve their personal profit. The third point demanded the ministers to carry out their official duties strictly. To avoid seeking special favors from the ruler,
the ministers were prohibited to talk about the problems unrelated to their own business. Shen Pu-hai stressed the importance of "law" and "power" because these were two basic factors which helped the shu to be operated. The punishment and reward of the Legalists could help the "seeking the practical effectiveness according to name" to be carried out. The ruler could put the shu into practice by enforcing law and order because he possessed power (shih). In addition of placing high importance on law, statecraft, and power, Shen Pu-hai also valued agriculture highly.

Historical Records remarked that Shen Pu-hai's doctrine was derived from the teaching of Huang-Lao 黃老. Actually it was influenced by Lao-tzu only. The book of Huang-ti is not genuine. It was written by someone during the Warring States period. Shen Pu-hai's doctrine is said to have been influenced by Lao-tzu because his performance in politics showing the spirit of T'ai-shan. In addition, Shen-tzu 申子 which is lost now is similar to Lao-tzu in some respects. We hold that Shen Pu-hai had some relation with the School of Names because he used the theory of "seeking practical effectiveness according to names" as a political tool. The existing version of T'ang Hai Tzu 朧子 is not genuine, but it has many ideas which parallel with those of Shen Pu-hai.

Sheng Pu-hai belonged to the Legalist School. Thus his predecessors such as Li K'uei 李悝 and Shen Tao 慎到 might have influenced him. Li K'uei advised the Lord Wen of Wei 魏文侯 (403 B.C.-225 B.C.) to fully use of the wealth of land. Shen Pu-hai, living in a small state like Han, fully knew the value of the land, and thus advocated the development of agriculture. Li K'uei's idea might have inspired him. Shen Tao who emphasized power (shih), demanded strict legal right of possession. These were the sources of Shen Pu-hai's doctrine. As we have noted that Shen Pu-hai's shu was implemented on the basis of shih or power.

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Shen Pu-hai's influence can be seen in two men: Lord chao of Han and Han Fei Tzu. In Han Fei Tzu there are a number of records of Lord Chao's acceptance of Shen Pu-hai's advices, such as careful consideration of reward and punishment, and the like. These are examples of the latter's influence. Han Fei Tzu has quoted many passages from Shen Pu-hai's writings which are now lost. Han Fei Tzu also absorbed Shen Pu-hai's theory of "seeking the practical effectiveness according to names" into his own program of rewards and punishment. He even criticized Shen Pu-hai's defects and actions that contradicted with his words. We can see that Han Fei Tzu was certainly influenced by Shen Pu-hai.

I evaluate Shen Pu-hai's "Statecraft" according to its practical value. His method or art of conducting affairs and handling men was created to meet the need of the new situation. It was practical and effective. His experiment of the philosophical theory of Lao Tzu and the School of Names into practice was unusually successful.