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VIII.6 On the corruption of the principle of monarchy

- The Spirit of Law - Book VIII. On the corruption of the principles of the three governments -

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As democracies are doomed when the people divest the senate, the magistrates, and the judges of their functions, monarchies are corrupted when the prerogatives of guilds or the privileges of the cities are progressively stripped away. The first case tends to the despotism of all ; the other, to the despotism of one man alone.

"What doomed the Qin and Suí Cháo dynasties," says a Chinese author, "was that instead of limiting themselves, like the Ancients, to general oversight, alone worthy of the sovereign, the princes wanted to govern everything directly by themselves." [1] Here the Chinese author reveals to us the cause of the corruption of almost all monarchies.

The monarchy is doomed when a prince believes he shows his power better by changing the order of things than by following it, when he takes natural functions away from some in order to bestow them arbitrarily on others, and when he is more in love with what he fancies than with what he wills.

The monarchy is doomed when the prince, relating everything exclusively to himself, calls the state to his capital, the capital to the court, and the court to his sole person.

Finally, it is doomed when a prince misjudges his authority, his situation, and the love of his peoples, and when he is not fully aware that a monarch should deem himself secure, as a despot should believe himself in peril.

[1] Compilation of works written under the Mings, related by Father du Halde.