

The Spirits and Contemporary Value of Confucianism

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Abstract: Confucius sublimated the collective historical memory into the overall consciousness of the history of civilization. In this sense, Confucianism and China have mutual stipulation. Today how to draw Chinese wisdom from the excellent traditional Chinese culture and provide spiritual resources and value significance for contemporary society is the issue we are facing. This paper will elaborate from four aspects: the necessity of carrying forward Confucianism, the spirits of Confucianism, the contemporary transformation of Confucianism and how to combine Confucianism with the basic principles of Marxism.

1. Introduction

"China is a civilization system with original nature. Confucius sublimated the collective historical memory into the overall consciousness of the history of civilization, in this sense, Confucianism and China have mutual stipulation"^[1]. In the new era, how to draw Chinese wisdom from the excellent traditional Chinese culture with Confucianism as the main body and provide spiritual resources and value significance for contemporary society is the issue we are facing.

2. The Necessity of Carrying Forward Confucian Culture

Carrying forward the excellent traditional Chinese culture is not only out of respect for national history and the need to cultivate national feelings, but also the inevitable requirement of using Chinese wisdom to solve new era issues. The modern history of China is a history of denying tradition and learning from the West. In the West, cultural beliefs and social ethics resorts religion, social development resorts to positivism and pragmatism. Both Christianity and Islam are other-worldliness religions, which are unattractive to the Chinese who have a strong concern for this world. Thus, the western religions have never occupied a dominant position in Chinese society. As far as social development is concerned, China has actively learned from Western practical science. However, when pragmatism overflows and is used to construct social values and ethical order, it will make people materialized and become tools and means, rather than ultimate values. Now, the disorderly expansion of capital and the overflow of pragmatism have resulted in many problems. How to deal with these problems of modern civilization? Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889-1975), a famous British historian, said: "The hope of mankind in the future lies in China, and China will contribute to the unification of the world in the future". Toynbee's assertion is based on Chinese culture.

3. The Spirits of Confucianism

Confucianism is the core of the excellent traditional Chinese culture. In Chinese two thousand years' history, Confucianism was the mainstream of social culture. In essence, China is a civilization system with original nature. Confucius deleted the Six Classics in order to determine the historical practice as the spiritual resources and cultural basis for the integration of the Chinese civilization community. Confucius sublimated the historical memory of fragments into the overall consciousness of the history of civilization. In the sense, Confucianism and China are mutual stipulated.

Confucianism is not only the common spiritual home of the Chinese nation, but also provides the Chinese people with ethical and moral norms. In terms of the individual's inner spiritual world, Confucianism "opens up the source of value, establishes moral subjectivity"^[2], focuses on the universal issues of moral value, rather than aiming to solve specific political problems with certain strategies and means, nor using man as a means to manifest the will of God. However, western philosophy regards morality as an objective object of study, lacking the study of human beings as the subject of moral practice. Without the moral ethics of moral subjectivity, moral ethics becomes objective knowledge. The respect and humanistic care for the value of life in Confucianism is the reason why it was the common source of spiritual value of Chinese people. Confucianism is by no means a simple moral preaching. The reason why it can be deeply rooted in the hearts of the people is that it regards moral principles as a special manifestation of the universal law in human society.

"As a value philosophy, Chinese traditional philosophy itself is the practice of value pursuit."^[3] Thus, Confucianism take a great emphasis on the spiritual cultivation, because the Supreme Ultimate in every man entirely. It presents the subjectivity of human beings and the real existence of human beings in practice. That is to say, we should show the truth and essence of life at the human level. From Confucius (c.551 B.C.-479 B.C.) and Mencius(c.372 B.C.-c.289 B.C.) to Chou Tunyi(1017-1073) , Ch'eng Hao(1032-1085) , Confucianism focuses on spiritual cultivation of moral practice. In their theories, ontology and the spiritual cultivation are mutually invented. The spiritual cultivation of Confucianism emphasizes cultivating the mind and nature to conform with the morality, and cultivating the inner spiritual world to stimulate the value of human life. At the same time, Confucianism concerns about the construction of ethical values and social order. As far as the construction of a stable social order, Confucianism had established a complete set of moral and ethical order with moral norms, such as benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and faith, as the core. Although Confucianism was used by the rulers to suppress the free development of human nature, it promoted the harmonious and stable development of society mainly.

The biggest difference between Chinese philosophy and Western philosophy lies in whether the relationship between human and the outside world is seen in the mode of dualistic opposition. Western philosophy mainly focuses on the essence and laws of the world. The world is external to "I" and is an object waiting to be recognized by "I". This kind of civilization model has developed positivism and scientism, which has stimulated the industrial revolution and material civilization prosperity of Western countries. Unlike this, both Confucianism and Taoism in the traditional Chinese philosophy put forward the realm of "harmony between human and nature". What they concerned about is the interaction and harmony between human and the universe, which is also said in *The Doctrine of the Mean*: "If the principles of *Chung Yung* (The Mean and Harmony) can be applied in all aspects, reaching the state of perfection, then all things in the universe will be able to live in peace and fulfill their potential"^[4]. Human is neither a fool in the universe, nor the master of the word. Mencius said: "Love your relatives, then be kind to the people; be kind to the people, then love all things." Chuang-tzu said: "Heaven and earth coexist with me, and all things are one with me." The Chinese philosophy maintained that the highest achievement in the spiritual cultivation of

a man lies in the identification of himself with the whole of nature, i.e, the universe. Human is not the master of the world. What human needs to do is to follow the nature of all things' development.

Its spiritual development is different from the three major religions (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) who appear more other-worldly, as well as different from the local Taoism's aspiration for immortality. It aims to achieve identification with the Supreme Ultimate or T'ai Chi. The cosmology of " the identification of human with the universe" is established on the basis of understanding that human and the universe are of the same origin.

4. The Creative Transformation and Innovative Development of Confucianism

Through the above analysis, we can be sure that the excellent traditional Chinese culture with Confucianism as the main body can provide Chinese wisdom for human beings to deal with many problems of modern civilization. At the same time, we also clearly know that traditional culture cannot be directly applied to the new era, we should carry out creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional culture.

Firstly, we need to pay more attention on the pursuit of content truth. Confucianism is the philosophy of social organization, and is also the philosophy of daily life. Confucianism emphasizes the social responsibilities and the moral cultivation of human nature. The construction of an objective knowledge system is particularly inadequate. It the main reason for China lag behind the West in the development of modern science and technology. Although *the Great Learning* talks about "investigating things to extend knowledge", it only does not exclude the pursuit of objective knowledge and the study of specific affairs in the primary stage of learning. The ultimate goal of investigating things to extend knowledge is to grasp the "Li"(abstract Principles or laws) of philosophy and life, which points to humanistic reason rather than scientific or technological reason. Confucianism has the tendency of emphasizing ethics and neglecting objective knowledge, so it is not a science.

All in all, Confucianism tends to emphasize ethics and morality and neglect objective knowledge. It's determined by the social structure of ancient China. Since the Tang and Song Dynasties, the intellectuals served society mainly by through the imperial examination system and then entering the centralized bureaucratic system. It required intellectuals to possess the basic ideological quality of being able to perform official duties firstly, rather than various natural science knowledge. Both moral principles and scientific knowledge are universal. Westerners perform well in the aspect of extension truth, studying objects and nature, and developing science. In this regard, we should learn from the strengths of Western civilization, respect objective knowledge, and develop science and technology in a realistic manner.

Secondly, we should adhere to and carry forward the moral principles and philosophical ideas that regulate interpersonal relationships in Confucianism, and abandon the cumbersome etiquette system and the social norms that solidify the hierarchy. Confucianism is the mainstream ideology of China's two-thousand-year feudal society. In addition to the above analysis of Confucianism focuses on moral values and spiritual cultivation, another important thing is that Confucianism constructs a complete social ethical order.

Mencius put forward the "five ethics" moral norms of "father and son should love each other. Ruler and subject should be just to each other. Husband and wife should distinguish their respective spheres. Elder and younger brother should have a sense of mutual precedence. And between friends there should be good faith". Tung Chung-Shu (c.179-c.104 B.C.) wrote:" There is nothing that does not have a correlate, and in each correlation there is *the Yin and Yang*.The sovereign is *Yang*, the subject is *Yin*; the father is *Yang*, the son is *Yin*; the husband is *Yang*, the wife is *Yin*"^[5]. "Tung Chung-Shu made an ontological proof of the three cardinal guides and the five constant virtues in

order to consolidate the unification of the Han Dynasty"^[6]. Different from Tung Chung-Shu, Chang Tsia maintains men and all other things are but part of one great body. We should serve Heaven and Earth as we do our own parents, and regard all men as we do our brother. Chang's idea made people have a higher understanding of their moral obligations, greatly improved their moral consciousness. Chang's theory has no religious utilitarian purpose, and it is based on cosmology to discuss benevolence and seek benevolence. This idea transcends the thinking mode of subject-object dichotomy and makes people's moral behavior have cosmological significance.

5. How to combine Confucianism with Marxism?

Confucianism is the mainstream ideology and superstructure of ancient China. After experiencing modern social changes, Marxism is the mainstream ideology of today China's society. How to organically combine history and the present, and organically combine Confucianism with Marxism, are the issues of the times that we want to address. As analyzed above, Confucianism not only provides rich spiritual resources for the Chinese in history, but also constructs a sense of civilization based on common historical practice. That is the solid foundation of Chinese cultural self-confidence. It is necessary to combine Confucianism with the basic principles of Marxism at present.

As an important thought of Western economics, politics and sociology, Marxism has a rigorous logical system and objective knowledge system. Obviously, Marxism has played an important role in the period of China's socialist revolution, construction and reform. The past experience has proofed that, the universal mind and methodology of Marxism provide philosophical methods for Chinese people to understand and transform the world. However, Marxism is difficult to become the way of life of Chinese people, and even difficult to become the way of spiritual cultivation of the Chinese. It is exactly where traditional Chinese culture, especially Confucianism, should play a role. Using the three "main cords" and eight "minor wires" of *The Great Learning* to make a distinction, Marxism is an effective philosophical guidance for understanding the world through observation and investigation. But Confucianism is a cultural resource for Chinese people to cultivate their minds, rectify their mind and be sincere, and nurture their life realm. Confucianism is about the order of human relations. In this sense, it is also the soft power for Chinese people to cultivate them own selves, regulate their families, order well their own states and manifest illustrious virtue throughout the world. However, the economics and politics of Marxism lead China out of moral idealism. In new era, China combines Marxism with the nation's development and Innovates new social governance pattern and economic development methods.

The Confucian concept of a harmonious world and Marxist communism both reflect the aspirations of humans in different times and nations for a better world. "All roads lead to Rome, and all thoughts converge to one," meaning that there are many paths to the same goal.

6. Conclusion

Today we carry out creative transformation and innovative development of Confucianism from the following aspects: First, China respects objective knowledge, and develop science and technology in a realistic manner. Second, China carries forward the moral principles and philosophical ideas that regulate interpersonal relationships in Confucianism, and abandons the cumbersome etiquette system and the social norms that solidify the hierarchy. Third, we should go beyond the mode of dualistic opposition and draw wisdom and methods of life cultivation from Chinese philosophy to obtain spiritual transcendence.

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