

Specificity of the Ancient Chinese Worldview and the Place of Person in It

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes anthropological ideas in ancient Chinese philosophy, using Taoism and Confucianism as examples. The authors question the established stereotype of diminishing the personal element in Chinese culture. The inadequacy of its study based on Western conceptual apparatus and methodology is asserted. The anthropological character of Chinese philosophical culture is emphasized, and its principles, expressed in a peculiar way already in pre-philosophy, in Taoism and Confucianism, are revealed. It is pointed out that the principles of the construction of the universe, the Celestial Empire, and the implementation of human behavior (naturalness, non-violence, respect, etc.) can be regarded as salutary for modern civilization. It is not for nothing that many philosophers and cultural creators turn to the wealthiest and most valuable heritage of ancient China. In cinematography, for example, Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986) borrowed many of his ideas from Taoism. The authors conduct a comparative analysis of the spiritual teachings of ancient China with the Gospel truths.

Keywords: *Tarkovsky, Anthropology, Confucianism, Tao, Heaven, Naturalness, Inaction, Benevolence.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Chinese culture and civilization are among the oldest known globally, unique due to the autonomy, consistency, and duration of development. Researchers note that the formation of Chinese statehood - the political basis of this civilization - has been taking place since the Xia dynasty (21st – 16th centuries B.C.) [1].

Ancient Chinese culture is quite specific. A researcher will not grasp it, based on the Western Weltanschauung. To come closer to understanding, the following should be taken into account:

- There is no concept of a Creator and faith in their Western, theistic understanding in Chinese culture.
- In the Chinese language, there is no the concept of "being." The language, as it is known, defines worldview, world understanding itself.

- In China, there is no concept of philosophy as a doctrine of being. The task is not to comprehend being, but not to fall out of it, to live in it (a kind of cosmocentrism).

It is also commonly assumed that ancient Chinese culture does not express a sense and notion of personality. We want to emphasize that this is a strictly Western view of things, coming from theistic personalism or a New European individualism. Personality is simply represented differently, plays a different role. It does not stick out, does not oppose itself to the other and nature, but instead seeks to integrate itself into the cosmic rhythms, merge with the Tao, follow the precepts of Heaven (Tian), to find harmony with the outside world. There is no place here for New European subjectivism. Chinese scholars note that the anthropological maxim of ancient Chinese philosophical teachings attributes a unique role to man: "Among all living beings, the most spiritual is man" (Yang Zhu, 5th – 4th centuries B.C.). Thus, man is the principal bearer of spiritual essence in ancient Chinese culture: it is anthropomorphically centered. Ancient Chinese philosophy is practical

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and ethically oriented, and its provisions are intuitive and lifelike [2].

At the same time, like other cultures of antiquity, ancient Chinese philosophy is characterized by cosmocentrism, the identity of man and Heaven: "Heaven and man are one, Heaven and man are mutually overcome ("influence each other") [3]. This cult was formed in Ancient China in the 11th – 3rd centuries B.C.: Heaven is thought of as a certain higher, non-personalized origin rewarding good and evil (in Russian, the analogy is seen in the poetic expression of the heavens, "the heavens are speechless"). This is why it is said that there is no religion as faith in China because one can only believe in that which is transcendent and incomprehensible. Heaven, on the other hand, is always above us; just lift your head. The ruler was called the "son of Heaven," who must strictly follow its precepts.

The primary philosophical schools in ancient China are Taoism and Confucianism. However, let us begin our analysis with the highly developed pre-philosophical culture in ancient China, which largely predetermined the quest for the first philosophers.

2. MAN IN THE PRE-PHILOSOPHICAL CULTURE OF ANCIENT CHINA

In ancient China, its mythological culture, *zoomorphism*, was widely represented, for example, in the myth of the ancestor of *Nuwa*, a half-human half-snake (or dragon). The myth of the universal man *Pan Gu* was also developed. The idea of the unity of micro- and macrocosm – *anthropomorphism* – prevailed. But as *Pan Gu* grew, there was a natural separation of the sky from the earth. In the later interpretation, *Pan Gu* already acts as a demiurge.

There are also known myths about some watery Chaos in which everything was like a chicken egg and the image of a world tree representing cosmic verticality. The five elements were Fire, Air, Wood, Earth, and Metal. The *forefathers* acted as cultural heroes, based on belief in which a whole cult developed (*Huangdi – Yellow Emperor*), *Fuxi* (*Paoxi*), and others. The destruction of the norms of tribal life was accompanied by the fall of human spirituality from the middle position in the culture. Human freedom and unparalleled activity destroyed the original harmony. It was necessary to replace it

with individual moral norms to restore order. This task was called to be performed by the perfect sages (*Zhenren*): "Heaven and earth create metamorphosis and change, the Perfect Persons copy them."

So Fuxi, focusing on celestial and earthly images, echoed the natural process of change of the Celestial Empire, made a graphic mirror - trigrams:

"In ancient times, Paoxi was the wang of the Celestial Empire.

Looking up, he contemplated images in the sky,

He looked down - and contemplated images on the earth.

He contemplated the patterns of birds and beasts and earthly semblances.

From this he began to create the eight trigrams...

To qualify the properties of the darkness of things" [4].

The trigrams created by Fuxi are *yin-yang* formations, occupying an intermediate place between nature and man-made things. *I Ching* rhythimized and coordinated the functioning of all systems of the natural and human parts of the world according to the algorithm of the universal cosmic genetic code. It stored in itself the cultural genotype of Celestial Empire's Tao and tuned the course of its life to the natural rhythms of this genotype. In this way, the balance between man and nature was restored.

The basic concepts of the Chinese worldview as formulated in the *I Ching* are:

- *Yang*: sky, south, masculine, light, hard, hot, success.
- *Yin*: earth, north, feminine, dark, soft, cold.

Combining them three by three, we get eight variations – trigrams (and six by six – 64 hexagrams).

In general, we may present the following scheme of the dialectical unfolding of the world in the archaic view of the Chinese people, which shows that the cosmos is born out of chaos in an attempt at ordering:

- 1. *Wuji*, or the Infinite.
- 2. *Tai Chi*, or the Great Ultimate.
- 3. *Liangyi*, or the differentiation of the world into yin and yang.

- 4. *Sixiang*, or the origin of elements, the interpenetration of *yin* and *yang* (full-fledged symbol of Tao).
- 5. *Bagua*, or the Eight Trigrams.
- 6. Sixty-four hexagrams or the origin of the darkness of things.
- 7. All the diversity of the countless forms of the universe.

Thus, the first attempt of spiritual restoration, harmonization of the Celestial Empire, is recorded in *I Ching*. The second one connected with the philosophical concepts of harmonization of the Celestial Empire. Since the graphic and hieroglyphic spirals of *I Ching* summarize two series of phenomena – "natural" and "man-made," two types of philosophical subjects had to be born in this bosom with necessity: "natural man" (Taoist, horizontal dimension), and "political man" (Confucianist, vertical dimension), which assume the beginnings of the two philosophical teachings of the pacification of the Celestial Empire [5]. Their ultimate goal is to achieve the lost unity of man with nature (Taoism) and ancestors (Confucianism), building a society of "general welfare." Ideologically directed, they have a single source in *I Ching* and represent the desired holistic unified worldview.

3. MAN IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF TAOISM

The name *Lao Tzu* is sometimes translated as the "Ancient Child," for only in early childhood (not yet "spoiled" by society) and perhaps in old age (having accumulated life experience and acquired knowledge) can one possess wisdom. The *Tao* can be thought of as the spontaneous law of the development of the whole universe. "The *Tao* that can be described is not the enduring and unchanging *Tao*" (§1) – is Tao Te Ching's opening statement. Lao Tzu admits that he does not know whose generation it is. He merely knows that "it precedes the heavenly ruler": "Man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from the *Tao*. The law of the *Tao* is its being what it is" (§25). The *Tao* is hollow and empty. It can be defined as nothingness, emptiness, which gives rise to all things: "The *Tao* is (like) the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fullness. How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the Honoured Ancestor of all things!" (§4) [6]. It is immanent to

both the cosmos and man; it is non-personalized: it has no features of an "omnipotent" one.

The most essential principles of Tao's realization, directly related to man and his behavior, include the following: *naturalness* – *ziran* (only in the *yin-yang* harmonious rhythm, which is *ziran*, real self-development, or spontaneous changes are realized, and true freedom is attained. While individualization leads to anarchy, falling out of Tao, war of all against all); *non-violence*; *inaction* (*wu wei*, in Christianity it corresponds to the following the will of God, and not one's egoism), *spontaneity*; *unlearning*; *constancy* (*chang*) ("Return to the essence is called constancy"). A.E. Lukyanov reveals not psychological, but the ontological meaning of this principle: "In the knowledge of constancy, i.e., in enlightenment, the whole essence of space, social and natural being of the Celestial Empire accommodate. Knowledge of permanence, with its reasonable enlightenment, overlaps scholarship. The latter has no place here. There is no place for it to take root because things are created by themselves, not under the influence of active human creativity..." [7]. The following principles include *impassivity* (in all spiritual traditions, the sage is endowed with this quality), *stillness* (compare with hesychasm in Eastern Christianity); *non-service*, and others.

The person who puts into action the principles of the Tao is the perfect sage, who "manages affairs without doing anything" (§ 2). "Therefore the sage holds in his embrace the one thing (of humility), and manifests it to all the world. He is free from self-display, and therefore he shines; from self-assertion, and therefore he is distinguished; from self-boasting, and therefore his merit is acknowledged; from self-complacency, and therefore he acquires superiority. It is because he is thus free from striving that therefore no one in the world can strive with him" (§ 22). Later, the *Tao* is already interpreted as "heavenly will" and "pure nothingness."

According to A.E. Lukyanov, "Taoist philosophy opposes the philosophy of civilization," and "Lao Tzu's Tao is not comprehended in book learning. One grows into Tao in the process of spiritual cosmic life." According to a contemporary Russian Chinese scholar, "The Tao serves as the basis for all directions, schools, and teachings of ancient Chinese philosophy. All of them come from the same culture of Tao, only depending on their objectives and methods of recreating harmony in

the Celestial Empire they define the original Tao and interpret it in their own way" [8].

Interestingly, the ideas of Taoism influenced the cinematic work of Russian cinematographer Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986). Thus, *Stalker*, having entered the Zone, prays alone and reads a passage from *Tao Te Ching*: "When a man is just born, he is weak and flexible. When he dies, he is hard and insensitive". Authentic strength lies in the tenderness and malleability that *Stalker* demonstrates [9]. He acts through persuasion, truth, not force. As with Alexander Nevsky, here, the power is in the truth, not in violence. Modern civilization, which often solves problems through violence against nature and man, looks doomed.

The image of children present in each of Tarkovsky's films is not accidental. Even if they are not the main characters, they can play a vital role in the films. After all, children are weak and vulnerable, but they can serve as a symbol of strength and purity, as saviors of the world. It is as if Tarkovsky is proceeding from the famous Lao Tzu's quote: "He who keeps within himself the depth of perfection is like a newborn baby." Here both Taoism and Christianity proceed from the same understanding: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven," says the Gospel (Matthew 18:3). "Becoming as a child" is something of an ideal of Tarkovsky's. In his movies, we always see "unusual" children. In his other film – *Solaris*, an astronaut discovers a "giant baby" in space; in *Stalker*, a *Stalker*'s daughter possesses paranormal abilities and has no legs; in *Nostalghia*, there is an angelic girl whom Gorchakov sees in a pool; there is a boy in *The Sacrifice* who persistently waters a dead tree and waits for it to return to life [10].

In Tarkovsky's cinematic world, the moral personality manifests itself naturally as human nature. It is connected to the perception of nature, life, and the universe. This concept is very close to the Taoist worldview. Tarkovsky believed that both art and truth originate in the creator's nature: "It is wrong to say that the artist 'seeks' his theme. The theme matures in him like some fruit, begins to demand its expression. It is like childbirth. The poet has nothing to be proud of - he is not the master of the situation; he is a servant. Creativity for him is the only possible form of existence" [11]. We may say that Spiritual cognition unfolds the essence of man and "unpacks personal meanings" [12].

There is no direct good vs. evil conflict in Tarkovsky's films, let alone an ending in which good triumphs. This is not to say that he did not believe in good. Tarkovsky's pursuit of goodness is as vigorous as his pursuit of truth and artistic beauty. The understanding of virtue as water in Taoism was close to Tarkovsky's: being in a state of naturalness and impassivity, the perfect sage is virtuous and makes no mistakes.

Taoist thought undoubtedly had a significant influence on the filmmaker's reflections on the ultimate fate of humanity. According to Tarkovsky, materialism has perverted people's perception of "truth" and "beauty," but Taoism can help man rediscover himself, restore his true nature, and finally get out of the spiritual crisis of modern man and humanity.

4. THE SPECIFICS OF THE CONFUCIAN VISION OF MAN AND SOCIETY

There is a legend that Lao Tzu met Confucius, his younger contemporary (at the request of the latter), but they did not understand each other. However, "the confrontation between the ideas of Confucius and Lao Tzu enabled Chinese thinkers to develop and compare the social and biological aspects of notions of personality" [14].

As A.I. Kobzev notes, "One of the fundamental problems of traditional Chinese philosophy, especially Confucianism, was the problem of human nature – *ren xing*" [15]. In contrast to Taoism, Confucius offered his recipe for salvation: one must return everything to its original state, i.e., "rectify the names" – *zheng ming* (正名), returning to their original meaning through observance of rituals (recall that in Christianity the devil is a "liar, and the father of it," John 8:44). Confucianism emerged not as a religion but as social and ethical teaching. In essence, Confucius created a "social religion." Whereas Taoism was primarily a mystical philosophy of nature, Confucianism was a socio-ethical concept. Taoism was too profound and challenging to understand, available only to a select few, whereas humans needed simple and straightforward moral norms. Confucianism fulfilled that need.

A.E. Lukyanov describes the difference between Taoism and Confucianism as follows:

"Both sages proceed from the same cultural basis of Tao but choose different archetypal

components of it. Lao Tzu bases his teaching on the horizontal Tao archetype and the lower (earthly) limit, Confucius – on the vertical and the upper (heavenly) limit. As represented by Taoism and Confucianism, ancient Chinese philosophy can be called a restorative-creative type of consciousness. In philosophy, Taoism and Confucianism "pull" in different directions, but within the archetype of Tao culture, they constitute a unity" [16].

The genesis of Tao in Lao Tzu and Confucius is entirely different. The former has cosmogenic foundations, and the latter has anthropogenic ones. Lao Tzu's Tao is born spontaneously, while a human subject actively creates Confucius's Tao. Hence, different harmonization methods of the Celestial Empire are outlined: for Lao Tzu - through the Tao of natural space, for Confucius - through the Tao of social space" [17]. Confucian worldview is based on the concept of *Heaven* and fate – *ming*. The following principles are adoration of antiquity, respect for precedence, and adherence to rituals.

Confucius is a historical figure, can be considered a kind of prophet of Confucianism, only his prophecy is not of a personal God, but impersonal *Heaven*. "I know the will of Heaven ["知天命"], – he said of himself, – I transmit but do not create; I believe in antiquity and love it" ["述而不作, 信而好古"], I transmit the dictates of Heaven. Heaven, on the other hand, determines the law of things – the fate of everything: "Everything is originally predetermined by fate" ("生死有命, 富贵在天") [18].

The state in Confucianism must be built according to the principle of the patriarchal family, where the emperor (*wang*) is the "Son of Heaven," followed by a hierarchy of officials and ordinary communes. Confucius was not a revolutionary here but rather a conservative. His reference to the past, however, was to the future. He did not seek to break the existing order, but to humanize it as much as possible and bring it to justice: "If you nominate just people and eliminate the unjust, the people will obey"; "Basic principles: "loyalty to the sovereign and care for the people, nothing else." And if "the upper echelons follow *li* rules in affairs, the commoners will be obedient." "Live in the family, honor your elders; being in the service, be loyal to the sovereign" [19].

Confucius, for the first time in human history, proclaimed the "golden rule of morality" ("what you do not wish for yourself, do not do for others"

– "己所不欲, 勿施于人") and developed the concept of a "man of noble character" (*jun zi*, 君子). The golden rule of morality is also voiced in the Gospel, but as a minimum of morality ("Abstain from all appearance of evil"). There it is continued and deepened, "and do good." Kant transforms it into a "categorical imperative," but without mentioning Confucius. However, Kant's morality is lifeless since it lacks the metaphysical foundations and worldview justifications (postulates) present in both Confucius and the Gospel.

Ren (仁), "benevolence," is the most crucial ethical category of Confucianism: "Venerating parents and brotherly love are *ren*'s basis." He gave priority to moral education and developed a whole system of it ("They begin education with poetry, consolidate it by studying the rules of *li* and complete it with ritual music" – "兴于诗, 立于礼, 成于乐"), as well as examinations for aspiring officials. Mencius developed Confucius' notions (c. 372-289 B.C.), teaching first of all about the "policy of benevolence" (*ren zheng*, 仁政): "The most valuable thing in a country is the people, then comes power." For him, as for Dostoevsky, the sense of charity (*ai ren*) (仁爱) is "the basis of humanity" and social life. The doctrine, on the other hand, "has only one purpose - to seek out the lost nature of man" [20]. Thus, we see that man and his virtue, the determination of his harmonious place in society, are central to Confucianism.

5. CONCLUSION

Taoism and Confucianism are essentially the foundation of China's spiritual culture and civilization both in ancient times and today. From the global perspective, China's maximum task is to build a "welfare society," a "spiritual civilization" that incorporates the best of its millennia-long heritage. The task is to create a "new man" based on the *putting people first* thesis (*yi ren wei ben*). These tasks require the development of such a science as cultural and civilizational anthropology. In this regard, the authors sought to uncover anthropological themes in China's pre-philosophical culture and its primary schools - Taoism and Confucianism. It is also seems to us actual and necessary because of the "enhancing anthropological crisis in modern geopolitical situation and growing existential tension", that "reactualize anthropological problems" [21].

Taoism teaches the art of ruling through *inaction*. The whole concept can be summed up in one phrase from Tao Te Ching: "In the highest antiquity, (the people) did not know that there were (their rulers)." The ruler from the Tao "manages affairs without doing anything, and conveys his instructions without the use of speech" (§2). When the Hobbesian war of all against all was going on in ancient society, the generic foundations of life and taboos had collapsed, and new social norms had not yet been created, proper metaphysics had to be developed to justify them. "The Tao Regime," what Lao Tzu proposes, has virtually no counterpart in either spiritual or socio-political theory and life. Power is not established from above but grows spontaneously from the implementation of the principles of the Tao: "The methods of governance are not invented. They are immanent to the Tao," and the perfect sage, while in power, "only observes the Great Reign." His function is purely nominal – he is needed to restore the "power of powerlessness." His vertical of power is only an essential repetition of the horizontal, "the horizontal in a spiral" [22].

Here is how to poetically describe this process using the water symbolics: "Water is dispersed in the horizontal ring of *yin* by the rotating dome of Heaven. It spreads over the walls of the vessel of the Celestial, ascends to the upper celestial limit." Lao Tzu actively uses the symbol of water in the construction of the dialectic of Tao, in socio-political doctrine, and even in ethics. The Taoist ruler fulfills his function only when he follows the "waterway," without being exalted and without being exasperated. If he stumbles, he is immediately overthrown by the "water current." The essence of such a rule is to "connect the Celestial to constancy, goodness, and naturalness. Follow nature, – says Lao Tzu, – then constancy will suppress passions and knowledge and restore non-activity, which ensures the Tao rule." The purpose of the ruler is only to eradicate human evil, stop the violence, return the Celestial Empire to naturalness: "It comes naturally and spontaneously, as the perfect man, who breathes the chaos of the Celestial Empire with his heart." The main thing here is not to interfere with the realization of naturalness in the function of self-subordination and self-government of things under Heaven. This is the method of "the self-subordination of things." Still, it does not exclude the controlling function of guaranteeing "the spontaneous development of things and the quietly impassioned self-assertion of the Celestial Empire." But it is, at the same time,

"Tao's uncontrolled control," exercised spontaneously [23].

However, the Taoist apotheosis of ruling through inaction malfunctioned. The higher aristocracy and the common people failed to grasp the idea of the Tao. It was expressed not so much in the social structure of society as in art, artistic and poetic creativity.

This is where Confucianism comes to the rescue, developing simple and clear norms of behavior enshrined in ritual. Social life is governed by a hierarchical principle analogous to the patriarchal family. At the same time, man is the alpha and omega in both Taoism and Confucianism. The entire work of both Lao Tzu and Confucius is devoted to determining his place in the Tao, in the Celestial Empire. We can confidently speak of the anthropological nature of ancient Chinese culture and the expression of man's concept in its fundamental philosophical teachings.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Authors' contribution to writing of the article is equal. Nizhnikov Sergei gave comparative analysis, wrote about features of Taoism and Confucianism. Yang Zheng investigated features of pre-philosophical culture of old China and provided comparative analysis of Tarkovsky's creativity with Taoism.

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