

On the Core of Chinese Traditional Values – The “Unity between Heaven and Man”

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Abstract—In the development process of more than five thousand years of glorious civilization, the Chinese nation gradually forms the traditional values with the “Unity between Heaven and Man” as the core. It systematically expounds the relationship between man and Nature, man and man, man and himself, man and State, and constantly promote the development and progress of the Chinese society. The “Unity between Heaven and Man” is the summation of the main thought of the Chinese excellent traditional culture, and the history witness that the Chinese civilization is hereditary and long development. It is a kind of lofty ideals pursued by the human society since ancient times to this day. Today it still has the most powerful vitality and profound practical significance for the survival and development of the human society.

Index Terms—Unity between heaven and man, man and nature, man and man, man and himself, man and state.

I. INTRODUCTION

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” always has a great vitality in the development process of the human history. It contains Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and other ideologies, it reflects the intrinsic value and the spiritual essence of the Chinese excellent traditional culture. The “Unity between Heaven and Man”, namely the harmony of Heaven “and” man, man should be in awe of Heaven and Earth with a grateful heart. On Nature man must follow the law of the universe, to respect and protect the natural, to have an insight into the truth that harmony can produce all things. On individuals man should practise his self-cultivation of original nature, to find the true self in his heart, to foster the temperament of a calm mood. On others man should be with mutual respect and courtesy, to abide by the principle of not adulation but affability. On countries man should be people-oriented, to establish the system of legal clarity, to clear about the law of logical administration and harmonious people. On other countries man should be in etiquette to the world, to win people by virtue, to achieve the objective of universal peace. The “Unity between Heaven and Man” is to reach the harmony and coexistence of man and Nature, man and man, man and himself, man and State, to maintain the integrity and unity of the human society.

However, because the Chinese nation has a long history, extensive and profound traditional culture, great differences between ancient Chinese and modern Chinese, a lot of people are difficult to fully understand, comprehend deeply on the Chinese excellent traditional culture, especially the

traditional core values – the “Unity between Heaven and Man”. They are just in one-sided understanding, surface interpretation, even misinterpretation in one respect and from an angle. The results are that the relationship between the state, nation, group, between individuals have changed greatly, some people lose moral to become degenerate, interpersonal relationship alienates from each other, the environment continues to deteriorate, highlighting the human society is facing the dilemma of development and survival crisis. Because man's thinking and behavior of good and evil can be sensed by Heaven. “Heaven reflects man as the mirror does.” “To be good, Heaven and Earth knows it; to be evil, Heaven and Earth also knows it” [1].

Fortunately human goodness still exists. Most people believe what goes around, comes around, believe there are some subtle relationship between Heaven and man. This is the fundamental reason that Heaven, Earth, and man can live in peace and still exist. Whether they are in government or in enterprises in China, Asia and other countries around the world, today there are still a lot of people continue to research and explore the Chinese excellent traditional culture, including “the Unity between Heaven and Man”, in order to enhance the people's moral standards and ideological quality, and strengthen the people's consciousness and awareness of coexistence. Man must consciously follow the development and operation rules between Heaven, Earth, and man, and actively respond to the challenges facing humanity, continue to explore ways and means to solve these problems, can explore a fit shortcut for human sustainable development, to avoid the fall of doom.

II. MAIN BODY

The Evolution of the Core of Chinese Traditional Values--the “Unity between Heaven and Man”

The Chinese nation has more than five thousand years of glorious history of civilization. It gradually forms a set of traditional values with the “Unity between Heaven and Man” as the core, to study the universe, society, and life with the relations of Heaven, Earth, and man as the center. The “Unity between Heaven and Man” originates from the “Book of Changes” in ancient history. After it is carried forward to the maturity by generations of thinkers, it becomes the summation of the main thought of the Chinese fine traditional culture. It constantly regulates people's thinking and daily behavior, to promote the development and progress of the Chinese society.

A. The Origin of the “Unity between Heaven and Man”

The “Analytic Dictionary of Chinese Characters” by Shen Xu, the scholar and linguist in Eastern Han Dynasty to the

“Unity of Heaven and Man” explains: “Heaven” is constituted by a “greatness” and a “one”. “Heaven” here is a “greatness”, i.e. a standing person; “One” above is the top of the head, i.e. a piece of Heaven. “Unity” contains fitness, fusion, and harmony. “Integration” is equivalent to “unity”, namely “Heaven” is well integrated with “man”, as a whole.

According to the legend, the earliest to explore the relationship between Heaven and man is Xi Fu, he creates the “Eight Gua (Hexagrams)”, namely Qian, Kun, Zhen, Tuan, Kan, Li, Gen, and Dui. They are later used by the posterity for a long period. In Xia and Shang Periods, “Eight Gua” is called “a Series of Mountains” and “the Return of Store”, double Guas have been appeared. In Western Zhou Dynasty, King Wen of Zhou edits it into the “Book of Changes”. “The ‘Book of Changes’ is flourished probably in the late Shang Dynasty and in the higher period of virtue of King Wen of Zhou, right? When things appeared in the era of King Wen of Zhou and King Zhou of Shang, right? So his diction contains all the meaning of fear and alert” [2]. “Does the ‘Book of Changes’ flourish in the medieval period? Does the author has the sufferings to play it?” [2] Accordingly Qian Sima refers that the King Wen of Zhou was detained in Youli to play the “Book of Changes”.

There are two parts of the “Book of Changes”, one terms Jing (the Text), and the other is Zhuan (the Commentaries). There are sixty-four Guas in the Jing which are the basic units. Every Gua is composed of Gua Fu (the Linear Signs), Gua Ci (the Judgment to the Hexagrams), and Yao Ci (the Text Pertaining to the Individual Lines). Gua Ci and Yao Ci are the expository words to comment the symbolic meaning in Gua Fu. The Zhuan adopts different angles to comment the Jing with particular emphases. They are composed of Tuan (the Commentary on the Decision), Xiang (the Image Symbol), Xi Ci (the Appended Judgments), Wen Yan (the Commentary on the Text), Shuo Gua (the Discussion of the Hexagrams), Xu Gua (the Structure of the Hexagrams), and Za Gua (the Relations of the Lines to One Another). Tuan, Xiang, and Xi Ci are each divided into two sections therefore all the ten sections as a whole are called “Ten Wings”. They have established the basic framework to study the relationship between Heaven and man in ancient China.

During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States Periods, the Confucianists represented by Confucius do detailed research on the “Book of Changes”. “Heaven in its motion gives the idea of strength. In accordance with this, the superior man nerves himself for ceaseless activity” [3]. “Earth in its sustaining gives the power of capacity. In accordance with this, the superior man supports all things with his large virtue” [4]. What it maintains is to follow Providence, advocating the spirit of vigor and energies, of tolerance and magnanimity. “As in a mold or enclosure he comprehends the transformations of Heaven and Earth without any error, by an ever-varying adaptation he completes the nature of all things without exception.” “The successive movement of the Positive and Negative Forces constitutes what is called Providence. What ensues from its result is goodness, what shows in its completeness is humanity” [5]. They think that all things between Heaven and Earth are connected with each other, and do as Providence.

Later, Lao Tzu, the originator of Taoism expounds it in

detail in the “Tao De Ching”. He believes that the universe is an integral whole, “Providence” is the source of all things and life, and is eternal unchangingness. “However there is one thing existed before the formation of Earth. Not to hear the sound of it and not to see its shape, it is silent and empty. It is independent for ever restlessness and motive for everlastingness without relying on any external power, and can be used as the root of all things. I do not know its name, so reluctantly call it Providence, and then barely give it a name called ‘Greatness’”. The process of generating things is that “Providence is unique, from which produces the Positive and Negative Forces, the Positive and Negative Forces intersect to produce a third party then there are the things in the world. Everything contains the Positive and Negative Forces, they interact each other to achieve harmony and unity.” Heaven, Earth, and man was also born of “Providence”, “Providence is great, Heaven is great, Earth is great, and man is also great. The universe has the four greatness, and man lives in one of them.” [6] He affirms that Heaven, Earth, and man is an integral part of the universe, and promote the study of the relationship between Heaven, Earth, and man.

B. The Development of the “Unity between Heaven and Man”

For the “Unity between Heaven and man”, the Confucianists only speak of the Positive and Negative Forces regardless of the Five Elements (metal, wood, water, fire, and earth) before the Warring States Period. Such as Chuang Tzu's views are that “man with Heaven can be integrated into a whole”: “Abandoned mundaneness in life, physical body would not exerted. Forgotten matters in life, spiritual power is not a loss. Healthy body, spirit enough, man and Heaven is integrated into a whole” [7]. Hsun Tzu's views are that “the distinction is between Heaven and man”: “So understanding the distinction between Heaven and man, it can be called clever people” [8]. Confucius's views are that “man can be juxtaposed with Heaven and Earth” “..... Able to assist the transformation and nourishing power of Heaven and Earth, man may form a ternion with Heaven and Earth” [9]. etc. They emphasize the close relationship between Heaven and man.

After the Warring States Period, different researchers remain controversial. Zhongshu Dong in the Han Dynasty uses the theory of the Positive and Negative Forces and the Five Elements together. He puts forward the theory of “the reaction of Heaven and man”, he is the first systematic demonstration about it. “Heaven also has the heart of anger and sorrow corresponding with man. Mixed them together with the classification, Heaven and man is the same” [10]. “Things are in the name of fame, fame is in the name of Heaven. Heaven and man is communicative, it is integrated into a whole” [11]. Zhongshu Dong thinks that “man corresponds with Heaven”, “Heaven is the similar to man”. Therefore Heaven and man can sense each other and live in harmony.

Philosopher Zai Zhang in the Northern Song Dynasty first puts forward the complete concept of the “Unity between Heaven and Man”. “Because of sensibility the confucianist can be sincere, because of sincerity he can be sensible, so he

can reach the realm of the Unity between Heaven and Man. Studying the knowledge, he can be a sage; and learning from Heaven, he will never leave the innate things” [12]. “Qian said that the mysteries of the creation of Heaven is called the father of all things; Kun said that the principle of the production of all things is called the mother of all things. I am so small, but mixed between Heaven and Earth” [12]. He believes that man is an integral part of nature.

During the same period Hao Cheng also speaks of the “Unity between Heaven and Man”. “So it is a rational and reasonable, Heaven and man is integrated into a whole, not respectively.” “The benevolent takes all things of Heaven and Earth as a whole” [13]. He further perfects the idea.

Fuzhi Wang between Ming and Qing Dynasties emphasizes that “the sage makes humanity in line with Providence. In line with Providence he is possessed of the healthy reason to survive. Making humanity, he is possessed of the favorable vitality to grow” [14]. He affirms the identity of “Providence” and “humanity”.

Scholar Zhen Dai in Qing Dynasty adheres to the concept of the universe that the “gasification is Providence”. He thinks that “Providence still exists; gasification is in presence, life and growth in Nature. Therefore it is called Providence” [15]. “Therefore the life is benevolence, the order is propriety, the decision is righteousness, the store is wisdom” [16]. He puts “Providence” and the “goodness” of human relations into the “Unity between Heaven and Man”.

Chinese thinkers from generation to generation play a major role in the formation of the core of the Chinese traditional values. Many contemporary scholars still agree with the “Unity between Heaven and Man”, and elaborate it in detail from different levels. E.g. Xianlin Ji, the master of Ancient Chinese Literature, thinks that “.....the ‘Unity between Heaven and Man’ is man and Nature to be united, to be in peaceful coexistence, not to speak of conquest and subjugation” [17].

The Character of the Core of Chinese Traditional Values--the “Unity between Heaven and Man”

As the core of Chinese traditional values, the “Unity between Heaven and Man” always puts the harmonious relationship between man and Nature, man and man, man and himself, man and State as the main melody of pursuit. It thinks that everything in the universe has its motive rules. Humanity must conform to Providence, Providence is also turned into the criterion of man. Therefore it can make the country in peace and the people in safety, Heaven and Earth can be everlasting in stability.

1) The relationship between man and nature

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” thinks that Heaven, Earth, and man is the relationship between mutual connection and mutual corresponding. “Qian is Heaven and is called the father. Kun is Earth and is called the mother” [18]. “Heaven and Earth is parents of all things” [7]. “The great person is with the virtue of Heaven and Earth, with the bright of the sun and the moon, with the procedure of the four seasons, with the fortune and calamities of God and demons. He may precede Heaven, and Heaven will not act in opposition to him; He may follow Heaven, but will act as Heaven at the time would do” [3]. They worship the generating principle of Heaven and Earth, and the implementing principle of man

himself. Finally it can reach the ideal realm with the mutual communication among Heaven, Earth, and man.

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” completely expounds the mutual relationship between man and Nature. “Man follows the example of Earth, Earth follows the example of Heaven, Heaven follows the example of Providence, and Providence follows the example of Nature” [6]. Zai Zhang and Yi Cheng think that humanity is Providence, confirmed the identity of both of them. Zai Zhang believes that “humanity and Providence is easy to just change” [19]. Yi Cheng thinks that “the compassion of humanity is Providence which is the same with humanity” [20]. “There is the distinction between Heaven and man as Providence does not make a start. But it is Providence in Heaven, the law in Earth, humanity in man” [21]. They affirm that Providence is humanity, recognizing the unity of Nature and humanity.

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” advocates the harmonious coexistence between man and Nature. It warns the people that “to go beyond is as wrong as to fall short” [22]. not to go to extremes in thinking and behavior, to destroy the ecological environment, contrary to the laws of Nature. “Let the states of equilibrium and harmony exist in perfection, and a happy order will prevail throughout Heaven and Earth, and all things will be nourished and flourish” [9]. “Heaven and Earth is united and all things are born, the Positive and Negative Forces are intersected and the changes begin to appear” [23]. Then, the individual can be merciful in heart and moral in sublimation, and the group can live together in mutual sincerity and magnanimity; the society can be in long-term stability, harmony, and progress, consciously maintain the dynamic balance between man and Nature.

2) The relationship between man and man

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” explores the natural law and mutual relations among Heaven, Earth, and man. In real life, it has established the relations that “Heaven is above and Earth is below”, also established the relations that “the senior is noble and the inferior is humble.” “Heaven is lofty and honorable; Earth is under and low. Qian and Kun is determined, with their respective meanings, all things were determined” [5]. It advocates that “the superior man takes benevolence as the statue. The world is rich, what is rich? The benevolence is as the rich. The world is noble, what is noble? The benevolence is as the noble” [24]. The person whether he is rich or poor, should be based on virtue. Who has virtue is noble and is humble without virtue. Therefore, the rich takes the charity to others as virtue, the poor gives up the extravagance as virtue. The honorable considers the safety of the common people as virtue the humble forgets the disadvantage of the situation as virtue.

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” promotes the interpersonal exchanges of civilization. It reflects the mutual relationship that one person should be loyal to others with efforts and treat others with the forgiving attitude. “The essence of propriety is self-esteem and respect for others. Even though the hawkers must also have a respectable position, not to mention the rich” [25]. It advocates the mutual respect between man and man. “Do not do to others what you would not have them do to yourself” [26]. “When

the rulers love the rules of propriety, the people respond readily to the calls for service” [27]. The statue of “propriety” let the people have a “formality” to follow, and make the country in civilization and in peace.

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” emphasizes the kind-heart and puts forward the concept that “blood is thicker than water”. “Treat the elders in your own family with reverence, so that the elders in other families shall be similarly treated; treat the youngsters in your own family with kindness, so that the youngsters in other families shall be similarly treated” [28]. Mencius first proposes the concept of “human relations”, and takes “understanding human relations” as the law to be on intimate terms with the people and subjugate the country. “When those relationship is illustrated by the superior people kindly, feeling will prevail among the inferior people below. Should a real sovereign arise, he will certainly come and take an example” [29]. Mo Tzu puts forward the concept of “universal love and mutual benefit” [30]. They advocate the harmonious relationship that the people deal with each other and make mutual communication.

3) The relationship between man and himself

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” thinks that the principles of Providence and moral values are derived from Heaven. Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity is given by Heaven. It is as “benevolence” as the moral core, as “propriety” as its manifestation of appearance. Confucius advocates “the superior man holds righteousness to be of highest importance” [31]. He advocates “the virtuous rest in virtue, the wise desire virtue” [32]. “The determined scholar and the man of virtue will not seek to live at the expense of injuring their virtue. They will even sacrifice their lives to preserve their virtue complete” [33]. Mencius advocates “laying down one’s life for righteousness”. “Life is my desire, righteousness is also my desire. But if I cannot get both together, I would rather choose righteousness than life” [34]. It explores humanity by the people, advocating the self-perfection of humanity in order to realize the self-value of life.

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” emphasizes intrinsic values of man, paying attention to the cultivation of one’s original nature and the edification of one’s sentiment. “Only the most complete sincere person under Heaven, he is able to fully develop his human nature. Able to fully develop his nature, he can fully develop the nature of others. Able to develop the nature of others, he will fully achieve the nature of all things. Able to develop the nature of all things, he will assist the transformation and nourishing of Heaven and Earth. Able to assist the transformation and nourishing of Heaven and Earth, he may form a ternion with Heaven and Earth” [9]. “Therefore, sincerity is Providence of Heaven, to think how to be sincere is humanity of man” [35]. They pay attention to humanity in accord with Providence, achieving the communication with others and things between Heaven and Earth.

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” emphasizes the personal morality and the sincerity of heart. “From the emperor to the common people, all are to cultivate one’s morality as the root” [36]. It also emphasizes to play the

initiative of the individual morality at the same time. “Is virtue a thing remote? I wish to be virtuous and virtue at hand” [37]. It advocates that “it should be sorrowful before the people of the world are in sorrow, and should be pleasurable after the people of the world are in pleasure” [38]. Because “humanity is set forth by cultivating one’s own nature; he is preserved from confusion by honoring the sage” [9]. Both “regulating the family” and “administering the country” or “suppressing the world”, all these things have to begin from cultivating one’s morality, because this is the fundamental source of all thinking and behavior.

4) The relationship between man and state

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” identifies the “destiny” principle of respecting the “monarch” and observing the “propriety”. “However the emperor is given orders by Heaven, the world is given orders by the emperor, the country is given orders by the king” [39]. It puts the hopes of the country on the “sagacious emperor” and the “imperial power” the common people are just “subjects” or “people”. Even though the dynasty is in the rise and fall, no matter who has taken power still self-styles the “divine power of monarchies”. “Therefore propriety is to serve Heaven above and Earth below, respect the ancestor and the monarch, which are the three basic principles of propriety” [23]. The system of Chinese “propriety” is sacred and unshakable, but people still can “enforce justice on behalf of Heaven”, to overthrow the tyranny, and establish a new regime.

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” advocates the governance of the country by “propriety”. It has been described as “the system of propriety” and “the rule by propriety”, specifically performing for justice and public, namely benevolence, for public, for justice, and patriotism. Both the scholar bureaucrats “plead for the people”, and the public class “enforce justice on behalf of Heaven”, “everyone is responsible for the rise and fall of his country” [40]. It becomes each citizen’s bounden duty, to form the traditional spirit of patriotism, to safeguard the great unity of the Chinese nation.

The highest ideal realm of the “Unity between Heaven and Man” is the embodiment of “harmony”, humanity accords with Providence. Confucius emphasizes that “in practicing the rules of propriety, appropriateness is to be prized” [41]. It advocates that “the superior man is affable, but not adulatory; the mean man is adulatory, but not affable” [42]. “Only a capacious heart can man has high morality, only a patient heart can he do things successfully. Because only a capacious heart can he forgive the mistakes of others, only a patient heart can he withstand the ups and downs of things” [43]. The Chinese people always oppose violence, advocating peace. On the basis of harmony between man and Nature, man and man, man and himself, they begin to explore a harmonic survival pathway of the doctrine of the mean, thereby promoting the stable development of the Chinese society to live in harmony with the neighbouring countries.

III. CONCLUSION

The “Unity between Heaven and Man” is a complete collection of thought, unified in logic, unified in Providence,

unified in the noble morality. There is a definite link and a corresponding relationship between Heaven and man, because the occurrence in astronomical phenomena will accordingly lead to the changes of the human society. When man truly understand the relationship between man and Heaven, they will naturally understand the meaning of life and the value of survival. Man will take the initiative to consciously regulate their thinking and behavior, to actively complete their mission and responsibilities conferred by Heaven. Therefore the core of Chinese traditional values clearly defines the basic judgment of the people for right and wrong, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, affecting generations of the Chinese people to regard the truth and virtue as the supreme pursuit.

The "Book of Wei" thinks that "Three Sovereigns (Fuxi, Shennong, Suiren) step fast, Five Emperors (Zhuan Xu, Ku, Tang Yao, Yu Shun) trot quickly, Three Kings (Qi of Xia, Tang of Shang, King Wen of Zhou) gallop ahead, Five Chiefs (Duke Huan of Qi, Duke Wen of Jin, Duke Xiang of Song, Duke Mu of Qin, King Zhuang of Chu) only go after them" [44]. It reveals the increasingly falling trend of the human historical development. The innate pristine nature, the innate instinct to communicate with Heaven and Earth, as man increasingly raise the capabilities of their awareness and self-defense, as well as man strengthen the desire of possessive material, degenerated and lost with each passing day. So Taoism has proposed the thought of "returning to one's original innocence", Confucianism has proposed the viewpoint of "subduing one's self and returning to propriety" [26]. Buddhism has proposed the opinion of "cultivating one's heart to be good." Their purpose is to stick to the heart to Providence against the current, breaking away from various desires and temptations of fame and fortune to tie him down, consciously restraining their thinking and behavior, to improve virtuous standards, and return to Providence and humanity.

The "Unity between Heaven and Man" reflects the profound and unique cultural essence of the Chinese people, and the philosophical views that "Providence is so great and from Heaven, which is unchanged, Providence has also unchanged" [45]. Open the human history of development, natural disasters almost never cut off from before. If man do things contrary to Providence, Heaven will drop calamities to be warning, and promote man's introspection. If man can promptly correct human error, and make amends for it, then calamities will subside on their own. Otherwise, warlords everywhere, and social turmoil, the rise and fall of dynasties would be replaced. So comply with Providence, to teach man to be good, it would be the most fundamental way to solve natural disasters and man-made misfortunes in ancient China, and so do many other countries in the world. This is because "man who accord with Heaven can be preserved and man who rebel against heaven can be perished" [35].

As the core of Chinese traditional values, the "Unity between Heaven and Man" is the collective crystallization that the fine traditional culture of the Chinese nation continues to carry forward and mix together. It is the history witness that the Chinese civilization is hereditary and long development. It is also a kind of lofty ideals pursued by the

human society since ancient times to this day. Whether it is in ancient or modern times, the moral philosophy among different nationalities are basically the same although the development process of all countries in the world are not the same. They have the same or similar myths and legends, emphasizing that the relationship between Heaven and man are closely linked and inseparable. The "Unity between Heaven and Man" has the importance of universal values, still shows the most powerful vitality and profound practical significance today. Therefore, it is applicable to any country and nation all over the world.

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