



THE PERSPECTIVE ON HUMANS IN EASTERN PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract:

Eastern philosophy appeared very early in history with two typical philosophies, India and China. These are the two countries with the earliest and most influential culture and ideology in the region. Studying the entire Eastern philosophical thoughts, we can easily see that the problem of man stands out. During the process of formation and development, Chinese philosophy has taken people and human-related issues as the object of study. Theories on humans are very rich and diverse in order to clarify the human issues in many different aspects. Therefore, the article focuses on analyzing the human perspective in some basic theories to clarify the content of human theory: from the origin of formation, human nature, human's inherent character to the development of human personality to adapt to the social community in which people live in Eastern philosophy.

Keywords: Eastern philosophy, Indian, Chinese, human, human nature, human inherent character, ancient

1. Introduction

It can be said that Eastern philosophy was born and culminated in its development even in ancient times in both India and China. India is famous for its Brahmanical philosophy, which consists of six systems: Nyaya, Vaisesika, Sankhya, Yoga, Purva-Mimansa and Vedanta; in addition to Brahmanism, there is also Lokayata, Buddhism, Jaina. And China developed most brilliantly in the Spring and Autumn period - Warring States period with schools such as: Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism, Moism, Yin and Yang... which history calls this as Hundred Schools of Thought. If Indian philosophy focuses on religious and spiritual issues, Chinese philosophy focuses on in-depth socio-political, ethical and moral issues. Each philosophical school and each religion have a strong pervasive influence, not only directly affects society, the material and spiritual life of the people here, but also imports that influence on many countries in the region. In the process of changing the

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socio-economic situation, due to invaders and the process of cultural exchange, our country was deeply influenced by three ideologies, namely Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism. Although there are developments in different directions, both Indian and Chinese philosophical systems have a common tendency to introversion and study humans in the following aspects:

2. Human origin

In Eastern philosophy, the explanation of the origin of man has been proposed since the beginning of society's division into classes and continues to be debated throughout its development history. Human origin is the basic issue to explain many other human problems, so philosophical and religious doctrines have focused on expressing different viewpoints, even the opposing ones, richly and deeply.

Both Indian philosophy and Chinese philosophy have a fierce debate between religious idealism and materialism on the origin of human formation. If religious idealism holds that man is created by a supreme god, materialism holds that man is created by material factors.

The view of religious idealism is clearly expressed in the Indian system of Vedata and Upanisads; The Book of Poetry ((詩經 Shī Jīng) and The Book of Scripture (書經 Shū Jīng): in China. The Vedata believes that human beings and all things are created by a creator. The Upanisad says that the soul (atman) of man is only the product and manifestation of the soul of the world (brahman), *"The Atman is likened to infinite space, the individual like the space contained in a vessel. The vessel is the body...that example demonstrates how one must understand birth. When vessel breaks, where does the space contained in the vessel go? It disappears into infinite space. In the same way the living individual disappears into the supreme Atman."*

Meanwhile, The Book of Poetry and The Book of Scripture assert that people are influenced by the destiny of heaven; Typical is the view of Confucius (the founder of Confucianism) that *"all human beings have destiny and fate"*. In ancient Chinese philosophy, Confucius was the pioneer. Later, more and more other thinkers joined, thus making the arguments about the origin of man more and more extensive.

From the point of view of Confucius, idealism is based on that to expand. During the Han Dynasty, Dong Zhong Qiu (a representative of the Confucianists of the Han Dynasty) said that humans have the following origins: Heaven gives birth to people in their own shape, Heaven gives birth to people to fulfill their will. Heaven gave birth to animals to feed people, Heaven gave birth to righteousness to teach people, Heaven gave birth to kings to rule people. It can be clearly seen that the ultimate goal of the view of heaven's destiny is *"Heaven gave birth to a king to rule people"*. He exalted Heaven just to absolutize the role of the King. The king was called *"Son of Heaven"* to replace Heaven to practice religion. Thus, this point of view aimed to strengthen the centralized feudal system and became an excellent tool to dominate the majority of labors at that time.

In contrast to religious idealism, the views of materialism and atheism in both India and China are very progressive. Buddhism does not recognize the world soul as

the source of the human soul and Buddhism say that man is his own cause; in which, the past man is the cause of the present man, and the present man is the cause of the future man. This is clearly demonstrated in the doctrine of the Interdependent Origination. With the use of material factors as the basis to explain the birth and existence of human beings, Buddhism has had a positive meaning in opposing the idea of destiny and fate; However, Buddhism still cannot escape the vicious circle of mystical idealism when it believes that human beings are caused by the law of cause and effect, due to "karma"; birth and death is in the cycle of retribution.

In the Upanisad, the materialist view says that the original of the human world consists of four elements: earth, water, fire and wind. This view is similar to the Chinese "Five Elements" view. The "Five Elements" includes five elements: metal, wood, water, fire, earth. They both have supportive relations and have a reciprocal relationship with each other. They are the origin of human beings and all things. This view has laid a solid ideological foundation for the later stages. By the Song Dynasty, Zhou Xi and other physicists made the point: Humans are born from "li" according to a process: "li" generates "qi" (ie, yin and yang, five elements)- "qi" gives birth to "people" and "things". It is the point of view of "li" and "qi" became the instrument of domination of the feudal classes in China. Therefore, it can be seen that for the philosophers of ancient Chinese philosophy, even though they come from different worldviews to give different explanations about the origin of man, in the end, all aim at the same goal of supporting and justifying the caste order of the contemporary feudal system.

Criticizing the view of heaven's destiny, Xunzi continued the view of Sun Jian and Yuanwen, when he said that "qi" is the source of all things and people. Later, Zhang Tai in the Song dynasty conceived of "*the great vacuum*" (the basic form of existence of "qi") as the source of all things and people. During the Qing Dynasty, materialist Dai Zhen believed that the origin of man was in the movement of primitive matter, which he called "circulating qi".

Besides, Lao Tzu said: "*Morality*" is "*the origin of all things*". Its process is "*Morality gives birth to 1, 1 gives birth to 2, 2 gives birth to 3, 3 gives birth to all things*". After "*Morality*", there are factors that help things form: "*Morality is born, virtue is nurtured, objects manifest and the body helps to grow*". We can understand Lao Tzu's the word "morality" to refer to the absolute principle that existed before the creation of heaven and earth, no birth, no death, no increase or decrease. Morality can be understood in two ways: Wu and Huu.

Wu is the principle of heaven and earth, the principle of the invisible.

Huu is the visible principle, the mother of giving birth to all things.

Later, Chuang Tzu affirmed, "*Morality is infinite and invisible*", "*from the root, there is no heaven and earth*", "*from the ancient times, there was a Morality, and from the Morality, heaven and earth were born...*". This shows that the essence of Lao Tzu-Chuang Tzu's thought on Morality is an expression of objective idealism. From opposing the mystic idealism (specifically, Confucianism's view of heaven's destiny) falls into another mystical trend that makes people's perception more ambiguous and confusing.

3. Regarding the nature, the inherent character of human and the human morality

3.1 Regarding human nature

Human nature is what separates humans from animals. The reason why humans are separated from the life of animals is that human nature is formed in relation to the community and society. Confucianists have explained a lot about human nature and also formed two opposing views between the two schools of idealism and materialism.

According to the idealist school, Mencius said that, thanks to “goodness” that people can perform three fundamental bonds and five constant virtues; understand the moral relationships between the king and officials, father and son, husband and wife, upper and lower. Accordingly, officials must be absolutely loyal to the king, the wife must absolutely obey and be faithful to her husband, the relationship between upper and lower must be hierarchical and order. According to Mencius, those must do this to be called human beings. He said that the implementation of “Universal Love” (jiān'ài, 兼愛) (the doctrine of Mozi) or “Egoism” (the doctrine of Yang Zhu) is very the beast. This view of Mencius, later developed by Song dynasty theorists, they said that it was human nature to perceive “Virtues” (ie Humanity - Righteousness - Propriety - Wisdom), that meant, to perceive the religion of being a servant, a wife, and a child.

Looking back over the development of the Chinese feudal system, we realize the view that human nature must have “goodness” has become the feudal moral standard. The feudal classes used this point of view as a basis for moral education for all classes of people in order to keep their dominant position, enslave and dominate the people.

Contrary to the above idealistic views, three typical representatives have given very rich and diverse materialistic views on human nature. Those are XunZi, MoZi and Dai Zhen. XunZi said that humans are different from animals in that they have “Righteousness”, surpass animals in that they know “sociality”, so you can control the animal. Mozi said that humans are different from animals in that they have labor. Thanks to labor, people know how to cultivate to eat, weave cloth to wear, build houses to live in. Meanwhile, all animals only know how to use their fur to make clothes, rely on nature for food and drink, but cannot create it themselves. This was a very progressive viewpoint, because he was a representative of the handicraft class, he saw the role of labor in shaping human nature. In the Qing Dynasty, Dai Zhen said that humans differed from animals in that they used consciousness instead of instinct.

3.2 Regarding human's inherent character

The issue of human inherent character, Eastern philosophy is interested in clarifying in many different aspects. We can see very clearly the separation between Indian philosophy and Chinese philosophy in the interpretation of this problem.

In ancient Indian philosophy, Buddhism discussed the human character as a religion. From Theravada Buddhism to the Hinayana and Mahayana schools, they all agree on the point of view: Humans have two types of personality: Buddha nature (called “nature”) and mundane nature (called “love”). In which, Buddha Nature is the enlightened human nature of “empty”, “nothingness”; enlightenment about the world of

“eternal truth”, about the realm of “nirvana” without birth and death. The mundanity is the human character that is still immersed in the realm of ignorance with thoughts filled with the habit of “greed - hatred - delusion”. “Greed” means coveting, wishing to have, possess; “hatred” means anger, impatience; “Delusion” means ignorance, darkness. The mundanity makes people covered with ignorance, wandering around, unable to escape from the cycle of reincarnation to advance to Buddhahood. Therefore, want to have Buddha nature to attain Nirvana; people must destroy sex, that is, giving up “greed - hatred - delusion”, following the eight paths called the eightfold paths.

In Chinese philosophy, thinkers have been interested in researching and offering many opposing views on human inherent character; because one of the characteristics of Chinese philosophy is to aim to correct the moral and ethical values of human beings by promoting the image of the perfect gentleman.

During the Warring States period, Mencius introduced the concept of “*Man’s inherent character at birth is good*”; that is, right from the moment of birth, human's inherent character is good. Humans already have the germ of “benevolence”, “righteousness”, “propriety”, “wisdom” and have the germ of filial piety to parents, loyalty to the king, and respect for elders.

Contrary to that view, Xunzi said that “*human inherent character is evil*”; It means that humans are born evil by nature. To justify that view, he said: Humans is the type of “*the eyes like pretty colors, the ears like beautiful sounds, the mouth likes good flavors, the heart likes what is beneficial, and the bones and flesh like what is comfortable*”. It is those desires, along with the inherent character of greed for good things and avoidance of harm, that make people cruel. Because of the love of benefit, it is easy to give birth to quarrels, lose the attitude of concessions and lose loyalty. Although affirming, human's inherent character is evil, but Xunzi believes that everyone can do good things and become good. Therefore, humans must be educated in the right way to give up evil and return to good.

The doctrine of the evil of Xunzi, later, was inherited and developed by Han Fei Zi. Han Fei Zi believes that human's inherent character is evil, inherently selfish, greedy for benefit and afraid of harm. With that evil inherent character of man, it will be the germ to make society disorder. Therefore, it is just stop at education, it is not enough, but it has to promote the Legal (the legal system must be strict), and it must be severely punished to threaten the evil of humans.

Later, Gao zi was the next person to discuss human's inherent character. According to him, the human character has three points worth noting: Firstly, the non-virtuous and virtuous nature (human inherent character is neither good nor evil). For a better explanation, he said: “*sinh chi vị tính, thực sắc tính dã*”; means that “*Living is the character – Eating and the nuance is also the character*”. Thus, according to Gao zi, the inherent character is the basis of human and animal life. Human's inherent character is expressed in growth and reproduction. Growth is to maintain the individual's life, reproduction is to continue the life of the species. This is instinct, not good or evil. Secondly, the character of “*khả dĩ vi thiện, khả dĩ vi bất thiện*”; that means, the inherent character can be made good, can also be made not good. To better understand, he explains that “*the inherent character is like water flowing around. When opening to the East, it*

flows to the East, when opening to the West, it flows to the West". With this understanding, the inherent character is initially like a blank sheet of paper, if we write good things, we will become good, if we write bad things, we will become evil. Thereby, highlighting the role of education in shaping human character. Thirdly, the humanity belongs to a priori, that means, "*dữ sinh cân sinh*" (it was already available at birth). As for Righteousness, it belongs a posteriori, they were born through knowledge and experience. Therefore, he said, "*Nhân nội dã, phi ngoại dã. Nghĩa ngoại dã, phi nội dã*". (Humanity is to be inside, not outside. Righteousness is to be outside, not inside)ⁱⁱ.

To the time of Wang Fuzhi and Dai Zhen, the view of human inherent character was broadened. Wang Fuzhi said that human character is not innate, but is born and then formed. More specifically, human character is formed through learning, "*Every day is lived, every day is formed*". Complementing this point of view, Dai Zhen expands the character into three aspects: Desire (sex), Affection (love), Knowledge (intellection). Thus, both Wang Fuzhi and Dai Zhen saw the very natural needs of human character, and they have seen that human character is formed in the relationship between people and the social environment where they live. Thus, these are highly advanced views of human inherent character in ancient Chinese philosophy.

In general, the above thinkers have based on the materialist point of view to explain human's inherent character. Although the views may be opposite, they all agree that they all recognize the role of education in shaping the inherent character as well as educating to bring human inherent character to the goodness.

Besides those materialistic views, idealism also has many representatives who were interested in human's inherent character. Typical among them are: Dong ZhongQiu divided human's inherent character into 3 types: sainthood (comprehensive), middle-class (good and evil), and pettiness (all evil). Han Wu (Tang Dynasty) also divided human's inherent character into three levels: high level (perfect), middle level (good and evil) and low level (only evil). Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi (in the Northern Song Dynasty) divided into the good character (pure good), temperament (good and evil). With the point of view of 理 li (principle) and 事 shi (affairs, matters), Zhu Xi (Northern Song Dynasty) shares the nature of man into heaven and earth's character (only principle) and temperament (principle and affairs).ⁱⁱⁱ.

3.3 Regarding human morality

On the basis of clarifying the nature and inherent character of human beings, thinkers of Chinese philosophy have put forward their views on humanism. Human morality in Buddhism advises people to cultivate in order to get rid of sufferings in the world, to live "*compassionately, to save suffering, to rescue*" to reach Nirvana. Confucianism believes that the religion of being a person expresses the relationship between the individual and his/her family, society, country, race, superiority, etc. Confucian thinkers all uphold the

ⁱⁱ Nguyen Dang Tien (2007), "Eastern philosophy on humans and development", Journal of Human Studies No. 3 (30) 2007, p. 20.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nguyen Dang Tien (2007), "Eastern philosophy on humans and development", Journal of Human Studies No. 3 (30) 2007, p. 21.

doctrine of Confucius' "Rectification of Names" to protect feudal hierarchy and order. They uphold the theory of the three fundamental bonds and five constant virtues, promote humans to cultivate humanity and righteousness. In addition, Taoism advocated building the human morality according to the point of view of "Wu-wei" (nondual action), living in harmony with nature, not caring about fame and profit in human-to-human relations.

4. People's attitude towards the country's socio-political situation

From clarifying issues related to people such as nature, human inherent character and human morality, Chinese philosophy moves on to discuss people's attitudes towards politics and society. This is, after all, the central part of all philosophical doctrines on man. People's attitude towards the country's socio-political situation is aimed at the incarnation spirit of human beings. It plays a decisive role in what people need to do to make their mark in the general development of society. Consciousnesses of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist ideology also have different views on this issue. student, not the teacher, is the central figure in the school. Confucianism advocates that people incarnate, attach themselves to society by giving the model of a perfect gentleman who must know "*cultivate oneself, put the family in order, govern the nation, bring peace to the world*". Therefore, people need to study hard to succeed, become an official to help the king and save lives. If you succeed, you will become an official, if you are not successful, you will hide or bring the learned knowledge and pass it on to your students. This is a positive view, promoting human's training ability, capacity and behavior, and upholding human's sense, responsibility and mission for the development of the country.

Contrary to the view of Confucianism, Buddhism advocates to avoid life, advises people to stay away from life to become a monk to find a life of nothingness. Seeing life as a temporary realm has made people have negative thoughts, cynicism, avoidance, indifference and irresponsibility to the times. Also, with the policy of being out of the world, Taoism offers the point of view of "wu-wei" (no-action). Criticizing the Confucian viewpoint of fame and benefit, the viewpoint of "wu-wei" causes people to have two attitudes towards socio-political issues. It is a noble life attitude, deeply studying and practicing the religion, not caring about fame and benefit, money, not being greedy for fame and wealth, but consequently, it gives rise to a negative, boring, irresponsible attitude of the people to society.

5. Conclusion

Eastern philosophy pays great attention to human issues in many aspects such as origin, nature, inherent character, and morality, and focuses on the relationship between people and between people and society rather than between people and nature. Covering Eastern philosophy is the worldview of idealism, strongly dominated by religion; and materialism in the East is developing quite slowly, but nonetheless it is still a doctrine that dares to fight for the needs and rights of human beings. Although the issue of human

morality is given top importance, when it comes to solving it, Indian philosophy focuses on researching and interpreting issues from the perspective of religion and spirituality and “introspection”. On the contrary, Chinese philosophy focuses on solving socio-political problems and the pressing daily problems that are happening, solving the ethical and moral problems, taking people, the interests of people and human society as the center. Studying the entire Chinese philosophy on humans has left current generation with extremely valuable ideological legacies and has raised many issues of topical significance that we need to clarify in new historical conditions.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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