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Mandate of Heaven (天命 Pīnyīn: Tiānmìng) was a traditional Chinese sovereignty concept of legitimacy used to support the rule of the kings of the Zhou Dynasty and later the Emperors of China. Heaven would bless the authority of a just ruler, but Heaven would be displeased with an unwise ruler and give the Mandate to someone else. *"Mandate of Heaven"* was also the very first era name of the Qin Dynasty.

The Mandate has no time limitations, but a performance standard. The Duke of Zhou explained to the people of Shang, that if their king had not misused his power, his Mandate would not have been taken away. This means that a legitimate emperor need not be of noble birth, and in fact, dynasties as powerful as the Han dynasty and Ming dynasty were founded by people of modest birth.

The concept was first found in written records from the words of the Duke of Zhou, younger brother of King Wu of Zhou and regent for King Wu's infant son King Cheng of Zhou. He is usually considered to be the first supporter of the idea. The notion of the Mandate of Heaven was also invoked by Mencius, a very influential Chinese scholar[1].

Eventually, as Chinese political ideas developed further, the Mandate was linked to the notion of the dynastic cycle. Times of floods or famines were considered divine signs from the heaven in violation of the Mandate.

Contents

- 1 The Shang and Zhou
- 2 The Five Dynasties Period
- 3 Comparison
- 4 See also
- 5 Bibliography
- 6 References

The Shang and Zhou

The Mandate of Heaven concept was first used by the Zhou dynasty to justify their overthrow of the Shang dynasty and would be used by many succeeding dynasties to come.

The Shang legitimized rule by family connections to divine power. It was believed their founders had been deities, and their descendants went to join them in Heaven. Heaven was very active and interfering, in mysterious ways, in earthly rule, as shown by the divination texts preserved from the later part of the Shang, the oracle bones. The Mandate of Heaven may be thought of as changing this divination legitimization to a feudal one.

The Five Dynasties Period

Main article: Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms Period

Song Dynasty scholar-official Xue Juzheng compiled the *Five Dynasties History* (五代史) during the 960s and 970s, after the Song Dynasty had taken northern China from the last of the Five Dynasties, the Later Zhou Dynasty. A major purpose was to establish justification for the transference of the Mandate of Heaven through these five dynasties, and thus to the Song Dynasty.

He argued that these dynasties met certain vital criteria to be considered as having attained the Mandate of Heaven despite never having ruled all of China. One is that they all ruled the traditional Chinese heartland. They also held considerably more territory than any of the other Chinese states that had existed conterminously in the south.

However, there were certain other areas where these dynasties all clearly fell short. The brutal behavior of Zhu Wen and the Later Liang Dynasty was a source of considerable embarrassment, and thus there was pressure to exclude them from the Mandate. The following three dynasties, the Later Tang, Later Jin, and Later Han were all non Han Chinese dynasties, all having been ruled by the non-Chinese Shatuo Turks. There is also the concern that though each of them were the most powerful Chinese kingdom of their respective eras, none of them ever really had the ability to unify the entire Chinese realm as there were several powerful states to the south. However, it was the conclusion of Xue Juzheng that the Mandate had indeed passed through each of the Five Dynasties, and thus onto the Song Dynasty when it conquered the last of those dynasties.

Comparison

The Mandate concept is similar to the European notion of Divine Right, which legitimized rule, but allowed the overthrowing of unjust rulers. In Chinese thought a successful revolt was considered evidence that the Mandate of Heaven had passed. In both systems it was wrong to revolt, but a successful insurrection was understood as evidence of divine approval. In Japan rulers are thought of unbroken successions of the sun goddess.

See also

- Tiananmen
- Divine right of kings
- Impeachment
- Imperial Seal of China
- Amaterasu

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1. **^** Perry, Elizabeth. [2002] (2002). Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China. Sharpe. ISBN 0765604442

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- The **Mandate** of **Heaven** (天命 Pinyin: Tiānmìng) was a Chinese concept used to justify the rule of the kings of the Zhou Dynasty and later the Emperors of China.
- The concept of the **Mandate** of **Heaven** was that a king's rule was based on the blessing of **Heaven** and that if a king ruled unwisely, **Heaven** would be displeased and would give the **Mandate** to someone else.
- One consequence of the idea of the **Mandate** of **Heaven** was that it was not necessary for a person to be of noble birth to lead a revolt and become a legitimate emperor, and in fact a number of dynasties such as the Han dynasty and Ming dynasty were founded by persons of modest birth.

Mandate of Heaven - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (512 words)

- The **Mandate** of **Heaven** (天命 Pinyin: Tiānmìng) was a traditional Chinese concept of legitimacy used to support the rule of the kings of the Shang Dynasty and later the Emperors of China.
- **Heaven** was very active and interfering, in mysterious ways, in earthly rule, as is shown by the divination texts preserved from the later part of the Shang dynasty, the oracle bones.
- The **Mandate** of **Heaven** theory may be thought of as changing this familial connection to a feudal one—the world was now a fief, held at **Heaven's** pleasure, which could and would be reassigned if the holder misbehaved.

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