

## On the Characteristics of Confucian Moral Education in Pre-Qin Dynasty

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**ABSTRACT.** *Confucianism first appeared as an education system. Pre-Qin Confucianism emphasizes the value of human beings, fully affirms the initiative of people in moral pursuit, attaches importance to cultivating people's moral self-discipline, and promotes moral education from the aspects of mind and body cultivation theory and moral practice.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Confucianism; moral education; cultivation; moral practice;*

Pre-Qin Confucianism emphasizes the value of human beings, attaches importance to human moral self-discipline, and promotes moral education from both the theory of physical and mental cultivation and the practice of moral practice.

Confucianism first appeared as an educational system. During the Western Zhou Dynasty, the government set up two kinds of schools: national school and rural school. In the Eastern Zhou Dynasty, wars broke out frequently, and the unified system began to collapse nationwide. The princes set up their own official schools, and some capable civilians were also absorbed and cultivated by official schools. Confucianism represented by Confucius also emerged in the same period. Confucius himself advocated expanding the scope of educational objects and put forward the idea of “make no social distinctions in teaching”, and put it into practice, which has a pioneering function in promoting the education for ordinary people in ancient China.

Different from theistic religion, Confucian moral education is people-oriented, and the way of moral realization is based on people's moral will and moral cultivation. The core of Confucian morality is “benevolence”, which is the embodiment of people-oriented. Confucius thought that man can make the Tao carry forward, not the Tao makes man's ability expand, and “benevolence” can be achieved: “Is Rende far away? I want to do good for benevolence, then benevolence will come naturally!”[1]. It fully affirms people's initiative in moral pursuit. Although Mencius and Xunzi have different views on the theory of human nature, they believe that the moral cultivation of ordinary people can also reach the realm of saints. Mencius believed that “all human beings can be Yao and Shun”. Even Xunzi, who holds the theory of evil nature, affirmed the necessity and feasibility of

improving moral cultivation through the education and norms of the acquired benevolence and righteousness, etiquette and law. He said, “ordinary people on the road can become Yu” [2], because “ordinary people on the road can know the essence of benevolence and righteousness, and they can all have the tools of benevolence and righteousness.”. Although from the possibility, people have the potential to become saints, but in reality, people always have their shortcomings. How to ensure the consciousness and effectiveness of moral cultivation? Confucianism also contains the belief factor, and its thought also plays a function similar to Religion in some periods. But generally speaking, Confucianism cultivates moral character mainly through the education of thought and behavior rather than theological belief. Confucianists abide by the principle of “by paying attention to ethics, we can make people's behavior conform to civilized etiquette.” in Zhouyi. Their values are based on the “Immanent Transcendent” of human beings. Their practice of cultivation focuses on the self-cultivation of social ethics. Confucian ethics is characterized by people-oriented.

The new Confucians use “Immanent Transcendent” to describe the characteristics of Chinese thought or Confucianism. Confucianism was rooted in the highly developed ideological and cultural soil in ancient China at the beginning of its emergence. The superior cultural ecology of the Pre-Qin period created a superb ideological system of Confucianism and Taoism. Confucianism adheres to the idea of “the unity of man and nature” which is carried out in the ontological, axiological, self-cultivation and other ideological levels. Mencius demonstrated the ontological basis of human's moral attribute and the necessity of moral cultivation with the progressive relationship of “Tao” -- “nature” -- “heart”: “To do one's own good is to realize one's own nature, to realize one's own nature is to understand destiny. To preserve one's goodness, to preserve one's nature, and to deal with destiny.”. The Doctrine of the Mean, the mean takes “sincerity” as the foundation of the internal unity of heaven and humanity: “sincerity is the law of heaven, and sincerity is the law of humanity.”. “Sincerity” is not honesty, but the law of reality, true and objectivity. But for people, “sincerity” is honesty and trustworthiness with moral attribute. As long as it is educated and guided, it can achieve the goal of improving self-cultivation and produce the effect of “daily innovation”.

There must be a practical mechanism of moral cultivation for the sustainable development of morality. There are many ways of Confucian cultivation, which are valuable experiences of the ancient moral development. Confucius summarized the cultivation of different stages of life as three key points: “There are three things a gentleman should take as a warning: when he is young, his blood is not mature, so he should give up temptation to all things; when his body is mature, his blood is just strong, he should give up fighting with others; when he is old, his blood is weak, he should give up greed.” Zengzi thought that there are three aspects of moral self-examination: “I have to do many self-reviews every day: Is my loyalty to the master? Am I working with my friends to be honest? Do I often review the things taught by the teacher?”. Through the way of “self-examination”, we should constantly strengthen moral consciousness. If he finds his own moral defects, he will consciously correct them to restore his inner moral ability, which Mencius called it

“peace of mind.” Mencius's “Qi Theory” is a typical representative of Chinese traditional culture theory, which has the methods of “keeping ‘night Qi’” and “cultivating noble spirit”. The greatest feature and function of this theory of cultivation is that it is both physical and mental, intuitive and effective. The Doctrine of the Mean has the method of training self-discipline - “consciously act according to moral requirements”. On the basis of absorbing the thoughts of Buddhism and Taoism, Confucianism in Song and Ming dynasties developed a more complete theory of Confucian cultivation, including the system of desire, scrupulously abiding by sincerity and respect, etc.

The cultivation of Confucian self-cultivation is based on the moral consciousness of the subject. If this consciousness is not of universal significance, then its effect is also limited. In fact, Confucianism also uses the means of faith to carry out education, although this way is not the main means. Confucius didn't talk about the mysterious phenomena such as ghosts and spirits, but he advocated sacrifice, because “careful treatment of the death of parents and the pursuit of long-standing ancestors will naturally lead to the loyalty and honesty of the people.”. The social and cultural ecology of ancient China determines the extremely important position of the Confucian classic Zhouyi in the moral construction of ancient China. The moral function of Zhouyi is divided into two levels. First of all, for the intellectual elite, the philosophy of Zhouyi provides complete moral principles. In the book of changes, there are sixty-four hexagrams, each with six kinds of lines. According to their position, characteristics and interrelation, every hexagram and lines has its own operation mechanism. Because hexagrams and lines can correspond to personnel, if people are in the corresponding state, they should follow the corresponding code of conduct, which is based on moral considerations. According to the characteristics of each hexagram, the Daxiang zhuan can deduce the corresponding moral principles, for example, according to the hexagram of pure Yang - the vigor of the Qian hexagram, it puts forward the moral requirements of “the operation of Tiandao is strong and vigorous, and the gentleman should consciously work hard to make progress.”. According to the hexagram of pure Yin - the kindness of the Kun hexagram, it is advocated that “the momentum of the earth is thick and smooth. A gentleman should enrich virtue and contain all things.”. These moral requirements have a profound impact on people who are familiar with and believe in the book of changes. Confucius said, “give me a few more years so that I can study the book of changes at the age of fifty, and I will not make any serious mistakes.” As we all know, the ancient imperial examination test was to test the Confucian classics. Before the imperial examination, there was a selection mechanism for officials to recommend the virtuous and upright or the virtuous and good literature in the Han Dynasty. Literature was actually Confucian classics, so as early as the Han Dynasty, the atmosphere of learning “Confucian classics” was formed. The book of changes is bound to have a profound moral impact on the social elite. Secondly, for ordinary people, including those without education background and knowledge reserve, Zhouyi also has a wide influence. Because the Chinese folk has always had the custom of consult the oracle, and Zhouyi occupies an important position in the divination system. It is self-evident that his moral concept has an influence on those who interpret hexagrams and those who ask for divination. Confucianism and the

early classics that Confucianism praised and popularized adapted to the cultural ecology of ancient China, but also created the cultural ecology of traditional Chinese morality, greatly promoting the development of traditional morality. As a traditional culture, Confucian ethics has gone deep into the national psychology and shaped the spiritual outlook of the Chinese nation. Its flow and surplus also exist in East Asia and other surrounding areas of China, which also had an important impact on Western Enlightenment thinkers.

In a word, the moral education of Confucianism is effective. Confucianism has a far-reaching influence on the social elite and ordinary people in history, but after being instrumentalized, it is easy to become a mere formality. With the decline of the modern national movement, Confucianism, as a scapegoat, became the object of criticism. It is a pity that the rational elements of Confucian ethics and the effective methods of moral practice are gradually lost. Today, we should have a correct understanding of the practical role and historical position of Confucian moral education and get new inspiration from it.

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