

The Evolution and Adjustment of Chinese Traditional Core Values

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Abstract—The inheriting of Chinese civilization is coming down in one continuous line, Chinese traditional culture is a integration from the Pre-Qin Period to early Qing dynasties, and the core values including “theory that man is an integral part of nature”, “patriotism”, “people oriented” and “unity of knowledge and action”, which leads to profound Chinese culture. From the First Opium War to establishment of China, western culture spread in gradually, Chinese and Western cultures agitating and mixing, when Chinese traditional culture reached into the transition period and finally came into “Conflict-Reaction” modern cultural form, and the core values including “humanistic pragmatism”, “people oriented” and “all-embracing”. By the establishment of China, modern Chinese culture tends to absorb world view, so that “world spirit”, “theory that man is an integral part of nature” and “plural complementation” are added into the core values. The Unified consensus of modern society is based on social system and individual code of conduct, so that the tendency of Chinese culture which containing principle of equality will not only maintain in the level of survival but also opening for a higher level and being reflected by ethical norms.

Keywords—*Chinese traditional core values, world view, principle of equality*

I. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CLASSICAL FORMS

A. *The Theory That Man is an Integral Part of Nature*

Chinese traditional culture pursue “the theory that man is an integral part of nature” and take it as the supreme realm, and break the relation between human being and nature, then take nature and human being as a whole, which turned into the classical system thoughts that being through universe, social affair and life value, etc. The theory that man is an integral part of nature bud in the Western Zhou Dynasty and formed in Spring and Autumn and Warring Period; proposed by Dong Zhongshu in Han Dynasty; After Song Dynasty, accepted by various ideologists. Based on their own standpoint, different factions gave different concrete explanation to the thought, even being opposite. Among those explanation, there being “Telepathy between man and nature”, represented by Dong Zhongshu; “Natural theory of heaven”, proposed by Confucius, Xunzi and Liu Yuxi; “the theory of mind and nature” which created by Mengzi and Confucians of Song Dynasty.

The theoretical essence of the theory that man is an integral part of nature is the unification between human and nature, spirit and nature. The basic meaning of this thought is to fully affirm the unity of nature and spirit, coordination between human behavior and nature. Engels said that: “The laws of

thought and those of nature must be consistent with each other as long as they are properly understood.”[1] These points reveal the unity of nature, unity of nature and spirit, unity of the law of nature and those of thought. In Chinese traditional core values, nature and human are considered as a whole, and nature exists before human, so people in ancient time advocated the harmonious relationship between man and nature, which seems reasonable from the point of modern science. This kind of thought is of great significance for understanding and dealing with environmental crisis, energy crisis and so on.

B. *Patriotism*

In Confucianism, the three-in-one ethical politics of family spirit, patriarchal spirit and political spirit is revealed mostly in traditional ethical spirit. This ideology, in which ethics and politics are directly identical, is the patriarchal principles that based on the family's kindship. Then it rised to the national political order. This is the unity of ethical politicization and political ethicization, which constitutes the complete ethical politics. Confucius said, “to run a country with morality wins the respect, circled by numerous other stars”. “On the courtesy, the people dare not to respect; on the righteousness, the people dare not accept; on the faith, the people dare not to love. If this is the case, then the people of the Quartet will live up with their sons.” On the other hand, political ethicization requires that the right of the ruling class is constrained by political and social ethics norms to a certain extent.

The spirit of Chinese classical patriotism is also embodied in its humanity or social outlook which is “etiquette integrating with benevolence”. If people can do as what etiquette requests, “A person who helps others to establish what he wishes to establish, and to achieve what he wishes to achieve.” “what you do not want yourself, don’t do to others.” “Don’t look at what is contrary to propriety; don’t listen to what is contrary to propriety; don’t speak what is contrary to propriety; don’t make movement which is contrary to propriety.” Norms and self-cultivation, rights and obligations, external control and inherent self-awareness naturally combine to achieve the ideal of “benevolence”. Courtesy spirit that adherences to the social order constitutes an important aspect of Chinese traditional patriotism.

C. *Peopleoriented*

First, the value system and the main content of traditional Chinese core values are always devoted to reveal the valuable goal of life, and to achieve people's self-worth. Examining

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things and distinguishing them from truth, we not only measure “whether it accords with the natural law” and “whether it is effective or not”, but also measure “whether it will be effective if implemented”. “Destiny” and “natural law” is the external theoretical framework of “human affairs”. “Human affairs” and human relationships also poured into the “natural law”, making it becomes the objectification of subject consciousness and the embodiment of the moral ration, which fully demonstrated the culture spirit of “people oriented”.

Secondly, in the traditional Chinese Confucian thought, the core of “people oriented” was the “life is the essence” principle. From the perspective of behavior and regulation, it regarded the “ensure life safety” and “provide basic life support” as the first principle of justice. From the perspective of value, life and survival were the most precious value. The value of life was not from the perspective of tool or means, but because life itself was precious. Confucius advocates that the principle of “The benevolent loves people”, and believes that it is necessary to practice benevolent government. This moral principle of “life is supreme” runs through the traditional Chinese society, which derives the doctrine of “benevolent government” and “kingdom” by opposing to “killing chickens and getting eggs” and “draining the pond to catch fish”.

Finally, the critique to absolute monarchical power. The reflection of Huang Zongxi toward “the lord is the minister” has reemphasized the “people oriented”. He believed that the people were the true master of the world and the society, and the ever-changing monarch was just a guest. In addition, he also pays attention to the distinction between “Ruler guides ministers”, and “Father guides sons” and opposes to the joint name of “the thought of monarch-ministers relationship”. The approach shifting “filial piety” to “loyalty” may lead to the dangerous situation of over-aggrandizing the private and political spheres.

D. Unity of Knowledge and Action

The Chinese classical theory of “knowledge” and “action” includes a variety of theoretical perspectives. The first emphasizes the “action” in ethics category. In the *Analects of Confucius*, “knowledge” has two meanings, one is “smartness”, which means virtue and wisdom. The wise man is the man who has wisdom and the morality. The other is the “understanding”, which means the understanding to human and things. For “action”, Confucius puts forward the program of “when all this is done and there is time for other things, they should use it for the study of the classics.” For example, LaoZi believes that “knowing everything without going out”, he realized that “action” was much important than “knowledge”.

In addition, unity of knowledge and action in epistemology category. Xunzi introduced “action” into the epistemology, inherits and developed Confusions’ empiricism of “wisdom obtained by studies”, emphasizing that “action” is more important than “knowledge”. Xunzi said, “What you hear is better than what you are not hear; what you see is better than what you hear; What you know is better than what you see; what you do is better than what you know”.[2] He underlined that the systematic knowledge came from the contact to the outside world of the organ. People’s knowledge was from the accumulation of study and experience. Mo-tse put forward the

functional significance of behavior in the process of understanding. He says that “exploring the past of the ancient emperor, hearing from the people’s voice”, “observing whether it complies with the interests of the country and people”, and regarding these three principles as the standards to measure the value of knowledge. At the time of Ming and Qing dynasty, Wang Fuzhi established a more complete doctrine of “unity of knowledge and action”. He clearly puts forward that “action” is ahead of “knowledge”, and from “action” to “knowledge”, “knowledge is not the first, and action is not the second, when all this is done and there is time for other things, they should use it for the study of knowledge”, “you can gain the knowledge by action, but you can’t gain action by knowledge.” We can see that Wang Fuzhi affirmed that the importance of “action”.

II. DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE CULTURAL MODERNIZATION BASED ON CONFLICT-REACTION

A. Humanistic Pragmatism—Chinese Essence and Western Utility

Humanistic pragmatism inherited the tradition of “unity of knowledge and action”. The practical science of Ming and Qing Dynasties opposed academic research away from social reality, emphasized that academic research should be connected with real politics and advocated the spirit of Humanistic pragmatism. Humanistic pragmatism was further confirmed and developed in modern times, embodying in “opening the eyes to observe the world” and “learning foreign technology”.

At the mercy of the Humanistic pragmatism, Wei Yuan put forward “learning foreign technology”, Zeng Guofan put forward “to achieve self-improvement, we should urgently deal with improving politics and seeking men of virtue and talents, and then learn to make cannon and build ships”[3]. The natural logic of these proposals is to extend Chinese practical research to Western practical research. Based on Wei Yuan’s “learning foreign technology”, Feng Guifen, an early reformist, systematically discussed the necessity, urgency and feasibility of learning from the west, and the basic principles of dealing with the cultural relations between China and the west in his book named *The Protest of Jiabinlu*. Feng Guifen said “treating Chinese ethics as essential, supplementing other countries’ methods of becoming prosperous”[4], which was summed up as “Chinese essence and western utility”. “Chinese essence and western utility” was popular in period of 1860s to 1890s. On the one hand, it advocates that using the Chinese traditional system and spiritual culture as the basis for governing the country. On the other hand, it advocates that using Western modern science and technology and material culture as an auxiliary means to govern the country.

B. Humanoriented—From Individual Liberation to Popular Belief

In 1920s, the pioneers of the New Culture Movement proposed new values and moral ideas, took “individualism, science and democracy” as the slogan. The basic point is “weighing the value of men” and establishing “independent personality”. But the political enlightenment at that time was a national salvation movement under the background of national

crisis, so it didn't pay much attention to individual liberation. The fundamental task changed into awakening the consciousness of people and enabling most citizens to fulfill their independent freedoms until the New Cultural Movement.[5] The call for individual liberation was becoming increasingly intense and had a profound impact.

On the basis of criticizing the theory of "total Westernization" and "Chinese standard culture", Chinese Marxists regarded building the "national scientific popular culture" as the correct direction for the development of China's new culture. This assertion was put forward by Mao Zedong in 1940. Similarly, Lu Xun put forward the slogan of "popular literature in the national and revolutionary War" in 1936. And this new literary slogan also had general cultural significance. The public was democratic, be showed in enabling people to enjoy cultural rights and master grasp cultural knowledge. It unified the democratic consciousness and the mass viewpoint, and more clearly defined the nature and the development direction of new culture.

C. All-embracing—World Outlook

Facing the invasion and challenge of the West, we should keep a foothold of Chinese traditional culture, establish the self-respect and self-confidence of the national culture, stimulate the psychological identification of the national culture, and safeguard the survival and independence of the nation. We would also meet the challenges of the new era, reflect and criticize the traditional culture, which is an antinomy. Kang Youwei emphasized that "breaking the boundary between China and the Weston"[6]. Yan Fu further pointed out that "we must be able to take a broad view and think of the future, revise it, and view it as a new one."[7] Sun Yat-sen proposed that "promote my own culture, and absorb the world's culture and make it great, in order to keep pace with all nations."[8]. Mao Zedong further explained "China should absorb a large amount of foreign progressive culture as the raw material for its own cultural food", "everything what we find useful today should be absorbed"[9].

Chinese traditional culture became increasingly popular after 1920s, which was the inevitable result of the deepening debate between Chinese and Western culture. After the May 4th Movement, the debate between Chinese culture and Western culture was becoming increasingly fierce and deepening. The pain of the western war caused worldwide introspection of Western cultural trends; Accordingly, the Chinese people began to re-examine the development and rejuvenation of the traditional culture. Chinese ideology had gradually been influenced by the concept of national equality in the modern sense. Great changes have taken place in ideology and mode of thinking. The idea that emphasized argumentative philosophy and disrespecting the arts was abandoned, and replaced it with a certain degree of emphasis on craftsmanship, and put forward the idea of learning western skills and scientific knowledge, so that scientific idea was introduced into Chinese ideology, which provided a strong vitality for the modernization of Chinese traditional core values.

III. THE BASIC TREND OF MODERN CHINESE CULTURE WITH WORLD CONCEPT

A. Concept of Wholism and Harmonious Spirit

The traditional Chinese core values itself is the holism value concept which contains the essential connotation and essence of globalization; it is of positive significance to promote the development of globalization in the contemporary era. The wholism concept of Chinese traditional core values is mainly embodied in the ideas of "the whole world as one community" and "pantisocracy". Among them, the whole humanity does not distinguish poverty or wealth, and are full of true freedom, equal idea and spirit, which is the most precious thing in the core of globalization, and might be worth inheriting and carrying forward.

The wholism concept of Chinese traditional core values is also embodied in domestic and foreign policies such as "harmony is precious", "neighborliness" and "making all nations live together peacefully", which are the basic values of the Chinese people in dealing with human relations and national relations, and the basic principle for the Chinese people to handle state relations as well. And its prerequisite and fundamental guarantee is to oppose the aggressive war and safeguard national unity.

B. The Theory That Man is an Integral Part of Nature

Toynbee, An English civilized historian, mentioned in his book *Man and Mother Earth -- A Narrative History of the World*, that "human beings have ideas, so he interacts with spirit in mysterious experience, and it is the same as the spiritual reality of the non-world." [10] Therefore, unlike the "nature" of material, there is the "nature" of spiritual. Kant highly praised the vast sky. Einstein awed the mystery and harmony of space. The Chinese ancients also have the tradition of offering sacrifice to nature. The "nature" spirit that transcends human factors also plays a supreme position in the human value belief system and often has an overarching meaning.

Facing to modern society, people have diverse forms of belief and the state of objects, and "the theory that man is an integral part of nature" also presents two new characteristics. One is to get rid of anthropocentrism or egoism, realizing the limitations of human beings in human body, intellectuality, morality and well-being, awing something that transcend the existence of humans or others. The other is a reflection of human beings, not only taking pity on the misery of the disadvantaged and moral misery of the advantaged group, but also introspecting the moral evils which do not realize because of lacking opportunities. So we must seek some moral common ground, that is, there are basic norms and codes of conduct in any reasonable belief system. For example, the "World Ethics" was launched and promoted by Western Christians like Hans; global religious philosophy of "All rivers flow to the sea" was proposed by Chinese scholar He Guanghu.

C. Harmony in Diversity and Plural Complementation

Globalization process should reflect the justice, prosperity and happiness of globalization, not the justice, prosperity and happiness of minority groups or countries and their communities. Although the production mode, the economic

system and the political system are converging, ethnic characteristics and cultural traditions are diverse. "Harmony in diversity" means opposing unitary homogenization, opposing conflicts and confrontations of different things, advocating respect for differences and plural complementation, which contributes to sustainable development of diversity. Different nationalities and countries' history, institutions, religions and cultures all have their own unique interpretations, so all countries should recognize and respect this difference, seek common ground while reserving differences. The modern implication of "harmony in diversity" is mainly a principle dealing with the relationship between different ethnic cultures in the era of economic globalization. Each country should not only identify with its own culture, but also treat other ethnic cultures with a broad and tolerant spirit so as to have a consensus and understanding of differences in the dialogue, gradually toward pluralistic harmony of human civilization.

IV. THE FUTURE TREND OF CHINESE CULTURE BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUALITY

The future trend of Chinese culture is the principle of equality. In a hierarchical society, morality is divided into two parts. The gentleman fulfills the true morality and sets an example for the people. The public is influenced by the gentleman to form a good moral trend. The essence of traditional morality is of an elite nature. The new moral principles in an egalitarian society must be geared to all members of society, requiring broad masses of people to participate in politics with equal power. Therefore, the consensus in contemporary society must be based on social institutions and norms of individual behavior. Accordingly, the culture principle of equality should not only be implemented at the basic existence level, but also be opened to a higher level and reflected through ethical norms.

The culture which consisting of the equality principle should be different from religious belief, humanistic value belief system, and its character should be non-ideology, which means it has its own principle, rule and standard. It is independent of politics, and more permanent than politics. The culture which consisting of the equality principle is not special personality norms, but generally applicable norms to all

members of society, so it should be general. Taking patriotism as example, modern patriotism should be sensible which distinguish from traditional patriotism. Tocqueville argues that the patriotism is different from the love of monarchs. People must actually get involved in the management of state affairs and get actual exercise of political power, and make them feel that they are the owner of this country. This is "the most powerful means and even be the only way that we can make everyone care about motherland's destiny." [11].

A complete understanding of the entire Chinese traditional culture, a profound grasp of the stipulations and basic characteristics of traditional Chinese culture, and in-depth exploration of the unique spirit of traditional Chinese culture, which will help transform the advantages of the Chinese national worthy cultural resources into cultural soft power. The implicit soft power of Chinese culture is transformed into the dominant national cultural soft power. So, from the perspective of history, we will examine the evolution and formation, sum up experience and achievements, and promote the awareness of carrying forward the fine traditional culture to enhance the national cultural soft power.

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