



From “Goodness” in Chinese Confucianism to “Truth” in Japanese Confucianism

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Abstract

After being introduced to Japan, part of the basic ethic concepts and value of Chinese Confucianism, which pursues “goodness” as its core value standard, are deep into the hearts of Japanese people and become an important part of their moral standard and national mentality. However, due to the inclusive and subjective characteristics of Japanese culture, Chinese Confucianism that pursues “goodness” gradually changed into Japanese Confucianism that pursues “truth”. By comparing the Confucian culture in China and Japan, this paper analyzes the changes happened to Chinese Confucianism when it was spreading in Japan.

Keywords: Chinese Confucianism, Japanese Confucianism, Goodness, Truth, Practicality

Japanese people believe in Buddhism, Christianity, Shinto indigenous in Japan and Confucianism originated from China. The basic ethic concepts and value of Chinese Confucianism are deep into the hearts of Japanese people and become an important part of their moral standard and national mentality.

As we know, by focusing on the moral cultivation of human being, the indigenous Chinese Confucianism aims to regulate people's ethic and morality through their will so as to build a harmonious social order. However, Japanese Confucianism does not take all the concepts of Confucianism introduced from China unconditionally. Instead, by fully considering the reality and possibility in Japan, Japanese Confucianism keeps the unique national mentality and characteristics of Japanese culture and localizes Confucianism with the folk customs of Japan. Besides pursuing social stability, it also caters to the social conditions in Japan and proceeds from reality, which is clearly displayed in Japanese Confucianism. For this, it is without doubt that the localized Japanese Confucianism can become the true driving force for the social development of Japan.

After being introduced to Japan, Chinese Confucianism is digested and absorbed by Japanese people and demonstrates the characteristics of Japanese culture. We can observe the inclusiveness of Japanese culture and the applying and creating capacity of Japanese people in this process. By comparing the Confucian culture both in China and Japan, this paper analyzes their main characteristics, differences and similarities with a view to explore the unique cultural features and national mentality of Japan.

1. Chinese Confucianism

1.1 The Development of Chinese Confucianism

In the Spring and Autumn Period, Confucius, famous ideologist and educationist of China, absorbed the great achievements of China's ancient thought and culture and founded the original Confucianism ideological system. Original Confucianism is also called Pre-Qin Confucianism. Combined with political theory and moral thought, it plays a significant role to the development of Chinese history and the formation of China's national and cultural mentality. Original Confucianism is regarded as the source of Chinese Confucianism and Chinese philosophy. Besides Confucius, its main representative figures include ancient sage such as Mencius and Xunzi. They make China's cultural market active by their respective opinions. Pre-Qin Confucianism lays the foundation for China's classic culture.

Under the backdrop of fast economic development in the Han Dynasty and to go with the need of feudal autocracy, Pre-Qin Confucianism witnessed further development and improvement and was endowed with new ideological system. Dong Zhongshu, the main representative figure at that time, added the thought of Yinyang and Wuxing to Confucian

classics featuring the thought of benevolence, loyalty, ceremony, wisdom and honesty and founded an ideological system of “telepathy between heaven and man”. Theologized by Dong Zhongshu, Confucianism in the Han Dynasty matches the ancient feudal ruling system and turns from folk theory to orthodox official theory.

Although delayed in the Six Dynasties and Tang Dynasty Period, Chinese Confucianism experienced fast development in the Song Dynasty. The Taiji Theory and Theory of Li and Qi added the traditional concept of Yinyang and Wuxing, the theories of Laozi and Zhuangzi and the philosophy and world view of Buddhism to the system of Confucianism and formed the framework of the new Confucianism. Based on the world view of Li and Qi since North Song Dynasty, Zhu Xi in South Song Dynasty founded the Zhuzi Studies. Till the end of Qing Dynasty, Confucianism maintained an important place in China.

After Song Dynasty, Confucianism with the theory about human nature and ethnics as the center absorbed the essence of world view and epistemology of the Huayan School and Chan School of Buddhism and the heaven evolving theory of Taoism and laid the abstract and philosophical foundation for Confucian theory system in terms of ontology and cosmology, forming a large Song and Ming Philosophy system including the metaphysical theory. Song and Ming Philosophy can be regarded as the second reconstruction to Confucianism.

Through the above analysis we can see that the Confucianism founded by Confucius continuously renews and improves itself in accordance with the requirement of time in the long history of China; however, its basic characteristics and essences never change. This paper will explore the essence and characteristics of Confucianism by looking back at the developing process of Confucianism in the following pages.

1.2 The Characteristics and Cause of Formation of Chinese Confucianism

Before exploring the characteristics of Confucianism, we need to first talk about metaphysics. In the Spring and Autumn Period when Confucianism was formed, most of China’s ancient sages took a metaphysical view about the origin of the world. The speculative and abstract thinking they held on the origin of the world and the form of the universe constitute the most basic factors in Confucian theory system.

The important figure that promoted and developed the metaphysical view or philosophical view in Confucianism is Zhu Xi. He said in his theory of Li and Qi that “Li” is the most important thing and the source of all morality. Zhu Xi expounded the paramountcy and absoluteness of the “principle of heaven” and set a complete theory system. Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism played a certain positive role for the social development at that time; however, his “principle of heaven” which was the source of the universe, ruler of everything and source of social moral standard was abused by the ruling class and became the base for all feudal regulations and etiquettes. That means besides some positive effects, Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism also has some drawbacks. Perhaps the real meaning of Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism is a metaphysical theory that starts from the point of “Li” and explores the moral order of human society.

Ever since its founding, Confucianism is connected with politics and morality. Many Confucianists are committed to finding ways to rectify social order and rule the country and exploring the necessity of ethic and morality and the validity of emperor autocracy. Besides metaphysics, another distinct feature of Confucianism is the importance it attaches to ethic, morality and personal cultivation.

Confucianism that highlights ethic, morality and personal cultivation is pursuing “goodness”. “Goodness” as it implies seeks the inner tranquility and peace of people’s heart and a friendly and harmonious human relation. The main goal of Confucianism is to pursue the “goodness” of people’s inner world, “goodness” among social members and “goodness” among different ranks of society.

In terms of this, Confucianism is also knowledge about life and explains how people should live their lives in this world. First self-cultivation, then regulating the family, governing the country and establishing peace throughout the world is the lifelong dream and goal of all Confucianists. Starting from improving personal moral standard, they pursue the common interests of the whole society. The ultimate goal of Confucianism is to make their most contribution to the society through personal efforts. The society guided by this Confucian theory is a society in which people “concern about others’ interests and do good things to the society”. Confucianism advocates goodness and the society built under this concept is harmonious and liveable.

While taking “goodness” as the ultimate goal, Chinese Confucianism also has its fatal weak point. If too much effort is made to pursue “goodness”, the efforts to pursue “truth” will be reduced. Lack of attention on technology and practical science becomes the main obstacle for China’s social development in modern times. Just as Han Lihong says: when approaching an issue, most Confucianists turn to their inner world and moral cultivation instead of the nature, resulting in a trend that defies science and technology.

Sometimes blindly pursuing “goodness” will result in the trend that “morality” is over “law” and “human relation” is over “regulation”. Under Chinese traditional cultural background influenced by Confucianism, what people highlight is the moral cultivation of themselves. So compared with the binding effect of law, the binding effect of morality is more

easily recognized by people. This is in essence different from modern managerial concept that counts on laws and regulations and hinders the pace of China's modernization.

We can not finish everything of the characteristics and influence of Chinese Confucianism in this paper. By analyzing the most distinct characteristic and most profound influence of Chinese Confucianism, this paper will study the characteristics of Japanese Confucianism and the national cultural mentality of Japan.

2. Japanese Confucianism

2.1 *The Development and Characteristics of Japanese Confucianism*

In the sixth century A.D., scholars who taught the Confucian classics from Baiji spread the classic Confucianism to Japan and since then Confucian theories began to develop in Japan. From the time Confucianism was introduced to Japan to the end of Heian Period is the "Early Confucianism" period. As a political thought, early Confucianism only influenced Japan's politics at that time instead of morality and other fields. The strong speculative and metaphysical features of Pre-Qin Confucianism were not represented in the early Confucianism of Japan. The main reason is that early Confucianism only exists as a foreign culture instead of a culture born from Japanese society.

In the Kamakura Period, Neo-Confucianism, ie. Song Studies, Zhuzi Studies and Chan Studies spread to Japan and its development injected new vitality to Japanese Confucianism. However, the real purpose of Japanese Buddhists lied in promoting the Chan doctrine through the strength of Song Studies instead of popularizing Song Studies. The Neo-Confucianism at that time just co-existed with Buddhism and failed to achieve its independent development. In the Edo Period, Japanese Confucianism witnessed real development and ushered into its peak era.

Fujiwara Seika, who is regarded as the ancestor of modern Confucianism, first advocated the independence of Confucianism; then his disciple Hayashi Razan founded the Zhuzi Studies in Japan. The theory of Zhuzi Studies advocates the duality-opposition of the Yin and Yang in the nature and believes that this duality-opposition bolsters the order of class difference in human society. This metaphysical theory was used by the feudal ruling class. To the Shogunate government at that time, this was the best theory and was greatly appreciated and stressed as the official learning of Japan.

But when Chinese scholars analyze the inevitability of the formation of Japan's ancient studies, they say like this: with the upheaval of the Bakuhan System, Zhuzi Studies, although as the official feudal learning, fails to play its due role, which makes the founding of ancient studies, the new theory pillar of feudal system, become inevitable. Ienaga Saburo, famous historian of Japan, describes the main causes for the formation of ancient studies like this: Feudal thoughts are formed not merely to cater for the wills of the feudal rulers. As there are contradictions and development in the feudal society, the sector of thought is not in a standstill. So the ancient studies, which abandons Zhuzi Studies and returns to the thoughts of Confucius and Mencius, comes as the time requires.

The three representative figures and forefathers of ancient studies in Japan are Yamaga Sokou, Itō Jinsai and Ogyuu-Sorail. Although there are differences in their thoughts, their common idea is the same, which is to find the theory and philosophy from Chinese classic Confucianism to guide the social practice in contemporary Japan. The three schools all agree that reality and positive activities should be stressed instead of empty theory and formal morality. From the common ideas of the ancient studies we can see the change in ways of looking at things in Japanese society, which is the biggest contribution of ancient studies schools to the cultural history of Japan.

Besides, the Yangming Studies advocated by Nakae Toju and the thoughts of the School of Mind founded by Ishida Baigan also appeared successively, both of which became the original spirit power that boosted the social development of Japan.

2.2 *Inheriting and Developing Chinese Confucianism*

While absorbing the essence of Chinese Confucianism, Japanese Confucianism adds some unique factors of Japan's folk customs into Chinese Confucianism, makes it more close to Japanese culture and forms a Confucian theory with Japanese features.

As described above, Chinese Confucianism focuses on the pursuit of "goodness" and stresses the harmony among social members. Every social member takes himself/herself as an individual of the society, tries not to cause troubles to others and pursues social interests to realize his/her personal value. This value of Chinese Confucianism is taken and absorbed by Japanese Confucianism and forms a common mentality of the Japanese nation which is the "Group Consciousness" of Japan. Chinese Confucianism has shed some enlightenment on the formation and development of "Group Consciousness".

Kawashima Takeyoshi, contemporary social scientist of law of Japan, once describes like this: if many people coexist in a group for a long time, they will unconsciously take themselves as a member of this group. If the thought or deed of one individual goes against the interests of the group, it means that he or she breaks the idyllic peace of the whole group.

While inheriting the spiritual essence of pursuing “goodness” of Chinese Confucianism, Japanese Confucianism creates its splendid culture pursuing “truth”. As the pillar of feudal society, Confucianism on the one hand plays a positive role in sustaining social order and human relations and on the other hand it bounds the individuality and ignores human emotions. The Japanese nation has the cultural tradition of respecting individual feelings in essence and attaches great importance to the truth and purity of the inner world of human beings.

For example, Yamaga Sokou, Confucianist in the early Tokugawa Period and one of the three forefathers of Japanese ancient studies, advocates that human beings should unleash all the feeling from their hearts and he describes this insuppressible inner feeling as “sincerity”. He says: the naturally expressed desires and feelings of human being should be respected instead of suppressed. Masuho Zankō, expert of Shinto studies in the middle Edo Period, holds the idea that the moral view that focuses on form and etiquette and ignores human feelings should be abandoned. He believes that marriage without love will result in unhappiness for both man and woman and they should get into marriage on the basis of love. It can be seen that the ethical thought of Japanese Confucianism is very emotional. It excludes asceticism in essence but takes a tolerate attitude towards ardor.

Japanese Confucianism, which stresses “truth”, attaches great importance to the true feelings of human being. It advocates the creation of an environment where individuals can unleash their feelings naturally. Only in this way can every individual bring their initiatives and creativity to the full play. Japanese Confucianism also advocates the development of practical science and holds great interest in science and technology. This is far different from Chinese Confucianism that stresses moral cultivation and looks down upon science and technology. Most Confucianists in Japan stress science and technology as regard them as “statecrafts”. Ekiken Kaibara, ideologist in the early Edo Period takes the view that the “Li” of natural law are more important than the “Li” of metaphysics. He advocates that human should explore the laws of nature objectively and implement their rationality and objectivity. That is why his thoughts in medical field, herbal studies and practical morality all have profound influence.

3. Relation between Confucianism and the Cultural Mentality of Japan

To sum up, Japan always takes Chinese Confucianism as a foreign culture and accepts it critically in line with the conditions in Japan. Then what is the cultural mentality and national personality behind this?

First, Japanese Confucianism has been absorbing the most advanced part of Chinese Confucianism during its development and including the new changes and development of Chinese Confucianism into Japanese Confucianism. On the contrary, Chinese Confucianism is relatively closed. Most Chinese Confucianists restrict themselves by the theoretic system created by them and only focus on their moral cultivation. They ignore foreign cultures and other Confucian theories. Proceeding in such a lonely atmosphere, Chinese Confucianism reserves its purity and independence but excludes all foreign cultures and hinders its development.

Japanese culture adopts an inclusive attitude when learning from Chinese Confucianism. Backed by this inclusiveness and tolerance, it can naturally accept the advanced ideas and thoughts of other countries; however, this is not unconditional acceptance but critical acceptance. Instead of a simple imitation, it is based on the necessity and possibility and combines the local folk customs and way of thinking to finally create a unique cultural model of Japan.

Chinese Confucianism focuses on promoting smooth exchange between people and peaceful and harmonious social relations. When Chinese Confucianism that pursues “goodness” is introduced to Japan, Japanese people modify its core value according to their conditions. Chinese Confucianism stresses the ethics and morality, but the modified Japanese Confucianism stresses the existence of individual and the simple and natural feelings of human beings. It does not accept the hypocritical asceticism of Chinese Confucianism. Besides, Chinese Confucianism tends to create a harmonious society through the efforts of individual, while Japanese Confucianism takes the view that individual deeds should be guided by social regulations and the overall social rule should be maintained by common social standard.

The same origin but different viewpoint results in the above-mentioned difference between Chinese Confucianism and Japanese Confucianism. When exploring the causes, we discover another distinct feature of Japanese culture, which is its subjective feature. Due to this feature, Japanese Confucianism does not inherit Chinese Confucianism totally; instead, it adopts the way of thinking and Japan and creates advanced ideas that Chinese Confucianism can not reach.

“Syonindo” is also a unique economic and moral system of Japan. As a merchant, while fully affirming that it is a just deed to pursue economic interest in business activity, Ishida Baigan also advocates that merchants should be upright instead of speculative so as to create a practical ethical morality for the merchants. Ishida Baigan first establishes a management philosophy that combines economic interests and morality in the “Confucianism Cultural Circle”, which is the famous syonindo of Japan. This example fully displays the “creativity” of Japanese culture.

The above analysis gives us the following enlightenments: Japanese nation adopts an inclusive attitude when absorbing Chinese Confucianism and develops Chinese Confucianism under a creative and pioneering spirit. Either in accepting foreign culture selectively or in localizing foreign culture, the Japanese nation always starts from their needs and national interests and take into consideration the reality in Japan and the pragmatic mind of Japanese nation all the time.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, while pursuing “goodness”, stability and harmony, Chinese Confucianism also restrains the initiative and creativity of individual. It is undeniable that this negative and conservative deed hinders the social progress and development of China. However, Japanese Confucianism starts from the pragmatic cultural mentality and pursues “truth” in social life while absorbing the spiritual essence of “goodness” in Chinese Confucianism. It not only inherits and develops the essence of Chinese Confucianism but also improves it with folk customs of Japan to make it the original driving force for Japan’s social development.

When doing the research for this paper, the author feels that if China can adopt a critical attitude like Japan when accepting foreign culture, it will play an inestimable role for China’s development. We should not mechanically imitate foreign culture; instead, we should take into consideration the way of thinking of our people and create a unique cultural model that belongs to ourselves. In a time when culture plays an increasingly significant role, to inherit, develop and innovate Confucian culture plays an unignorable role for both China and Japan.

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