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MASTER'S THESIS

**Confucian values and the Chinese political  
tradition**

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## **Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis independently, using only the listed resources and literature.
2. I hereby declare that all the sources and literature used have been properly cited.
3. I hereby declares that the thesis has not been used to obtain a different or the same degree.

In Prague

27.04.2021

Zhe Zhang

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## **Abstract**

Culture and politics are inseparable. How to realize the cultural factors of Chinese traditional politics and its influence and enlightenment on the contemporary era has been one of the most important issues with great concern of the academic community. Starting from Confucianism, this paper uses qualitative analysis and Marxist theory of cultural criticism to provide an in-depth interpretation of traditional Chinese politics. The main content of the paper is divided into three parts.

The first part provides a systematic study of the background of the emergence of Confucian political philosophy in the pre-Qin period. Its main content covers the economic, political, and cultural aspects of the Warring States period.

The second part analyzes the values of pre-Qin Confucian political philosophy. This part mainly deals with the theories of heavenly and human nature of three Confucian scholars, Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi.

The third part interprets traditional Chinese politics in the context of Confucianism by focusing on the blood patriarchal culture, the social-based culture, the ethical culture, and the political culture of the sages, respectively. Through a summary of the characteristics and contradictions of traditional Chinese politics, an objective understanding of the emergence, development, and characteristics of traditional Chinese politics is further developed.

## **Key words**

Traditional Chinese politics; Confucianism; Rites; Socially-oriented; Morality; Obligations; Heaven;

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Research background and significance

With China's rapid economic growth, international research on the "China model" has become a hot topic (Girard, 2018: 1). However, some of these studies are based on values and theories inherent to the Chinese political system, and to some extent go beyond the purely academic to include political intentions and moral biases. They tend to ignore and avoid the historical connections of the contemporary Chinese political development path and view the model in isolation.

Political culture is the soul of politics, and it determines the intrinsic motivations and values of people's political behavior (Morlino, 2017: 64). The culture of any country has a long history of accumulation and continuity, in which political culture is formed by the history of the nation and the actual process of social, economic, and political activities, and the type of attitudes formed by people in the experience has an important role in enforcing future political behavior (Almond, 1956). A rational analysis of Chinese politics needs to start from the traditional Chinese political culture.

And culture and politics have never been inseparable. Behind the formation and development of any national political model, there is a socio-cultural background that influences and drives it (Mehmetaj, 2014: 5). And Confucianism, as the mainstream of traditional Chinese political thought and culture, is a very important indicator for the study of traditional Chinese politics. During China's feudal era, which lasted more than 2,000 years, the traditional political culture of Confucianism always occupied a dominant position, and its radiation covered many countries and regions in East and Southeast Asia, exerting a wide and profound influence on their historical processes and social development, forming the 'Confucian cultural circle' (Liu, 2009: 1-3). In its long evolution, Confucian culture has gone far beyond the realm of mere cultural significance and has developed into a mature and pervasive traditional Chinese political culture, forming a complete system of political norms, values, and norms for political life, and has had a wide and profound impact on the development of traditional Chinese society, and will continue to profoundly influence the process of political development in contemporary China. Therefore, this paper takes Confucianism as an entry point to explore its influence on traditional Chinese politics in depth.

The main significance of the paper's research contains the following two points.

First, Confucianism has always played an extremely important role in traditional Chinese political thought. Not only did thinkers make a lot of theoretical discussions, but rulers of all generations also took it as the guiding ideology of practical politics. The fact that Confucianism has become the main body of traditional Chinese political thought is the result

of a choice made by Chinese society, and this choice itself has its intrinsic rationality. Through the analysis and study of the background of the emergence of Confucianism and its values, we will understand the influence of Confucianism on traditional Chinese society and its historical value, and establish connections between Confucianism and Chinese traditional politics.

Secondly, we will analyze the background of the emergence of Confucian culture and political philosophy to understand the emergence, development, and characteristics of traditional Chinese politics, explore the historical necessity, rationality, and historical limitations of its existence, and provide implications for political construction in the world today. Previous theoretical studies of traditional Chinese politics have mostly been conducted at the political, economic, and social levels, but have lacked cultural interpretations, especially in terms of geopolitical culture, blood patriarchal culture, social standard culture, and ethical-political culture. This inevitably results in a one-sided understanding of traditional Chinese politics. This paper selects Chinese traditional politics as the object of study and uses basic Marxist theory and qualitative analysis to study it from a new perspective, namely, the perspective of Confucian culture. Ultimately this thesis will comprehensively analyze the historical necessity and rationality of the emergence and existence of traditional Chinese politics and reveal the main features and cultural paradoxes of traditional Chinese politics.

## **1.2 Research and literature review**

Confucianism and Chinese political tradition have played a huge influence on Chinese political development since modern times. The relationship between tradition and reality is like a riverbed and a river, with the riverbed governing the course of the river (Zhang, 2017: 1). Therefore, the study of Confucianism and traditional Chinese politics has become an important issue of academic attention and research in recent times. Many researchers have conducted more in-depth studies on them from different perspectives, and the most important representative views are summarized in the following categories.

### **1.21 Chinese civilization and the core values of Confucianism**

Written by Professor Chen Lai (2017), "The Core Values of Chinese Civilization" profoundly expounds on the philosophical foundation of Confucian culture and its values. The author summarizes the basic way of thinking of Chinese civilization in six aspects and profoundly explains the philosophical basis of the values advocated by Confucian culture. The first is the correlative universe, which means that things in the world are seen as correlative beings (Chen, 2017: 1). The second is The One Continuous Qi, which means that all things are composed of Qi, and sees the creation and development of things the gathering and dispersion of Qi (Chen, 2017: 3). It is therefore different from Western atomism. The theory of Qi emphasizes the continuity of matter. The third is Yin-Yang Complementation,

which means that Yin and Yang are interconnected, interact, penetrate and transform each other, providing each other with the conditions for existence (Chen, 2017: 10). The fourth is Continuously Generative Transformation, which means that in the development of the universe, new things are constantly arising, and there are no things that remain unchanged (Chen, 2017: 13). The fifth is Natural Heavenly Patterns, which does not recognize a Creator, but emphasizes self-generation and nature, which also means valuing human beings (Chen, 2017: 16). The sixth is Unification of Humans and Heaven, which means that man is consistent with nature and heaven, and that all things in heaven and earth form an indivisible whole (Chen, 2017: 20). Therefore, Confucianism emphasizes the love of people and things, expanding from the love of people to the love of everything in heaven and earth.

And the author delves into identifying the similarities and differences between Chinese and Western core values. The author argues that to grasp the unique values of Confucianism, one should not only understand the characteristics of Chinese civilization but also recognize the values of world civilization, especially Western values (Chen, 2017: 36).

The author points out that, first, the values of Confucianism emphasize the responsibility of the individual for others, for the community, and even for nature, as opposed to the values of modern Western civilization, which emphasize individual freedom (Chen, 2017: 36). Confucianism's theory of virtue has formed a complete system since the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. Its basic orientation emphasizes the responsibility of the individual to others and to society. In the Confucian view, the individual has a continuous relationship with others and the community. It is a virtue to actively assume one's responsibility to the other. Individuals must not be self-centered in constituting relationships with others but should put the other person first. Responsibility becomes an important motivation for the social practice of individuals in the ideal Confucian society. At the same time, because individuals form various relationships with multiple objects in a network of social relations, their responsibilities are multiple rather than single. In contrast, in the dominant modern Western culture, human rights are more concerned with the responsibilities and duties of government than with the individual. This conception of rights is at the heart of modern Western liberal philosophy. It puts the focus on the individual's claim on society and the protection of his or her rights (Chen, 2017: 36-38).

Second, in contrast to the values of modern Western civilization, which emphasize the priority of rights, the values of Confucianism assert the importance of obligations in human relationships (Chen, 2017: 38). Chinese ethical culture emphasizes the priority of obligation in human relationships. In contrast, in the West, individualism has prevailed in recent times, creating an individual-based society. Moreover, the sense of obligation emphasized by Chinese ethical culture is open-ended, extending from the family to the clan, the community, the nation, and the world. This fundamental orientation toward obligation does not emphasize individual rights, but rather advocates striving to assume obligations to others (Chen, 2017: 38-39).

Third, in contrast to the values of modern Western civilization, which emphasize the primacy of the individual, the values of Confucianism believe that the interests of the individual cannot take precedence over the interests of the family and the state (Chen, 2017: 39). In the view of Chinese values, the individual cannot exist apart from the group. It places more emphasis on the intersection of the individual and the group, on the obligations of the individual to the group, and on the importance of the interests of the community as a whole. In a progressive structure from individual to family to state to world to nature, Chinese values demonstrate the responsibilities and obligations of the individual to the different levels of the community. In contrast, the central principle of modern Western liberal ethics is that each individual has the right to engage in activities according to his or her own values. The two different ethical positions reflect different value domains (Chen, 2017: 39-40).

## **1.22 Confucian political thought**

Since the 20th century, there has been a wealth of academic research on Confucian political thought. Vertically, it is divided into three stages: before the liberation of China, after the liberation of China to the end of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and after the Cultural Revolution (Chen, 2011: 1-3).

The first stage is before the liberation of China, represented by Feng Youlan, Xiao Gongquan, and others.

In his *History of Chinese Political Thought*, Xiao Gongquan (2010) discusses the political thought of pre-Qin Confucianism and mentions Confucius and Mencius. Regarding Confucius' political thought, he believes that there are two main aspects, political theory, and governing techniques, and summarizes them into the following four points. Maintaining the ritual system of the Zhou Dynasty was the starting point of Confucius' political thought and his advocacy of the political system. Confucius' so-called ruled by benevolence is a fusion of morality, rites, and politics into one, treating the individual, the family, and the state as one to manage (Xiao, 2010: 41). Confucius listed three ways to govern the people, which are nurturing, edification, and governance. The tools of nurturing and education are morality and rites, and the tools of governance are punishment and law, of which morality and rites are to be the primary and law the secondary (Xiao, 2010: 43). The so-called "ruled by benevolence" was Confucius' first measure to improve the politics of the Zhou Dynasty, and "ruled by man" was the second. Besides, Confucius often referred to the saint as the core of the idea of ruled by man (Xiao, 2010: 46).

For Mencius' political thought, he believed that Confucius discussed politics with benevolence as the main focus. Mencius agreed with Confucius and put forward the policy of benevolence (Xiao, 2010: 58). In his view, nurturing and educating the people is the most important duty of rulers, and Mencius further put forward the view that plebeian beings are more important than monarchs. Mencius said, "The people are the most important, politics is the second, and the king is the less important (Xiao, 2010: 61)." In Xiao's view, Mencius'

greatest contribution is stressing the ruled instead of the ruler, not only taking the people as the purpose of politics but also taking the people as the subject of politics.

Many ideas from this period still have positive effects when viewed today. But most of the research process has used the West as a reference, magnifying the shortcomings and deficiencies of Confucianism. And researchers also have paid less attention to Confucian scholars other than Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, and other Confucian masters.

The second stage was from the liberation of China to the end of the Cultural Revolution (1949-1967).

During the Cultural Revolution in China, due to the prevalence of "leftist" ideology, the discussion of Confucianism emerged as a phenomenon in which criticism overrode inheritance and politics took precedence over academia (Shang & Ren & Li, 2008: 279). During this period, most Chinese scholars denounced Confucianism as a retrograde philosophy, intending to expose its feudal authoritarianism and deception. They rejected Confucius and Confucianism in their entirety. Confucian political thought had no place in mainland China (Shang & Ren & Li, 2008: 274).

The third stage was after the Cultural Revolution (1967 to the present).

Along with the reform and opening up of China and the ideological emancipation movement, Confucianism began to be revived during this period as a result of the influence of the economic take-off in Japan, Korea, Singapore, and other countries. As a result, a large number of studies on Confucian political thought were produced (Zhang, 2010: 2).

In *Political Philosophy and Social Integration in Ancient China*, Mr. Liu Zehua (2000) emphasizes the importance of political philosophy in Traditional Chinese Political Thought (Liu, 2000: 2-3). The book discusses issues such as the belief in the mandate of heaven and the identity of kingship, the grand unification and political division, the exaltation of communism and the suppression of selfishness, and the doctrine of revolution (Liu, 2000: 5-15).

In Mr. Wang Jie's (2011) *Essay on the Political Thought of Confucianism in the Pre-Qin Dynasty*, he adopts the research idea of taking the historical development sequence as the baseline and makes a comprehensive and systematic arrangement and interpretation of the inner development path and basic characteristics of Confucian political thought. From the perspective of the history of thought, he explains the trajectory of intellectual change from theology to anthropology during the Zhou dynasty (Wang, 2011: 95). After Confucius, Confucian political thought unfolded mainly along two logical lines. One is the basic system of early Confucianism developed by Confucius and Mencius. This was followed by the formation of a complete political thought system of the Inner-Sage type (Wang, 2011: 241). The other is the complete system of the political thought of the outer-king type developed by Confucius, Xunzi, and the *Book of Changes*. The author believes that early Confucian

political thought laid the foundation for the basic point of traditional Chinese politics (Wang, 2011: 312).

Research in recent years has revolved around the discussion of communitarianism. Communitarianism has become a unique perspective for Chinese and Western scholars to study the political philosophy of Confucianism. In recent years, many Chinese and Western researchers have been keen to study the relationship between Confucianism and communitarianism. Some Western researchers argue that China has always been a communitarian society. In Tu Weiming's view, Confucian democratic communitarianism that blends Confucianism and the spirit of democracy on communitarianism can be established (Zeng, 2001: 3-4). He believes that a Confucian-style communitarian democracy is theoretically possible. In his view, communitarianism and liberalism are not incompatible (Zeng, 2001: 5).

### **1.23 Traditional Chinese politics**

The representative person who studied the authoritarian politics in China and the East from the perspective of water governance was the German scholar Karl August Wittfogel (1967). The result of his work is *Oriental Despotism*, published in 1989 by the Chinese Social Science Press. This view is that in the Eastern world, due to environmental aridity and the need for water, large-scale state-controlled public works were built. This gave the East its agricultural, political, and social uniqueness and gave Asian societies a special historical status (Wittfogel, 1967: 3-5). It can be said that the prototype of Wittfogel's theory about water management society was already formed in the late 20th century. In the theoretical system constructed by Wittfogel, the "Asian mode of production" is the "water management society", and "agricultural management authoritarianism is the basic feature of the water management society" (Wittfogel, 1967: 10). He argues that water irrigation in Eastern societies required integrated collaboration, strong management and control, and therefore authoritarian rule. Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism* treats China as a specimen of a "water-governing society" and offers some insights from an empirical perspective, but the book is a product of the Cold War era and "contains many far-fetched or arbitrary interpretations of Chinese history" (Lin, 1995: 1).

The influence of culture on politics is explored from a comparison between the ethical type of Confucian culture and the juridical type of Western culture. The representatives of this view are Zhu Hanmin (1989) and Zhang Xiang (2002). According to this view, if we compare the traditional political culture of China with that of the West, we can find that China is an ethical type of politics, while the West is a juridical type of politics. Specifically, the political order in China is mainly maintained by ethical concepts, political activities are regulated by ethical concepts, political rights are restrained by ethical concepts, and ethical concepts play a central role in the socio-political system (Zhu, 1989: 2). In contrast, the political order in the

West is maintained by law, political activities are regulated by law, political rights are restrained by law, and law is the core of the Western political system.

The existence of traditional politics and its implications are analyzed in terms of the hyper-stable structure of traditional Chinese society. According to this view, the social structure is seen as consisting of three parts: economic, political, and ideological structures (Jin & Liu, 1992: 198). The unique reason for the long existence of the "grand unification" of Chinese feudal society is that its economic base was different from that of other ethnic groups. Compared with the small peasant economy of other nations, which lacked organizational strength, its economic base was a "concrete" small peasant economy organized through the integration of political and ideological structures (Jin & Liu, 1992: 321). The integration of political and ideological structures performed three major historical functions: regulating the feudal political system of feudalism, limiting personal dependence in the feudal economy, and suppressing military fragmentation (Jin & Liu, 1992: 239). Thus, the economic, political, and ideological subsystems of Chinese feudal society interacted with each other to produce a unified feudal monarchy and to make the family and the state "a pair of isomorphs" in Chinese feudal society (Jin & Liu, 1992: 314).

From the history of academic research on traditional Chinese politics, research perspectives, and research results, there is still much room for expanding the analysis of the cultural perspective of traditional politics and its inspiration for today's world politics.

## **2. Background of the emergence of Confucian political philosophy**

Confucianism has its specific cultural background and ideological resources. On the one hand, as Marx said, it is not people's consciousness that determines people's existence; on the contrary, it is people's social existence that determines people's consciousness (Engels, 1884: 82). Confucian political philosophy arose, developed, and matured during the turbulent historical period of ancient China. On the other hand, as Engels said, "in the many and varied forms of Greek philosophy can be found the germ, the embryo, of almost all later views (Engels, 1884: 287)." Confucius was the founder of Confucianism. However, Confucius said that he was "describing but not doing", perhaps he thought that his thoughts were gradually formed in his interpretation of ancient society (Analects). The following is an analysis of the economic, political, and cultural context in which Confucianism arose.

### **2.1 Economic background**

Confucianism arose in ancient China during the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period (Cline, 2006). The biggest change in the economic sphere during this period was the establishment of private ownership. Before the Spring and Autumn Period, the state system of land ownership, represented by the Zhou kings, was in place. As the poem "The Book of Songs" says, "Under heaven, there is no other land but the land of kings; and on these lands, there is no other people but the subjects of kings (Wang, 2015: 11)." All land belonged to the king of Zhou. The king of the Zhou divided the land to the vassals according to the patriarchal system, and then the vassals divided the land to their subordinates. All nobles except the king of Zhou only had the right to use the land, but not to own it (Wang, 2015: 15). At the same time, there was a distinction between public and private land, and the state had to rely on the land for taxes, officials' salaries, and peasants' livelihood. Peasants had to finish their work on public land before they could work on private land. Private land was forbidden to be traded, and the size of the land was divided according to whether it could sustain a stable life. These lands were also subject to a regular rotation system (Wang, 2014: 18).

During the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period, the productivity of agriculture was greatly improved by the introduction of iron tools (Bai, 2005: 42). Engels (1884) spoke highly of the significance of iron, saying that it was the most important of the various raw materials that had played a revolutionary role in history. In terms of the role of iron in the development of the world economy, the industrial revolution in the West in the 19th century also began with iron. With the spread of oxen plowing, the productivity of a single laborer increased more than five times (Wang, 2014: 8). This greatly facilitated the clearing of wasteland and the construction of water conservancy projects. Since new private

fields were not subject to taxation, there were a lot of new fields. The vassals encouraged people to cultivate the land to expand their power rapidly. In this process, a large number of private lands began to appear and the old land system was loosened.

As a result of the emergence of private lands, the lords became more and more aggressive in opening up their territories and plundering their wealth. Frequent wars destroyed the self-sufficient and relatively stable economic life of the serfs. The oppression of serfs increased and the struggle between classes became more intense. The previous methods did not motivate the producers to work. Serfs were no longer willing to work hard for the public land. The lords proposed various policies to buy the hearts of the people to change the way of exploitation. In Jin Dynasty, the people's private lands were expanded while taxes remained unchanged. Qi Dynasty encouraged people to work by reducing taxes (Liu, 2000: 353). The burden of serfs was effectively reduced compared to the past. The reforms introduced by each lord were different in form but the essence was the same. All of them recognized private ownership of land and allowed the expansion of private ownership of land through acts of reward and land reclamation.

In the process of private ownership of land, farmers gained the status of independent laborers in the process of social change (Zhu, 2006: 18). They either cultivated on their land or rented land from landlords to do their work. At the same time, they were required to bear the corresponding taxes and labor. The people began to be valued by the rulers as the source of national taxation and military strength and were considered the foundation of countries at that time. With the development of private ownership during the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period, a small-scale peasant economy with family-based subsistence farming began to emerge (Zhu, 2006: 16). From then on, China entered a new economic era, namely the era of small-scale peasant economy. This was the most basic economic form of the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period.

## **2.2 Political environment**

During the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period, the biggest political change was that slavery began to be gradually replaced by feudalism. The noble class and the slave class, which were the main classes of society, began to divide into the landowning class and the peasant class, while craftsmen and merchants also began to appear in large numbers. And as time went on, the way of ruling by the kings changed as well. The relationship between the ruler and his subjects changed from the old family blood relationship to a relationship of power granting. The selection and appointment of officials no longer relied solely on family and blood ties; ability and morality also became criteria for selection, and even for choosing the ruler.

In the early Spring and Autumn Period, the ritual and music system and patriarchal system established in the Western Zhou still functioned. The ritual system emphasized order,

and it sought to address the distinction between superiority and inferiority. Music sought unity within the ruling class and stability in dynastic society. The patriarchal hierarchy of the Zhou Dynasty was a social system formed by combining the family system, which was directly based on blood relations, with state power. Its purpose was to maintain the hereditary rule of the nobility, and it was characterized by the combination of family and politics. According to Liu, ancient Chinese society was a strictly hierarchical society, and the ancient Chinese hierarchy consisted of a patriarchal hierarchy, an occupational hierarchy, and a racial hierarchy, which constituted the diverse features of the hierarchy (Liu, 2000: 45).

The Zhou dynasty's patriarchal system was reflected in the field of social life as Ritual, the basic point of which was to transform family relations formed based on blood relations into national political relations with the distinction of inferiority and superiority. The rituals as the law first defined the hierarchy. Those who observe rituals understand that there is a distinction between people who are superior and those who are inferior, that there is a difference between elders and children, and that there are different titles for the poor and the rich (Xunzi). And it is also stipulated that different ranks have different statuses. Different statuses had different rights and duties. Specifically, the monarch was responsible for the administration of the vassals, the vassals were responsible for the enfeoffment of their ministers, and the ministers were responsible for the enfeoffment of their subordinates, and each person in society had his rank and duties (Russell, 1997: 577). The "ruled by rites" also has a clear ethical and moral content, and the basic principles are filial piety and loyalty. In this way, the country is well-governed by loving elders, filial children, mutual respect among brothers, and friendly friends. Under this mode of rule, politics and blood relations are closely linked.

During the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period, the power of the vassals developed rapidly. Instead of being able to control the vassals, the Emperor of Zhou was bullied by them. History records that the vassal of Zheng defeated the royal army (Records of the Historian). The vassal of the Chu, one of the hegemonies, once asked the King of Zhou how much a tripod weighed. The tripod was a symbol of power in ancient China, and apparently, the vassal of Chu wanted to replace the rule of the King of Zhou (Zuo Zhuan). The entire Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period was a chaotic one, with vassals and lords fighting for hegemony, conquering territories and wars. Due to the need for hegemony, the rulers of various countries attached great importance to talents, and the Shi, as a special class, entered the stage of history. They were mainly used to advise the rulers. Under such circumstances, many of them became the elite of the times. Confucius himself was also a Shi. During this period, the lords vied for supremacy and the state was in an unprecedented chaos. Society urgently needed to establish a new and stable order, and Confucianism came into being.

## **2.3 Cultural background**

With the emergence of iron, social productivity developed rapidly, which promoted social changes and led to unprecedented vigor and prosperity of ideas. In the early Spring and Autumn period, some traditional concepts began to waver and new trends of thought began to emerge. This situation had a great influence on the formation of Confucianism, as illustrated by the following examples.

### **2.31 Changes in the concept of Heaven and Mandate of Heaven**

Confucius points out that the ideology of Shang society was characterized by the priority of the will of the gods over the ritual system. This indicates a very strong and solid primitive religious concept during the Shang Dynasty. At the same time, he pointed out that the dominant ideology of society was changing as the times progressed. The Xia Dynasty believed in the Mandate of Heaven, the Shang Dynasty believed in the gods, and the Zhou Dynasty adhered to the ritual system. The three cultures were closely linked, and the people's rationality was higher from generation to generation (Hou, 2005: 2).

During the Shang Dynasty, people believed in the Mandate of Heaven. The king of the late Shang Dynasty wished to move the capital, which was opposed by many ministers. But he still claimed that it was a directive from heaven. And the Shang emperor practiced tyranny. In his view, he had the blessing of heaven and even the most brutal rule would be approved by God (Wang, 1999: 135). The tyrannical rule provoked a rebellion of the people and eventually, the Shang dynasty's rule fell.

After the fall of the Shang Dynasty, the Zhou Dynasty emerged. The social and political situation was extremely unstable, and various rebellions occurred constantly. Under the severe political struggle, the Zhou rulers faced serious challenges in two aspects. One was whether the Zhou dynasty could continue to claim that the imperial power was ordained by heaven, as the so-called mandate from the heaven of the Shang dynasty proved not to be eternal. The second was that the Zhou dynasty was seen at the time as a rebellion to overthrow the rule of the Shang dynasty. Could this act be sanctioned by the Mandate of Heaven? In other words, it was a question of how the rulers of the Zhou dynasty continued to follow the Shang dynasty's concept of God and how to interpret the political legitimacy of the Zhou dynasty (Wang, 1999: 138).

The Zhou dynasty introduced the concept of Match Heaven with Virtue (Hou, 2005: 3). The Zhou concept of heaven was the highest spiritual entity with moral rationality, the concept of good and evil, and the sense of justice. The emperor's desire to obtain the approval of Heaven was no longer unconditional and unrestricted, but conditional and restricted. This condition is a virtue. The Mandate of Heaven in the eyes of the Zhou dynasty was transformed from an absolute authority to a supreme moral guardian with moral

consciousness. The Mandate of Heaven in the Zhou Dynasty was rationalized. It became more prominent in the Spring and Autumn Period. People gradually got rid of the control of Heaven on people's thoughts (Hou, 2005: 3-4). The change in people's attitude toward Heaven and the Mandate of Heaven made it possible for people to think rationally and freely. This provided the ideological basis for the later formation of Confucianism, which was distinct from religious theology.

### **2.32 Changes in the concept of Rite**

During the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period, the understanding and application of Ritual began to change as the concept of Heaven and Mandate of Heaven changed. In the beginning, Ritual was always mixed with religious ceremonies. Wang Guowei (2003: 5) believed that rituals originated from religious ceremonies. In ancient China, Ritual was first used as a ceremony to worship the gods. By the Spring and Autumn Period, the social function of the ritual was to maintain social order and Ritual began to have a political meaning.

### **2.33 Changes in the concept of emperors and ministers**

In the traditional patriarchal system, the superior and inferior relationship of the ruler, minister, father, and son was fixed. By the Spring and Autumn and Warring States period, some people modified this. Shi Kuang (552 B.C.) believed that a good ruler would reward good and punish evil, and nurture the people as if they were his children. The root cause of the people of Wei driving the state ruler away was the state ruler. The king failed to do his duty as a king, leaving the people in hardship and the gods lacking worship. This change in the traditional concept of ruler and subject was later developed by Confucianism. People began to judge kings by moral standards.

As society developed, by the end of the Spring and Autumn Period, social productivity increased significantly due to the widespread use of iron and oxen plowing, the social division of labor became more refined, and craftsmen began to appear in large numbers (Bai, 2005: 45). The economic and social structure changed dramatically, and the political situation was chaotic with vassals competing for supremacy. The rulers of each country began to look for different ways to "save" the world due to different political considerations. They had different views on the schools of thought of the time. Some advocated Confucianism, some advocated Legalism, and some advocated Mohism. The rivalry of the great powers provided favorable external conditions for the emergence and development of various ideas and doctrines. Various schools of thought also put forward various political ideas, reflecting the thoughts of their respective classes and criticizing other schools of thought. The situation of the Hundred Schools of Thought, as it was later called, began to emerge (Zhao, 2006: 2). Confucianism developed under the influence of Western Zhou culture and Spring and Autumn and Warring States culture.

### **3. The values of Confucian political philosophy**

#### **3.1 The Way of Heaven of Confucianism**

The Way of Heaven is the metaphysical basis of pre-Qin Confucianism, the logical starting point and spiritual destination of its political philosophy. The focus of the view of Heavenly concept put forward by pre-Qin Confucianism was to find a reasonable transcendent basis for earthly order and moral values, rather than to explore the origin of the world and the relationship between the spiritual and material worlds (Feng, 1998: 15). The pre-Qin Confucians believed that the Way of Heaven existed in the moral consciousness of human beings and acted in all aspects of human social life. Therefore, they advocate a people-oriented view and believe in the virtue, wisdom, and power of human beings and the humane presentation of heaven.

##### **3.11 Trace to the origin of The Way of Heaven**

To some extent, any politics needs spiritual pillars. Western countries mostly take God in religion as their spiritual pillars, such as the American president taking the oath of office with his hand on the Bible. In ancient China, people took the Mandate of Heaven as their spiritual pillar. Also, the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven was recorded early in China. Archaeological findings show that divination was prevalent during the Shang dynasty, and religious activities permeated all areas of people's lives at that time. With the contemplation of life and death, people began to blend their ancestors and God through their imagination. The Shang dynasty believed that the emperor could ascend to heaven after death, and by praying to the emperor, they made their wishes communicated to God. The evolution ended with the emperor having more and more power and authority. Chen Lai (2009: 168) argues that the fundamental difference between the Shang Dynasty and the Zhou Dynasty's worldview is that the Shang people's Heaven had no ethical content, and in general could not reach the level of ethical religion.

The Mandate of Heaven, as an authoritative reverence and theoretical belief and basis for political rule, has been transformed into the will of God in the West since ancient Rome, but in China, the concept has continued for more than two thousand years. According to Zhang Dainian (1981: 22), the Way of Heaven is the process with laws that have heavenly changes. The Way of Heaven is the law of nature, a category corresponding to the Way of Man, a series of metaphysical categories. The pre-Qin Confucian view of the Way of Heaven attempted to establish the ultimate basis for earthly order and moral values between heaven and man.

During the Western Zhou dynasty, Heaven gradually became the main belief of people. During the Shang Dynasty, people had no initiative in front of God, and they could only fear

and obey Him (Wang, 2006: 1). After the Zhou Dynasty replaced the Shang Dynasty, the most direct way to prove the legitimacy of its rule was to prove that it was the spokesman of the gods (Wang, 1999: 138). This prompted the rulers of the Zhou dynasty to contemplate the will of the gods. This sovereign power in the sky needed to be recognized by the people to be the basis of social order and moral values. The Zhou dynasty used Virtue to open up the link between heaven and man. Heaven became the heaven of morality. The rulers of the Zhou dynasty gave the Virtue on earth to the sky, and people needed to match Heaven with virtue. Heaven gave the Zhou emperor virtue, and the emperor needed to improve morality and give it to the people. In essence, it was emphasized that people should and could achieve a proper grasp and management of social affairs through subjective efforts. The essence of the Zhou dynasty's Mandate of Heaven theory is that the emperor, as the earthly ruler, is the sole representative of the Mandate of Heaven. The doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven unifies nature and man in the cosmic system, links heaven and man together, and provides the earliest inspiration of political thought for mankind to understand and deal with the relationship between heaven and man (Chen, 2009: 179). The Book of Zhou (636) expresses that Heaven does not treat people differently, but only tilts its will toward those who are virtuous. And the criterion of virtuousness is to be recognized by the people.

Through people's long-term observation and contemplation, people found that there were many fixed things and phenomena, which eventually gave rise to the meaning of laws and order and nourished the concept of the Way of Heaven (Luo, 2012: 15-16). People called the objective laws that could be recognized as the Tao. Later the Tao was derived as the laws that nature and man should follow. Later Mencius divided the Tao into the Way of Heaven and the Way of Humanity, with the Way of Heaven representing the lawful order of nature and the Way of Humanity representing the laws of society. The emergence of the concept of Tao indicates that people began to realize that universal laws are the ultimate force that determines the world. This helped people to detach from the objective world of perception, unlike the Mandate of Heaven which could easily lead to ambiguity. Chen Lai (2009: 212) believes that the theory of the Mandate of Heaven in the Western Zhou Dynasty was still, on the whole, a theory cloaked in God. However, it is undeniable that it has slowly developed into an idea of order and fate, with the idea of order gradually condensed into the idea of the Way of Heaven, while the idea of fate is still dependent on the idea of the Mandate of Heaven.

### **3.12 Confucius' view of the Way of Heaven**

According to statistics, the Analects mentions "emperor" only when quoting the language of the Shang emperor, while "heaven" appears forty-nine times. In terms of content, except for a few times when the word "heaven" refers to the sky, the rest are related to the meaning of God, the Mandate of Heaven, and the Way of Heaven. To fully understand Confucius' view of the Mandate of Heaven, we can study it in the context of the Analects.

Zigong once said that Confucius' knowledge of rituals and laws could be grasped by students, but Confucius' knowledge of human nature and the Way of Heaven could not be grasped by students (Analects). It is evident that he failed to fully contact or deeply experience Confucius' thoughts. Heaven is the logical starting point and value basis of Confucius' thought system. As a whole, Confucius' view of Heaven involves four aspects. One, Heaven is the source of legitimacy of power. For example, Confucius was concerned with the rule of Yao and Shun. Confucius praised them as being as tall as mountains, and Heaven is the highest, so it is as if they were following the example of Heaven. Second, Heaven is the value basis for moral edification. For example, Confucius' discourse on culture expresses this view. Confucius said to his students that he did not want to talk anymore, to which Zi-gong asked how he could teach students knowledge if did not talk. Confucius replied, "Did the heaven say anything? The four seasons run as they are, and everything grows as it does (Analects)." Thirdly, Heaven is a being to be feared and has a restraining effect on man's words and actions. Fourth, Heaven can determine the fate of man and is also the judge of whether man's behavior is moral or not. Confucius once said that it is useless to pray to any god if one has offended heaven (Analects).

Confucius agreed with the view of the Mandate of Heaven. In Confucius' view, one cannot be a gentleman if he does not understand the Mandate of Heaven. For those who understand the Mandate of Heaven, they can only be called a gentleman if they act based on righteousness. At the same time, Confucius also revered the Mandate of Heaven. Confucius believed that ancestors and gods should be worshipped personally, otherwise it would be better not to do so (Analects).

We can speculate the process of knowing the Mandate of Heaven from what Confucius said, "When you are fifty and you will know the Mandate of Heaven" and "If you are not known about Heaven, you are not a gentleman". First, you have a good grasp of rituals through study; then you can discern what others say and have a good understanding of things; once you have done this, one acts following human orders until one's words and actions naturally conform to the orders of heaven. It can be seen that the most important point in knowing the Mandate of Heaven is the mastery of the "Rite", without which there is no way to know the Mandate of Heaven (Sheng, 2016: 4-5). According to Confucius, the Mandate of Heaven is a necessity that has not yet been recognized. It consists of both natural and social destiny. Confucius linked destiny to the formation of a gentleman's personality, which is of profound significance.

### **3.13 Mencius' view of the Way of Heaven**

Mencius believed that heaven would reward and punish each person according to morality. He believed that rulers create a foundation and set an example to pass it on, and as for success or failure, they can only listen to heaven (Mencius). Although the success of a career is somewhat contingent, Mencius adopted a positive attitude. Mencius believed that

everything that happens in life is destiny, and that pursuing one's ideal to the best of one's ability, even if one fails, is a just fate (Mencius). Mencius believed that we should take good care of our bodies because the limited life span of human beings requires us to take good care of our bodies. Everyone should try his best to pursue his ideal and follow the Mandate of Heaven, which is the best way to establish his merits. According to Mencius, what Yao and Shun did was out of nature, while the Shang and Zhou emperors showed their nature by pursuing their ideals. Everyone should act according to ritual, which is the highest expression of virtue (Zhai, 1992: 12). Weeping for the dead is not for showing to the living. Practicing morality rather than violating it is not used to seek official positions. The gentleman acted according to the situation and waited for the arrangement of fate. All words and actions should come from the power of sincerity within, regardless of external encounters. This is the core idea of Mencius' view of destiny, and this is what Mencius considers to be the right attitude toward fate.

It is believed that the transfer of the throne before the Shang Dynasty was through the emperor's abdication and the transfer of the crown to another person approved by the emperor. In contrast, the imperial thrones of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties were inherited within the family. The emergence of Xia, the replacement of Xia by Shang, and the replacement of Shang by Zhou were achieved through revolution. Why didn't a sage such as Confucius rule the world? Mencius explained it in the context of each specific situation with his concept of the Way of Heaven. In Mencius' view, the key to the position of emperor, whether hereditary or ceded, lies in the will of Heaven and the people (Zhai, 1992: 35). On the one hand, cultivating virtue and becoming virtuous, and gaining the approval of the people and officials, could be achieved by exercising subjective initiative. If the people could do it consciously and voluntarily, it was the will of Heaven. On the other hand, although Confucius is relatively virtuous and wise, he did not become emperor. It was all the will of Heaven and could not be changed by human power. All an individual can do is to keep cultivating virtue, and the final result still needs the approval of the will of Heaven.

Concerning revolution, Mencius' attitude was positive. In Mencius' view, the unkindness and unrighteousness of the Shang ruler led to the rebellion of the people and abandonment of the Mandate of Heaven (Mencius). Although he was still the emperor, the Mandate of Heaven and the people had disqualified him as emperor. The overthrow of his rule by the people at this time through revolution was just the punishment given to him by the Mandate of Heaven.

At the same time, Mencius also considered Confucius' writing of the Spring and Autumn Annals and his criticism of Yang Mo as a kind of Mandate of Heaven. He argued that Confucius composed the Spring and Autumn Annals to evaluate historical figures, which should be the authority of the emperor. Instead, Confucius intended to put fear into the traitorous ministers to restore order. His criticism of Yang Mo, on the other hand, was intended to correct social values, eliminate absurd statements and biased behavior, and

ultimately to inherit the cause of the sages for the benefit of the people. Mencius considered himself a disciple of the sages, so it was his duty to govern the world (He, 1993: 6). Mencius wished to take up the responsibility of the Mandate of Heaven and to become a sage like Confucius. In expressing his ideal, Mencius presupposes the Mandate of Heaven and hopes that all people under heaven will hold themselves to the standard of saints (Zhai, 1992: 37).

### **3.14 Xunzi's view of the Way of Heaven**

Xunzi transformed Confucius' concept of the Mandate of Heaven, and his view of the Mandate of Heaven differs greatly from that of Mencius, and some of his theories are even opposite. For example, Mencius advocated Ruled by Virtue and believed that rulers should govern the world with benevolence and morality. Xunzi, on the other hand, advocated the doctrine of human nature is evil, believing that people with evil moral values should be restrained by strict laws. Besides, Mencius advocated the unity of heaven and man, while Xunzi believed that the power of nature should not be overstated. Xunzi praised Confucius and believed that Confucius had gained more power than the sages (Xunzi). Xunzi advocated that the state should regulate the legal system and encourage the development of morality so that the scourges of the state could be eliminated and the mission of the ruler could be well accomplished. At this stage of historical development, the world would be unified, and therefore unfavorable ideas and statements must be eliminated.

In Xunzi's view, rites and law had the important responsibility and role of regulating the world. Xunzi believed that rites were very important for the state. In his eyes, the fate of man depended on Heaven, and the fate of the state depended on ritual and righteousness. A monarch who revered propriety, valued the law, and loved his people could achieve long-term development, while a monarch who loved profit and played intrigue would surely perish (Xunzi).

Xunzi made clear the distinction between heaven and man, that is, the duties of man and heaven are different. He believed that social chaos was caused by the willingness within society, not by the Mandate of Heaven. He further put the responsibility for governing the state and society on the sages and the rulers. The ability to effectively govern society rested on whether a man could effectively use nature, and if not then it would lead to social chaos. Xunzi believed that heaven existed objectively and that it would not actively intervene in earthly affairs, but that sages and gentlemen could intervene in earthly order. Xunzi said that heaven can produce all things, but cannot govern all things; the earth can carry human beings, but cannot govern them; the duties of all things in the universe need to be defined by the sages. And he believed that the Mandate of Heaven is the law of operation in nature, not the will or command of Heaven. Therefore, he advocates mastering the laws of Heaven rather than conforming to them (Xunzi). In Xunzi's view, the sage and the ruler can master and make use of the laws of heaven. It is against the nature of all things to disregard human effort and rely solely on heaven. With the development of society and the improvement of human

understanding, many natural phenomena could be recognized and understood by the people of that time. Xunzi's "heaven" was a natural heaven, but at the same time, due to the limited cognition at that time, the leading role of human destiny in Xunzi's view was that of the sage and the gentleman (Gao, 2005: 6).

## **3.2 Confucianism's Theory of Human Nature**

The Confucians of the pre-Qin dynasty highly esteemed the rule of the Sage politics, and they insisted on cultivating their moral character and achieving their virtue, believing that only benevolent gentlemen or wise rulers who have achieved sainthood can gain political status (Zheng, 2007: 4). In essence, social governance and social management are the governance and management of people. Of course, it is inseparable from the discussion and research on human nature. Modern Western management science has been active in exploring human nature only since the 1950s and has successively constructed human assumptions such as economic man, social man, complex man, decision-making man, and management man. In China thousands of years ago, the Confucianists of the pre-Qin dynasty also put forward a great variety of theories on human nature when constructing their political theories, but it was mainly along with the logic of two kinds of natural human desires and human inner virtues to elaborate the nature of human nature and its origin.

### **3.2.1 Confucius' Theory of Human Nature**

From the history of the development of the theory of human nature, Confucius paid less attention to human nature, and there is only one sentence mentioned in the Analects: when people are born, they are all of the same characters, but due to the process of growing up, the learning environment is different, and there is a difference between good and bad temperament (Analects). In the middle of the Warring States period, Mencius proposed the theory of goodness of nature, believing that all people are born good, and later Xunzi explained human nature from the theory of evil of nature, believing that human nature has the moral value of evil. Compared with the thoughts of Mencius and Xunzi, the theory of human nature of Confucius is not completely shown in the Analects. Then, how should we understand Confucius' statement that people are born with the same character?

People are born with similar characters, but their later development leads to different characters. This proposition points out, on the one hand, that people have similar natures and, on the other hand, that they have different customs. Confucius divided human nature into nature and social customs. The former is the natural nature of human beings, while the latter is the character shaped by society. Confucius believed that benevolence is a characteristic that all people have. This is because everyone can't have the character of benevolence if it is not the natural nature of human beings. On the other hand, Confucius' interpretation of

benevolence contains innate characteristics. Therefore, in Confucius' view, human nature is good and has no element of evil (Zheng, 2007: 2).

For Confucius, man's common nature is first manifested in desire. People naturally desire wealth and power and hates poverty and lowly conditions. Confucius proposed that people should use "rites" as a standard to regulate their desires and make them conform to the rules of etiquette (Xu, 2001: 317). With "rites" regulating human behavior, people can have desires but not greed. Confucius affirmed the positive role of edification, as he believed that even a bad person could be made good through education. Also, based on recognizing the common nature of human beings and the plasticity of human nature, Confucius abstracted the social and moral category of benevolence, which is both a theoretical summary of the so-called common nature of human beings and a criterion for measuring whether human beings conform to human nature.

In sorting out the relationship between human beings and society, Confucius put forward the idea of benevolence and the way of loyalty and forgiveness. First of all, he explicitly takes human nature as the basis of benevolence and regards benevolence as inherent in human nature, and believes that benevolence relies entirely on the conscious efforts of human beings. Thus, although Confucius did not explicitly propose the proposition of human goodness, his concept of benevolence already contains a wealth of ideas about human goodness. In Confucius, benevolence is the highest morality. Confucius clearly stated that a benevolent person knows how to respect others. He asked his disciples to be filial to their parents, obedient to their teachers, prudent in their words and deeds, honest and trustworthy, less talkative, to love others extensively, and to be close to those who have benevolence and morality. If there is extra energy, then go on to learn knowledge (Analects). The fact that Confucius put character before knowledge shows how much he valued character. The connotation of this thought is the requirement to grasp the essence of human beings in terms of their relationship with each other. Confucius summarized the relationship between man and man into five basic relationships: benevolence, righteousness, ritual, wisdom, and faith. These five basic moral relationships call for putting oneself in the shoes of others when dealing with them. Everything one says and does must take into account the relationship with others. This idea should be extended to the relationship between human beings and society. Confucius then raised the issue of righteousness and profit. On the issue of righteousness and profit, Confucius advocates that people's pursuit of material interests should be in line with the requirements of benevolence (Analects). From this assertion, Confucius opposes being rich but not righteous. In Confucius' view, benevolence is not only more important than wealth and riches but also more important than life. A person who has benevolence cannot sacrifice benevolence for the sake of living, but he can sacrifice himself for the sake of benevolence. All these show that Confucius, in solving the problem of the relationship between human beings and society, always thought from the perspective of the social nature of human beings.

### **3.22 Mencius' theory of Human Nature**

In the history of Chinese thought, the first thinker to explicitly advocate the goodness of human nature was Mencius. On the issue of human nature, Mencius' main opponent was Suozi. Mencius' theory of the goodness of nature was established in the debate with Suozi. Mencius believed that human nature is like flowing water and that the flow of water has no direction, but is determined by the direction of diversion (Mencius). Thus, Suozi proposed that it is no good or evil. This is similar to the blank slate statement of the English thinker Locke (Xu, 2001: 316). The mental conceptions of good and evil and moral qualities are the result of acquired factors, especially education. Mencius, on the other hand, believed that the flow of water really has no direction, but water will flow downward. It is like water to flow downward, and it is also like a man to be good. Human nature is bound to develop in the direction of goodness, and he put forward his theory of goodness of nature.

Mencius' theory of the goodness of human nature is based on the distinction between the social and natural attributes of human beings. He emphasizes the social attributes of human beings to explore human nature and opposes grasping human nature only from the natural attributes of human beings. Mencius believed that good qualities such as compassion, shame, resignation, and right and wrong are all inherent in human nature (Zhou, 2017: 2). By expanding and developing these qualities, they become the good nature of benevolence, righteousness, ritual, wisdom, and faith (Xu, 2001: 385). When people have compassion, they can communicate with others, they can truly integrate with others, and they can see the whole human race as one big life. And the reason why human beings have character and dignity is that they have a heart of shame. The heart of resignation is to show respect and courtesy to others. The heart of right and wrong is the ability to judge right and wrong, good and evil. With the heart of right and wrong, people can have the right value judgment and choose the right path in life.

Mencius advocated the implementation of sexual goodness in the political sphere and social governance. As long as everyone knows to honor his parents and love his children, and extends the love for his parents and children to all people, it will be very easy for rulers to govern the country (Mencius). This is the basis of Mencius' idea of Sage politics. To raise people's consciousness to abide by social norms and laws, to use their moral norms to reconcile social conflicts, and to ultimately realize the purpose of using morality to rule the state, is the landing point and focus of Mencius' theory of the goodness of nature.

### **3.23 Xunzi's theory of Human Nature**

If we say that Confucius and Mencius excluded the natural attributes of man and focused on the social attributes of man on the issue of human nature, Xunzi here unified the social and natural attributes of man and put forward the theory of sexual evil.

Xunzi criticized Mencius from his view of the Way of Heaven. Xunzi believed that the fundamental error of Mencius' thought was his failure to distinguish between the innate and acquired nature of human nature. Xunzi emphasized the distinction between innate and acquired human nature in the issue of human nature. In Xunzi's view, human nature refers to the nature and ability of human beings from birth. This ability comes from nature, from nature rather than from study and effort. Later he further proposed that human nature is evil and that goodness is attained through acquired efforts (Zheng, 2007: 4). Xunzi believed that resignation and support of elders were requirements of man by propriety and righteousness, not by nature. If one starts from one's nature, one will not be humble because it is against one's human nature (Xunzi). In Xunzi's view, human nature is a natural material, to begin with, while ritual and morality are artificially processed. If there were no human nature, there would be no object for the processing of morality and propriety. And without human processing, human nature will not become perfect. Xunzi saw both the difference between human nature and social attributes and their relationship. On this basis, Xunzi presents his complete and profound view of human nature (Xunzi).

According to Xunzi, the eyes like to see beauty, the ears like beautiful sounds, the mouth likes delicious food, the heart likes wealth, and the body likes comfort, etc. are all manifestations of human nature (Xunzi). If this nature is allowed to develop without restriction, people will destroy the order and stability of society. Therefore, human nature should not be good but evil. But Xunzi agrees that human nature can be transformed into goodness. According to Xunzi, people's behavior can only be regulated through moral education, the guidance of ritual and righteousness, and restraint of institutions. For this reason, Xunzi attributed the shaping of human nature to educating people to curb their bad nature through the implementation of moral education. Therefore, the ruler must consciously take up the responsibility of shaping human nature (Xunzi). Xunzi believed that rulers must make the transformation and cultivation of human nature the foundation of governing and administering the state.

According to Xunzi, the edification of people requires the cooperation of three aspects. One is the discipline of rites; the second is the education of teachers; the third is the influence of the environment. The function of rites is to correct one's behavior. Without rites, one cannot correct one's behavior. And the teacher's function is to educate students to understand rites correctly. With the restraint of rites and the education of the teacher, one's behavior will be attached to the rules of rites, and such a person will become a saint.

On the surface, both Confucians are concerned about human nature, but their assumptions about human nature differ greatly. Confucius spoke less about human nature, so much so that his student Zigong lamented that Confucius' understanding of human nature and the Way of Heaven was unlearnable (Analects). Mencius said that human nature is good, while Xunzi said it is evil. It is really difficult to point out the common ground between them. But if we examine their doctrines carefully, we seem to find a certain degree of consistency

between them. Mencius believed that people are good by nature, but the not uncommon phenomenon of evil in real life cannot be attributed to the bad nature of these people. From here we can interpret Mencius' theory as meaning that human nature can be good, rather than human nature is good. Similarly, Xunzi's thought can be understood as human nature can be evil, but not human nature is evil. In this way, we can find that they both recognize the malleability of human nature. Besides, Confucius clearly expressed the spiritual aspiration of every person to goodness. To Mencius, everyone is good by nature. As long as everyone can develop their good nature, they can be called saints like Confucius. Xunzi believed that what makes a sage a saint is his adherence to the ritual system (Zheng, 2007: 3). To sum up, they both believe that nature is a quality given to people by Heaven and recognize that all people's nature is to develop towards goodness. This is because, in the view of the pre-Qin Confucian thinkers, Heaven would reward and punish people according to their character. In this way, the connection between the Mandate of Heaven and human nature shows the inevitability that human nature will develop toward goodness (Feng, 1998: 197).

## **4. Patriarchal clan system based on blood**

Compared to other civilizations around the world, traditional Chinese society has a more visceral characteristic, namely the long-standing existence of a patriarchal clan system based on blood. Blood patriarchal culture played a unique role in traditional Chinese society. Ancient Chinese politics has never been independent of the clan order; on the contrary, it has constantly been nourished by the latter and has constantly strengthened its ties with clan order (Qian, 1996: 2). Xia, Shang, and Zhou were the first three dynasties to emerge in ancient China. From that time on, the clan and the state in ancient China were one and the clan lineage had political connotations as well. People's blood relations in the clan were consistent with their political status so that the proximity of blood relations also became the relationship of superiority and inferiority in political life. The establishment of the state in ancient China belonged to what Marx called "by clan" rather than by region (Engels, 1884 :54). This is the deep historical root cause of the traditional Chinese society characterized by blood patriarchy.

### **4.1 The formation of bloodline patriarchal culture**

Ancient Chinese politics can be said to have originated from family politics (Liu, 2006: 1). From the original cultural roots, the state originated from the clan. It is a common phenomenon in the origin of the state in human civilization that the state originates from human groups formed by blood relations. In China, however, the clan has a much stronger and more important political and cultural significance for the state, both in its origin and in its development, than in Western countries.

In ancient China, the state had not yet formed fixed boundaries. The area ruled by the monarch was the sphere of activity of the entire Chinese nation. To facilitate administration, monarchs assigned their brothers as vassals to rule over a territory. Their positions were hereditary. The relationship between the emperor and the vassals was certainly political on the one hand, and blood clan relations on the other. As a political ruler, the emperor is the monarch; and as the ruler of the family, the emperor is the patriarch (Qian, 1996: 1). Each clan in a different hierarchical position in blood relations is at the same time a different composition of the political structure of the state. It is thus clear that blood clan relations were not destroyed in the formation of the ancient Chinese state, but were tied together with political relations. In the political society of that time in China, clan involvement in blood relations and authoritarianism were not mutually incompatible. Blood patriarchal ties did not bring any democracy to ancient political relations; on the contrary, the Chinese monarchy was largely rooted precisely in such blood kinship ties (Liu, 2006: 1).

The clan is the connection point between the social and natural nature of human beings (Zhou, 2011: 1-2). In ancient Chinese society, both as a whole and as an individual, people always entered society through clans, which were the first social relations of human

beings to appear. Clan as a natural relationship is a blood relationship based on both sexes, and as a social relationship is a civic relationship between members of society, and as a blood relationship there is always a natural hierarchy of blood relatives. Thus, there is always an objective inequality among family members due to their different blood relations, and only when they enter the social sphere, the natural hierarchy of blood relations among family members can disappear and they can exist as equal members of society. This means that if blood relations in the clan are brought into the social life, hierarchy and inequality will inevitably appear in social life. This means that if blood relations in the clan are brought into the social life, hierarchy and inequality will inevitably appear in social life. The initial social and state life of human beings was precisely based on blood relations in the clan, and therefore, hierarchy and inequality were inevitable in the initial social and state life. Compared with other nations, ancient Chinese society not only showed a high degree of consciousness in integrating family relations into state life, but also showed the long existence of such integration, and even the structure and operation mode of all state life was modeled on family (Wang, 1998). The state is a magnification of the family, and the family is a reduction of the state (Liu, 2006: 5-6). In this way, the family and the state have a "natural" consistency, and people do not have to worry about the change of roles between society and the family. This is indeed a pearl of great wisdom in the design of social and political life, which is both simple and practical. And this is the most hidden secret of why Chinese feudalism has lasted for thousands of years.

Also, ancient Chinese clan relations were never horizontal, but vertical. The core principle of family relations in ancient China was emphasized by filial piety. Confucius pointed out that the highest level of filial piety is absolute obedience (Liu, 2006: 5). Rather than upholding the democratic rights of each member of the family, it emphasizes the absolute power of the patriarch over the other members of the clan. In its connotation, it falls under the category of autocracy. For this reason, ancient Chinese feudal rulers often compared the relationship between ruler and subject to that between father and son, requiring people to serve the ruler as if they were serving their father (Liu, 2006:4). It can be said that the patriarchal politics of blood, as a major feature of traditional Chinese politics, well maintained the monarchy (Liu, 2006: 7).

## **4.2 The basic characteristics of blood patriarchal politics**

### **4.21 The uniqueness of blood patriarchal politics**

The patriarchal system with blood as the bond is a unique feature of Chinese politics. Feudal patriarchal relation is a historical category first introduced by the founder of Marxism. It refers to a relationship of dependence, servitude, and exploitation under patriarchal, coercive, clan-based power common in the ancient medieval history of the world. It differs from what is generally referred to as the patriarchal system because the patriarchal system

generally refers to a system within the blood-based organization of the same clan that can control, unite, and rules the clan through organizations such as ancestral halls and clan rules. Feudal patriarchal relationships, on the other hand, existed in a much broader context and were a non-blood patriarchal system (Jin, 1956: 13-14). Feudal patriarchal relationships first arose at the end of primitive society. In ancient Rome, patriarchal clan forms arose at the end of primitive society. Engels commented that "the first result of the male dictatorship so established was the patriarchal family which occurred at this time (Engels, 1884)." One of the most fundamental features of ancient Chinese society that distinguishes it from the West is that it had a very deep patriarchal foundation and was a patriarchal society with strong family characteristics. The slave state in ancient Greco-Roman was established in the process of the collapse of clan organization and the formation of the meaning of private property. For example, it was the state that was formed in Athens after Thoreau's reform. There were two fundamental points of the reform: first, abolishing the old tradition of clan blood; second, defining the rights and duties of citizens by the qualification of private property. As can be seen, the state was entirely a product of the full development of private ownership and replaced the family organization of primitive society. On the contrary, in China, the state and the clan were merged into one, and the means of production and other property remained in the possession of the social organization of the family and the state as one. The clan chief is directly transformed into the state monarch, the family organization is expanded into the state organization, and the patriarchal relationship becomes a political relationship again. In short, the formation of the state further expanded the patriarchal relations of the clan, which in turn maintained the newly formed state by the ties of blood (Liu, 2006: 6). This is the ancient Chinese political organization of the family and the state as one.

The patriarchal society has been present throughout the social history of China before the democratic revolution (Wang, 1998: 14). It can be seen that for thousands of years in Chinese history, the family-based natural economy has been the main production organization. This family-based production organization maintained the concept of family relations and clan.

According to the concept of blood patriarchy, the clan relationship with blood ties emerged first, followed by the political relationship of the state. It is not just a question of chronological order, but to affirm that the family is the basis of the state. The state system is nothing but an expansion of the family system, political relations are nothing but an expansion of family relations, and kingship is nothing but an expansion of patriarchal power (Wang, 1998: 34).

#### **4.22 The continuity of blood patriarchal political influence**

A highly centralized monarchical dictatorship did not emerge overnight. The centralized form of monarchy established by the Qin Dynasty, the first feudal dynasty in Chinese history, was already a well-established system. Before that, there was a long process

of formation. It is usually considered that the centralized monarchical dictatorship of the Qin dynasty was an inevitable trend in the development of ancient Chinese political systems and politics (Lv,1985: 5). As Tocqueville (1988: 104) says, history is a gallery where there are few originals and many reproductions.

A more interesting issue is that the combination of patriarchal and political relations, of family relations and state organization, did not exist only in the early stages of state formation. This combination is reflected in all political systems that have lasted for thousands of years in China, which provides objective social conditions for the continuation of patriarchal type politics (Jin, 1956: 15). Clan societies usually emphasize social group values and norms of social obligation, as well as patriarchal cultures that focus on family roles. And these are preserved in the political culture of the state. Just as the organization of the state in traditional rule preserves the organization of the state, so traditional Chinese culture preserves the culture of the clan. The group values of the family and the group values of the state, the moral obligations of the family, and the political obligations of the state are all mixed into one and become interchangeable. Thus, the fulfillment of moral obligations to the family can be transformed into political obligations of the state. When Confucius was asked why he did not enter politics, he replied that he believed that the fulfillment of moral obligations to parents was also the fulfillment of political obligations to the state and that the relationship between them was a transformable one (Analects). In a clan, the family relationship between father and son can be seen as a political subordination between the ruler and the ruled; in a state, the political subordination between the monarch and his subjects can be seen as a family relationship between father and son (Wang, 1998: 15). In ancient times, the monarchs and officials at all levels were called "parents" and the common people were called "sons and daughters", all of which are manifestations of this patriarchal political relationship (Zhou, 2011: 2). In short, the patriarchal culture of collective values, duty-based norms, and role-based personalities that emerged from the family society became an important element of traditional Chinese politics that lasted for thousands of years. From the very beginning of civilization, the ancient Chinese state apparatus embarked on a path of monarchical dictatorship. The main thing is that the feudal patriarchal family organization evolved from the patriarchal system, and through the transformation of Confucian orthodoxy, it was constantly completed and formed its own unique patriarchal family system. The traditional customs of the clan system and the ethical concepts of the patriarchal system, combined with Confucian orthodoxy, formed the ritual and legal system of feudal society, and later, through the transformation and development of the feudal society, formed Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues as the core of the feudal ritual system. Many clans developed their own clan rules based on these feudal rituals, taking into account the specific conditions of their families, thus making the feudal rituals more rigorous, specific, and targeted. In this way, the feudal ritual system and clan rules became a powerful weapon to maintain the rule of the patriarchal family (Wang, 1998: 21).

## **5. Socially-oriented cultural system**

Chinese traditional politics is a social standard politics with social groups as the mainstay (Zhang, 2019: 1). Therefore, to analyze and understand the characteristics of Chinese traditional politics, we must interpret and grasp the social-based culture as a whole. The socially-oriented culture system is to take society as the main body and basic unit.

### **5.1 The formation of socially-oriented politics and its value objectives**

#### **5.11 The formation of socially-oriented politics**

The subject occupies the core position in the value concept and is the basis of the existence of value. Traditional Chinese culture takes the social group as the value subject and forms a kind of socially oriented value system (Zhou, 2011: 5). Therefore, in traditional Chinese culture, the social group is always regarded as the ultimate entity for generating all values and the ultimate basis for measuring all values (Zhou, 2011: 6). First of all, to take the social group as the final entity to produce value is to affirm the absolute significance of the value of the social group. All values and meanings are derived from the social group (Wang, 2015: 2). On the contrary, all individuals have no independent value. The existence and value of the individual are derived from the social group. All individuals can obtain their value only when they satisfy the requirements of the social group and realize the interests of the social group. Secondly, in the traditional Chinese cultural concept, the social group is the ultimate standard for measuring value. A thing that is useful to an individual cannot be affirmed in value if it is not included in the value system of the social group. It can be seen that individuals are not only not independent value entities, but also do not have an independent status to measure and evaluate values. All values can only be measured by the social group. Thus, taking the social group as the entity that produces value and the ultimate standard for measuring value becomes the basic feature of traditional Chinese politics.

In contrast to this social group as the subject of value, the West has the individual as the subject of value. In Western culture, the existence and value of the individual are innately given and inalienable, and the individual is the ultimate basis for measuring all values and the ultimate entity for generating values (Gustafsson, 2009: 2). Society is composed of individuals, and individuals do not depend on this collection to have independent meaning and value of existence. Individuals, therefore, form a collective and social relationship, which is still ultimately for the realization of individual interests and values. Westerners believe that a collective is worthless if it cannot realize the value of its members. Based on this cultural concept, the Western social contract was created. Under the contract, individuals are bound by the legal norms that maintain social order, but if someone breaks the contract, then people can

abandon the contract and return to the state of nature (An & Ren, 2007: 3). The reason why individuals have the power to abandon the contract is that only the individual is the ultimate entity of all values. Thus, the difference of value subjects finally leads to the difference of Chinese and Western cultures and political systems.

Although traditional Chinese culture and politics take the social group as the ultimate entity for generating values and the ultimate standard for measuring values, this is only in terms of the content of its value system. Instead, as a theoretical form of values, it is to be embodied in the form of ontology. Thus, in traditional Chinese philosophical concepts, the ultimate entity of value and the standard of value is metaphysically referred to as the Way of Heaven (Luo, 2012: 7 & 12). Therefore, it is not the social group that is the valued entity, but those metaphysical ontologies such as Heaven and Tao. All individuals need to derive their values from it and it is the standard by which all values are measured. The values it affirms are absolute and inevitable. Therefore, traditional Chinese politics also affirms that there is a transcendent source of order and value in the world.

Confucianism refers to this source of value as Heaven and suggests that no individual can disobey it. Confucius proposed that no individual is powerless before Heaven, including the emperor who rules the state (Analects). Rulers at all levels are subordinate to the emperor, and the emperor must ultimately obey Heaven so that Heaven is a value that no individual can disobey. In ancient China, this political concept of using heaven as the source of value and value standard has continued for more than two thousand years.

## **5.12 The value objectives of socially-oriented politics**

Confucianism refers to Heaven as the source of the order and values that govern the world (Russell, 1997: 567). As early as Confucius, the Mandate of Heaven was linked to social ethics and personal virtue. Mencius developed this view of the Mandate of Heaven. Mencius believed that moral norms embodying social values, such as benevolence, justice, propriety, and wisdom, were the expression of the Mandate of Heaven. Thus, the content of the Mandate of Heaven is the moral code, and the moral code requires the individual to consciously obey the social group. Therefore, the real source lies in the order and interests of the social group.

The moral codes advocated by Confucianism, such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and trust, likewise have the order and interests of the social group as their value goals. Take benevolence, the core of traditional Chinese morality, as an example. Since Confucius founded the benevolence-centered ethical ideology system, benevolence has almost become the sum of the ethical norms system (Shao, 2010: 1-2). Benevolence itself refers to a harmonious social relationship. Confucianism advocates that all individuals should submit to the norms of benevolence, which requires submission to the order and interests of the social group. On the one hand, Confucius believed that individuals should refrain from their demands and desires, and on the other hand, individuals should satisfy the demands of the

social group (Analects). Therefore, the ethical concept of benevolence is itself a socially-oriented value. The ultimate entity of moral values is the social group rather than the individual.

## **5.2 The basic features of socially-oriented politics**

### **5.21 Obligation-based society**

Norms are specific codes of behavior, which can be divided into two main types, namely, rights norms and obligations norms. Rights norms are generally related to individual rights and interests, which stipulate that individuals can do certain things, and obligation norms are generally related to the rights and interests of others or society, which stipulate that individuals must do certain things and cannot do them certain things. In any society, there are always both rights and obligations norms, and rights are always linked to obligations. However, in the relationship between rights and obligations, there is still a question of who is primary, i.e., whether obligations are derived from rights or power from obligations.

The values of traditional Chinese politics are socially oriented, which inevitably leads to a one-way normative system based on obligations (Chen, 2017: 38). It is obvious that since only the social group is the ultimate basis for measuring all values and the ultimate entity for generating values, and no individual has an independent existence or value, the norms generated by this value entity must be centered on obligations (Russell, 1997: 578). Confucianism's core ideas of benevolence, righteousness, and propriety are realized in the form of obligation to the constraints on individual behavior (Liu, 2006: 2-4).

Similarly, the concept of Western cultural values is individual-based, so it necessarily leads to a power-based normative system (Russell, 1997: 576). However, this does not mean that only norms of power or norms of obligation exist on one side. Rights and duties are interdependent. The difference between China and the West is who is the principal of rights and duties, or who derives from whom.

### **5.22 Role-based politics**

The role is an important concept in contemporary sociology and cultural anthropology. Everyone lives in intricate social relationships and thus assumes various social roles. The ancient Chinese speak of different identities of ruler and subject, father and son, husband and wife, which are different roles. A person can be a subject of a ruler, a son of a father, a father of a son, and a husband of a wife. And each role has a corresponding set of behavioral patterns (Shao, 2010: 3). Roles make each individual a member of society and are influenced and judged by society. Thus, using the concept of roles, anthropology can transcend the single and unique behavior of individuals in society (Cohen, 1987: 92). The formation of a

personality system is the result of the individual's identification through the role, and in turn, the social and cultural environment always influences and constrains the individual's behavior through the role, thus forming the individual's personality system.

Thus, the close connection between culture and role is obvious. For values and norms to regulate individual behavior, they must be realized through the concept of roles. In this way, culture can also be said to be a pattern of behavior, which is concretely reflected in the concept of role. Therefore, "culture is a set of behavior patterns or roles", or "the system of social roles and behavior patterns constitutes culture (Duverger, 1987: 54)". Roles play an important role in culture, and cultural differences are inevitably evident in the roles and ultimately in the personality systems.

Traditional Chinese politics places great emphasis on individual obedience to roles and is a role-based politics. Different identities have different norms of behavior. Confucius also emphasized the unity of roles and norms. When Confucius' students asked him what things one needs to prioritize to participate in political life. Confucius replied to his students that each person should observe the norms of behavior appropriate to his or her position in society (Analects). A king should observe the code of conduct of a king, a minister should observe the code of conduct of a minister, a father should observe the code of conduct of a father, and a child should observe the code of conduct of a child. Otherwise, they will be incompatible with the social role they are in, and a chaotic situation will arise. This doctrine of Confucius had a deep influence on later generations. Xunzi also emphasized the important role of a correct understanding of one's social identity in establishing a harmonious social order and realizing group values.

In traditional Chinese culture, especially in Confucianism, the emphasis on role consciousness is extraordinary. They seem to have realized more clearly than anyone else that the realization of values as the core of culture must depend on the establishment of a system of social norms, which in turn must ultimately be implemented in each individual in society (Russell, 1997: 577-579). Therefore, they emphasize that education, as the basic means of cultural transmission, is to realize the education of all people in their roles. As long as each individual consciously fulfills the behavioral norms corresponding to various social roles, an ideal dynasty will come into the world.

This difference in social roles is established by the norms of ritual behavior (Cao, 2016: 3). Thus, to explain and elaborate on the role issue, it is necessary to relate it to the normative issue of rituals. As mentioned earlier, rites are the sum of all-embracing social norms in ancient China. As social norms, rites were always associated with different roles. Rites were always closely related to the identity and rank of individuals (Cap, 2016: 3). Confucian scholars have repeatedly emphasized this point when discussing the origins and nature of rituals, which are based on the fact that different social roles require different social norms. Each person can only choose to behave in a manner appropriate to the social role he or she occupies. Roles, as can be seen, are the concrete expression of the social norms of rituals.

Originally, rituals covered a wide range of areas, including politics, economics, the military, justice, officialdom, religion, education, marriage and family, and even daily living, food, clothing, and housing. The rituals link such an extensive system of norms with roles so that each person is tightly defined by an all-encompassing system of norms. For any kind of role, there is a whole set of normative systems that includes political life, social life, as well as clothing, food, housing, and transportation. Since roles in traditional Chinese politics are closely related to such extensive norms of behavior, the question of how to make individuals identify with roles and their norms becomes a very important one.

## **5.3 The influence of socially-oriented system on traditional Chinese politics**

### **5.31 The formation of an obligation-based political system**

Chinese culture tends to view the norm of obligation as an ethical premise by default (Ye, 1997: 2). In the Confucian system, Heaven has the role of an absolute command to all individuals. As the rationalist Zhu Xi (1169) put it, on the one hand, the Way of Heaven itself is a transcendent, self-existent essence that issues imperative, absolute commands; on the other hand, the content of the Way of Heaven is the norms of obligation such as benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith. In this way, the social norms of obligation to individuals have a metaphysical basis. The norms of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and faith all become ethical prerequisites by default. Chinese politics and culture have always viewed the power of the individual as a derivative of obligation. In other words, the so-called right is the individual's right to uphold the obligation. For example, in ancient China, much emphasis was placed on the constraints of behavioral norms in the relationships between ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife. Generally speaking, the ruler, father, and husband are in an honored position and have the power to give orders to the subjects, sons, and women. However, the power of the ruler, father, and husband is again relative and presupposes obligation as its precondition (Ye, 1997: 4).

But it must be pointed out that only Heaven is the subject of all rights. The power of the ruler, father, and husband is to fulfill the duty of Heaven, and their power is predicated on the duty to obey Heaven. If they do not fulfill their duties as prescribed by Heaven, Heaven, as the subject of rights, will deprive the ruler, father, and husband of their powers (Ye, 1997: 8-9). Therefore, Mencius pointed out that in politics, although the monarch has the highest power, in terms of cultural and moral concepts, the monarch has the greatest obligation. The power of the monarch is predicated on the obligations he undertakes. If the monarch is not willing to assume his obligations, then Heaven will take back this power. The same is true of the relationship between a minister and a king, between a father and his children. This relationship of obligation is not unconditional. For those tyrants who are brutal to the people,

the people can crush, kill, or banish them (Mencius). If viewed from the point of view of Western culture, this overthrow of the regime would be considered as the people restoring their natural human rights. They believe that when a brutal monarch infringes on individual interests, the people can reclaim their birthright. However, from the Chinese point of view, such an act is fulfilling an obligation given to the people by the Mandate of Heaven. The political acts of crusading against tyrants and killing corrupt officials are always done under the banner of exercising the duty in place of Heaven. It can be seen that even those acts that embody rights are, in the end, obligations.

The West is the opposite of China. The West has the concept of natural rights (Hobhouse, 1996: 2). In 1776, the Declaration of Independence of the American Revolution proclaimed that all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with non-transferable rights, including the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This political principle of natural rights emerged from the background of Western power-based culture. In ancient Greece, the idea of natural law emerged. Natural law was considered to be the naturally existing, universally applicable, and eternal norm of behavior in the universe. At the same time, they always referred to those norms of individual power as a natural power. All obligations arise based on individual powers. To protect the rights and interests of each individual, it is necessary to make a contract that everyone must follow. Under the contract, everyone is obliged to respect others. However, these obligations are derived from individual power. Moreover, the ultimate purpose of the obligations is to maintain the rights of the individual (An & Ren, 2007: 3). The Dutch statesman Grotius (2012: 78) laid down the natural law as follows: "Not to touch the property of another, to return what belongs to another and to repay the benefit derived from it, to keep one's word; to repay the damage caused by one's fault, and to give retribution to those who deserve it." All these norms are demanded of every person in the form of obligations, but they are based on the norm of the right to the sanctity of personal property. That is to say, first, there is the norm of the inalienable right to personal property, and then there is the norm of obligation. So, American statesman Sampson once pointed out that because human beings have natural human rights in civilized societies, they are usually considered justified whether they belong to the majority, which is responsible for enforcing those rights, or to the minority, which is committed to protecting those rights (Cao, 2016: 4). He believes that the right to retain natural human rights is the first to have, and on this basis, the obligation to safeguard these rights arises. It is clear that the rights of humans are natural, while the duties of humans are the result of contracting. This is the rights-based normative system of Western culture. Thus, although both Eastern and Western cultures possess norms of power and norms of duty, they differ in terms of who is the principal in rights and duties. This leads to significant cultural and political differences between East and West. It deeply permeates all aspects of specific forms of social culture such as ethics, law, politics, and customs.

### 5.32 Establishing a system of Rite obligations

The normative system of ancient China is most concentrated on rites. Rites originated from the rituals of the primitive religions that worshiped Heaven and ancestors. As society developed, rites expanded from a religious ritual to all aspects of society (Cohen, 1987: 156). As early as the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties, when the ancient Chinese state was first formed, a more complete social code of rituals was formed. After that, rituals continued for more than 2,000 years as a basic social norm of behavior (Shao, 2010: 1). The expansion of rituals in time and space has made them play a very important role in social life.

Rites became the main normative system of Chinese culture, with obligations as the basic feature. We know that the meaning of norms lies in the values they embody. As early as the Spring and Autumn Period, Confucius proposed that the value and meaning of rites were to maintain social order and achieve the interests of the group (Analects). The governance of the state and the stability of society all depend on rites. All individual behavior is governed by the norms of rites, which means obeying the needs of society and the state as a group. Therefore, the normative system of rituals is characterized by obligations (Shao, 2010: 2-3). Moreover, the ancient Chinese always took the absolute authority of Heaven and Tao as the source of rites.

The social norm of ritual originates from heaven, which is nothing but an indication that its regulation of human behavior is somehow compulsory (Shao, 2010: 2). And its essence is the compulsion of the social group on the individual. In Chinese culture, rites are not meant to determine the rights of individuals, but only to point out the social obligations that individuals must fulfill. The individual is guided by the rituals in social life, which are the social obligations of the individual.

Every individual in society can find his or her obligations in the social norms of rites. The norms and patterns of behavior prescribed by rites are almost always obligatory. Besides, Confucian scholars emphasized filial piety and forgiveness as the basic principles of rites, thus affirming the obligatory nature of rites. Therefore, the norms of rituals always have this dual nature. On the one hand, it satisfies and fulfills the interests of the social group, and on the other hand, it requires restraining and controlling the interests of the individual.

The social norms of rites are for the needs of the social group, so they need to restrain individuals from the side of obligation, but not to affirm individuals from the side of right. This is a reflection of the fact that traditional Chinese political norms are based on obligation. The concept of duty-based politics is fully reflected in the traditional moral sphere. In ancient China, there was no concept of moral rights, and morality was always associated with the obligation. Because traditional morality emphasized obligations and belittled or denied rights, the entire history of Chinese ethics is filled with debates over interests and morality (Zhang, 2019: 2-3). In the realm of morality, interests, and desires, which represent individual interests, have no place. In contrast, moral norms representing social interests are always the

object of praise and appreciation (Chen, 2017: 38). This inevitably leads to the formula that morality is equivalent to duty. For an act to be morally affirmed, it must be described as an obligation rather than a right.

### **5.33 Showing the cultural characteristics of role-based**

Role-based means replacing personality with the role. Personality refers not only to the social role a person assumes but also to his personality traits. However, in role-based traditional culture and politics, social role replaces personality traits. One of the major manifestations of this is that the various qualities of the individual self, such as talent, intelligence, character, etc., are attributed to the social role he assumes, and that the two different aspects of the personality system are all attributed to this aspect of the social role (Jin, 1956: 8). Affirming the social role that a person assumes is the only measure of individual personality. In this role-based context, it is difficult for the individual's personality to develop soundly. The inhibition of personality development inevitably and profoundly affects the formation and development of traditional Chinese politics. The normative system of traditional Chinese culture is based on obligation, which in effect affirms that role norms are based on obligation as a starting point. Originally, the norms of behavior associated with a role include both rights and obligations. However, because traditional Chinese culture gives a central position to social obligations, in this way, role norms develop into a one-sided norm of obligation. In the patriarchal hierarchical Chinese society, the most basic social roles are ruler, minister, father, son, brother, brother, husband, wife, and so on (Cao, 2016: 2-3). These roles constitute the basic social relations, and the norms corresponding to these roles are all obligatory. In traditional Chinese culture and politics, values, norms, and roles are unified. The socially-oriented value system is inevitably embodied in the duty-oriented normative system, and the duty-oriented normative system is ultimately implemented in the social roles (Cao, 2016: 4).

## **6. Ethical politics**

### **6.1 The basic characteristics of ethical culture**

The basic features of traditional Chinese political ethical culture are discussed in two aspects, the fit between ethical culture and Confucianism, and the close integration of ethical culture and political power.

#### **6.11 Ethical politics and Confucianism**

Political theory is a reflection of the realization of politics (Gatlin, 2021: 2). The reason why Confucianism has dominated the ideological sphere in China, been respected by successive rulers, and influenced China for thousands of years is that this ethical-political doctrine best meets the needs of realistic ethical politics (Chen, 2003: 3). This is also the greatest secret of Confucianism's success. It can be said that Chinese ethical politics created Confucianism, and it can also be said that Confucianism shaped Chinese ethical politics.

Confucianism strives to defend the monarchical system and justifies this political order from an ethical perspective (Liu, 2006: 3-7). Confucius affirmed that there is a distinction between noble and inferior human beings and that everyone has a social status (Tu, 1985 :46). In his view, a society with moral principles would emerge only if all rulers, ministers, fathers, and sons acted according to the social hierarchy in which they were placed and adhered to the political order of rites. He opposed a disorderly society in which the hierarchical order was destroyed, and demanded that each person fulfill his social obligations to the best of his ability. Finally, he united the political order of rites with the ethical concept of benevolence. He advocates that one should restrain oneself and do everything according to the requirements of rituals, and ultimately achieve the requirements of benevolence (Analects). Mencius' political thought was very radical, suggesting that the people are the foundation of the state and that they are more important than the monarch (Wang, 2006: 4). However, this does not imply his rejection of kingship. On the contrary, his doctrine of political ethics presupposes the affirmation of kingship. His political proposition is an idealized monarchical dictatorship. On the one hand, the monarch has the highest political power, but on the other hand, the monarch needs to observe the political morality of benevolence and righteousness (Gao, 2005: 2). Therefore, although he emphasized that the monarch should assume moral obligations and be subject to benevolence and righteousness, he still fully affirmed the rationality of monarchical politics. Mencius once said that an upright monarch could stabilize the country. Compared with Mencius, Xunzi was more prominent in affirming the monarchy and the role-based political order (Gao, 2005: 4). He proposed the political idea of ruled by man (Xunzi). The so-called ruled by man means monarchical dictatorship, so he advocates the concentration of political power in the hands of the monarch alone (Liu, 2006: 4). Xunzi saw

this political order as an ethical norm following the Way of Heaven. The above ideas of Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi represent the political ideas of Confucianism, and their affirmation of monarchical politics is one of the basic reasons for their esteem by successive rulers.

## **6.12 Integration of ethical culture and political rights**

The ethical concept is the subject's recognition of certain values and norms. For all cultural values and norms of behavior to work and achieve control over politics, they must first be recognized by people as an ethical value. Therefore, it is a common cultural phenomenon to combine political power with certain ethical and moral concepts. This point seems to go without saying in ancient China, which is an ethical form of politics. Traditional Chinese culture mainly uses ethical concepts as the basic way to control political organization. Unlike the West, the values and norms of the culture are allowed to be objectified into a legal system with authority that can control the exercise of political power. The values and norms of traditional Chinese culture are embodied through ethical concepts (Zhou, 2011: 2). The ancient Chinese law is different from the West. Ancient Greco-Roman law was formed by the struggle of the people to gain the right to legislate, while ancient Chinese law was made at the will of the monarch (Zhou, 2011: 3). Laws were considered to be made by the monarch and followed by the subjects. The law could only ever be under political power, and the personal rights of the monarch were exalted above the state and the law. In this way, the law could only become a ruling tool of the monarch. Traditional Chinese culture chose morality as the basic means of controlling politics. Unlike law, morality does not depend on the coercion of some external force, but on the self-awareness of the subject. So, here we take an interesting contrast. The West formed a juridical type of politics as a result of economically powerful industrial and commercial people uniting with the urban commoners against the dictatorship of the aristocracy. In contrast, the formation of ethical politics in China was the result of the self-consciousness of the aristocratic rulers. Moreover, humanistic monarchical politics is constrained by morality and can only rely on the ruler's identification with it. A humanistic monarchy is incompatible with a legalistic democracy because a monarchical ruler does not seek or create an external force that restricts his political rights. There were certain laws in ancient China, and cultural values and norms had to be reflected in legal form. But in this monarchical political system, instead of restraining and controlling rights, the law became a ruling tool for the monarch to assert his rights and abuse his power.

## 6.2 Ethical culture and Chinese traditional politics

### 6.21 Ethical culture as a constraint on monarchial power

Chinese ethical politics is based on Confucianism as the main ideological basis. Confucianism not only argues for the rationality of monarchial politics from an ethical perspective but more importantly, it systematically puts forward a set of theories for regulating political activities and restraining political power through an ethical approach, which had a profound influence on Chinese political culture at that time and later. Although Confucius affirmed the rights of the monarch and favored the theory of ruled by human, he did not believe that the monarch could do whatever he wanted. He tried his best to bring the political activities of the ruler into the order of ethical norms and put forward the idea of ruled by virtue (Russell, 1997: 567). In Confucius' view, the ruler is qualified to rule the people because he is a moral exemplar. Conversely, a ruler can have political authority only if he consciously fulfills his political ethics. The political morality that Confucius says rulers should follow consists of two aspects. On the one hand, is the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. Confucius requires rulers to love, nourish, enrich and teach the ruled (Wang, 2006: 4). Regarding the basic principles of governing the state, he spoke about three aspects. Firstly, he asked the ruler to conduct all aspects of the state's affairs seriously and scrupulously. Secondly, he advocated that rulers should be diligent and frugal and love their officials. Finally, he proposed that rulers should not let the people delay the agricultural time due to service. In addition, Confucius gave the highest moral value to the act of giving favors and help to the people and fiercely opposed the tyranny of torture. Confucius clearly expresses his view that it is tyranny to kill people when they make mistakes without education. On the other hand, there is a relationship among rulers. Confucius advocates that a ruler in a superior position should strictly adhere to the system of ritual and righteousness and constantly improve his moral cultivation so that his subjects in a lower position can be loyal to the ruler (Analects). But how can a ruler with political power consciously fulfill political morality and accept the constraints of moral codes? Confucius emphasized that a ruler should strengthen his moral cultivation and thus become a ruler who consciously fulfills benevolence and morality.

Mencius further developed Confucius' theory, emphasizing that rulers should start from their inner moral psychology to achieve the political purpose of ruling the country and pacifying the world. Mencius believed that everyone has compassion and sympathy for others. Similarly, as long as the ruler implements a policy of compassion and pity for others, then ethical-type politics can be achieved. Therefore, although Mencius recognized that monarchs can have errors of thought, and in a monarchy, it can lead to serious political consequences. However, Mencius never thought of establishing an objectified legal system to restrain the

king's power, but focused his main attention on how to make the monarch consciously subject to benevolence and morality (Li, 1994: 18).

## **6.22 The efficacy of ethical politics on authoritarian rule**

The ethical thinking of Confucian culture is twofold. On the one hand, it affirms the politics of kingship and upholds the rule of monarchs, and is therefore respected by the rulers. On the other hand, it criticizes the rulers and imposes various ideological restrictions on the monarchs and officials, and often becomes the opposing force of realpolitik (Cheng, 2012: 2). It is because of this duality that contemporary Neo-Confucianism advocates a distinction between these two kinds of Confucianism. This dual character of Confucianism cannot be separated. It wants to affirm the king's power, and necessary to restrain it through morality so that it does not destroy itself in its infinite expansion. Its purpose in criticizing and restraining the king's power is not to establish a new political system, but to affirm and consolidate an autocratic monarchy. This duality of the character of Confucianism is entirely intended to meet the needs of this ethical type of politics in China. However, Confucianism inevitably faces a paradoxical situation. Within the realm of realpolitik, the power of the monarch is paramount. The monarch holds all political power such as the executive, legislative, and judicial power of the state. And Confucianism affirms the monarchy, it must affirm the supremacy of the monarchy. On the other hand, to keep monarchical power under moral control, morality has to be placed above monarchical power in the ideology. This is a fundamental contradiction of ethical-type politics and the famous contradiction between the moral system and the power system in the history of Chinese political thought. Although political power is above everything in the political sphere, in the cultural conception, it is morality that is above everything. Only in this way can morality serve the purpose of controlling politics. Therefore, among the two systems of morality and power, Confucian scholars invariably place morality at the top of the social and political hierarchy (Chen, 2003: 22).

Confucius founded the Confucian school and actively supported monarchical politics, but he insisted on the supremacy of the moral system over the power of the king in the relationship between moral and royal rule. Confucius' political concept of embracing moral politics had a great influence on later generations. Mencius also expressed the same view. In Mencius' view, as a gentleman, the only task of serving the king was simply to concentrate on guiding him along the right path. He was confident that he stood in a higher position of Taoism, and made the monarch the object of his education and enlightenment (Mencius). Xunzi even made the slogan of obedience to morality rather than to the monarch clear (Xunzi). He requires his students to enter politics with morality as the supreme rule of political behavior, rather than just obeying the monarch. In this way, entering politics was not meant to be a tool of the real regime, but a way to realize the transformation of the political organization with morality. The emphasis on the primacy of ethics over politics and morality

over kingship became the spiritual force behind Chinese Confucian scholars' criticism of politics. Such ethical values also influenced the rulers active in the political sphere. Throughout thousands of years of authoritarian political systems, most emperors scorned ethical values and exalted the supremacy of power. However, those emperors who are truly discerning often understand the limitation of political power and the tremendous role of ethics and morality. The Tang emperor Li Shimin proposed that the emperor was a man of virtue, and therefore the people of the whole world were willing to elect him as their ruler (Fan, 1999: 152). This was also the concept promoted by Xunzi's theory of the Mandate of Heaven. Li Shimin recognized that kingship must be controlled by morality, and proposed benevolence and morality as the principles of governance. Therefore, the Tang Dynasty under his rule became famous in Chinese history as the Reign of Zhenguan (Lv: 2012: 1-2). But apparently, such monarchs are very rare. Without a high sense of political responsibility and moral principles, a monarch cannot guarantee the stability of the country by his own will alone, which explains why Chinese history is full of chaos.

## **7. Traditional Chinese politics of Saint-King**

Before the thought of Inner Sage and Outer King was generally accepted by Confucianism, Confucianism had many sayings with similar meanings. For example, the Zhou Yi suggests that people should improve their moral cultivation and expand their merits; the Shang Shu says that only moral people can bear the mandate of heaven; Confucius and Mencius also emphasize the role of morality in political life; Xunzi expresses that only those who abide by ritual, justice and the rule of law are good at ruling the country (Zheng, 2007: 2-4). They expressed the meaning of Inner Saint and Outer King from different perspectives and subjects. Generally speaking, for rulers, Inner Saint and Outer King requires them to strive to improve their cultivation and to govern the country with benevolence and virtue rather than hegemony (Zheng, 2007: 2). For citizens, Inner Saint and Outer King requires each person to complete his or her character building through moral cultivation and eventually become a sage. The value orientation of Confucian political thought in the pre-Qin dynasty can be summarized by Inner Sage and Outer King, which coincides with the characteristics of traditional Chinese politics (Zheng, 2007: 1). Next, I will analyze this political characteristic through its external rationality and internal contradiction.

### **7.1 The external rationality of political culture of Inner Saint and Outer King**

The external rationality of the political culture of the inner saint and the outer king is discussed in three aspects, namely, the rights of the king and the duties of the saint, the morality of the saint and the rights of the king, and the merits of the king and the morality of the saint.

#### **7.11 The power of the king and the duty of the saint**

The unity of rights and duties of Inner Saint and Outer King ensures the proper functioning of ethical politics and the realization of the normative system of duty-based politics (Zheng, 2007: 3). The unity of rights and duties of the inner sage and outer king ensures the proper functioning of ethical politics and the realization of the normative system of traditional politics based on duties. The king is the subject of power in the state and has absolute power in the state. In the organization of the state, the autocratic monarch controls the executive, legislative, judicial, military, and other powers of the state. In the traditional Chinese concept, the inner sage is always regarded as the subject of moral obligation (Zheng, 2007: 5). Ercheng once said that the reason why an inner saint is a saint is that he can fulfill the moral obligations of ruler and subject, father and son, and husband and wife (Cheng, 2012: 4). Of course, it does not follow that a person can become a saint simply by fulfilling a certain

moral obligation. The moral obligations of those who can truly become saints are different from those of ordinary people. According to most Confucian scholars, a saint has at least the following important moral obligations.

First, a sage must nourish the people. They believe that without the sage, the people cannot live. The sage not only has the ability to nourish the people but also has the obligation to do so. So, how does a sage nourish the people? Dong Zhongshu (134 B.C.), a Confucian thinker of the Han Dynasty, said that the sage originally had the heart to regard the happiness of the world as his own responsibility. The sage always cares for the people who are suffering, and through the activities of raising the people's profits and eliminating the evils, the sage keeps the people alive, thus achieving the purpose of nurturing the people.

Second, the saint must educate the people. The duty of the saint is not only to make the people meet the material needs of survival but also to make them moral and cultured. On the positive side, the saint makes the people into gentlemen who maintain the political and ethical order of the country. On the negative side, the saint should educate the people not to offend the imperial power or engage in rebellious activities. In order to teach the people to consciously maintain the ruling order, the saints specifically developed a system of ritual and justice. Xunzi, in his treatise on the nature of evil, wrote that the ancient sage kings believed that people were evil by nature. Therefore, it was necessary to establish rituals and systems for people to enforce their nature and guide their values. Ultimately, everyone would be able to observe order and correct moral principles (Xunzi).

Although Xunzi's emphasis on nature and evil is not the authentic concept of Confucianism, Xunzi affirms that the sages should establish a system of ritual and righteousness so that the people are bound by rituals and institutions. This has always been a Confucian idea (Zheng, 2007: 3-4). Therefore, later Confucians have always believed that rituals and laws are made by the sages to teach the people (Cheng, 2012: 25).

Third, the saint must protect all the people. This statement was made as early as the Zhou Dynasty. To make the dynasty last for thousands of years, future generations should protect the people well (The Book of History). The purpose of this protection of the people was to maintain one's rule. Later Confucians, on the other hand, believed that the saint protected the people not only for the sake of the throne but more importantly to fulfill the Mandate of Heaven. This is a noble sense of responsibility and obligation.

From the above, it can be seen that the outer king, as the subject of power, has all political rights, such as legislative, administrative, judicial, and military. And the inner saint, as the subject of duty, has the moral obligation to nurture, educate and protect the people. The political model that unites the inner saint and the outer king links political rights and moral obligations. People in ancient China believed that the supreme political power of the outer king was due to the moral obligation of the inner saint. Likewise, the moral obligations of the inner saint must be realized through the political rights of the outer king. There is a conceptual unity between the two.

## 7.12 The morality of the saint and the rights of the king

According to the view that inner saints and outer kings are unified, the political rights a ruler has should be proportional to the moral obligations he undertakes. In other words, the higher the moral character of the inner saint, the greater the political rights he should have. Mencius' theory of the Mandate of Heaven also expresses this view. He believed that Heaven would grant different political rights to saints according to their different moral qualities and spiritual realities (Mencius). This mode of thought determines that the moral obligations of saints and the political rights of kings are interdependent and cannot be separated.

First, the political rights of outer kings cannot be separated from the moral obligations of saints. As an autocrat, the king has the highest power in the country. His every move has decisive significance for the state and society. However, an ethical-political order can be established only if the political rights of the outer king are controlled under the moral obligations of the inner saint. Therefore, Confucian scholars wanted the monarch to become a saint. They proposed that all monarchs who became outer kings should assume the obligation to nurture, educate, and protect the people so that the power of kings and the obligation of saints would be unified. Confucian scholars attached great importance to the distinction between king and saint. This is also to oppose the kind of political power that is divorced from moral obligations, i.e., an outer king who does not want to become an inner saint.

Second, the moral obligation of the inner saint cannot be separated from the political power of the outer king. The inner saints bear the moral obligation of nurturing, educating, and protecting the people. But if they cannot become outer kings and do not hold the political power of the state, they do not have the ability to fulfill this obligation. This is because the sages must be in the position of the monarch to fulfill their obligations. Mencius also expressed this view by asking the sage to be an emperor.

It is because of the interdependence of the political power of the king and the moral obligation of the saint that there is another specific characteristic between the two. The extent of the king's political power should be defined by the scope of the saint's moral obligations. The Book of Filial Piety presents five different moral codes for performing filial piety according to the political rank of people (The Book of Filial Piety). Its purpose is not only to venerate and support parents but to derive political moral norms from filial piety. The lowest class of commoners had the lowest political status, had no political power, and thus had the narrowest range of moral obligations. Their moral obligations are merely to work hard and support their parents. The monarch, on the other hand, had the highest political power in the state and had the greatest scope of moral obligations. It can be seen that the unity of the saint-king unites the political rights of the outer king and the moral obligations of the inner saint, thus ensuring the proper functioning of ethical politics (Li, 1994: 10).

## **7.13 The behavior of the king and the morality of the saint**

Most Confucian scholars affirm that the merits of the outer king were to realize the ethical ideal of the inner sage and that the ethical ideal of the inner sage was necessarily realized through the political actions of the outer king. By unifying the two, the socially-oriented values of traditional Chinese politics can be realized. The ethics of the saint and the behavior of the king cannot be separated (Zheng, 2007: 4).

First, the king's behavior cannot be separated from the morality of the saints (Song, 2019: 1). Once the king's behavior departs from the restraint of the moral code of the saints it will cause the people to suffer. Many thinkers have severely criticized despots who are detached from the morality of the inner saint. An outer king whose actions are not constrained by the morality of the inner saint is bound to attribute grand political rights to his personal wealth. This would inevitably have tragic consequences for the people.

Second, the morality of the sages cannot be separated from the actions of the king either (Song, 2019: 1). For Confucian scholars, the ultimate purpose of the morality of the inner saint is to make their moral ideal a reality. If such moral ideals remain only in the realm of ideas, then saints will be useless. If one is satisfied with the morality of inner sainthood in the spiritual sense but does nothing in the practical political life, then there is no doubt that this theory will become an empty dream. The morality of the inner saint needs to be manifested through the merits of the outer king. We can think of the morality of the inner sage as the ethical values expressed by the merits of the outer king.

## **7.2 The inherent contradiction of the politics of Inner Saint and Outer King**

The inherent contradictions of the politics of Saint-King are discussed in three ways: the illusory reality of the unity of the saint and the king, the essential hypocrisy of the inner saint and the outer king, and the counterculture of the inner saint and the outer king.

### **7.21 The unreality of the unity of king and saint**

No matter how perfect the political model of the unity of saints and kings may be in theory, there is a real problem that such a monarch never existed in ancient China. The image of such a monarch was merely a fiction of Confucian scholars. And it is precise because there has never been such a monarch in the real society, Confucian scholars need such an image to restrain the monarch in this world. History relentlessly proves the fact that those inner sages with a moral character often had no political power, and that the powerful outer kings were not willing to take on more moral obligations (He, 1993: 2). We must recognize that the political model of Inner Sage and Outer King forces together with two contradictory and

conflicting things. The value goals and code of conduct of the inner sage and the outer king are fundamentally opposed (Dai, 2002: 3-4). According to the value goal of the inner sage, the ruler should be the highest moral model. However, the rules of the outer king require the ruler to seize and consolidate his political rights. Obviously, the two do not unite.

One can find that all emperors who have seized power are particularly fond of talking about Confucianism. But this does not mean that they unified the inner sage and the outer king. They simply used Confucianism as a means to consolidate their power. Such an approach used the moral code of the inner sage as a tool to strengthen personal power, in violation of the code of the inner sage (Dai, 2002: 4).

## **7.22 The essential hypocrisy of Inner Saint and Outer King**

So where is the inherent contradiction between the moral obligation of the inner saint and the political power of the outer king? The reason for this is to be found in the political system and cultural context in which the model arose. The unity of the inner sage and the outer king contains an inherent prerequisite, that is, the autocratic monarchy system (He, 2019: 2). Therefore, the reason is firstly related to the autocratic monarchy system.

In a Western juridical political system, whether the ruler is an inner saint or not does not play a decisive role in the functioning of the entire state apparatus. In Western society, it is not political rights but the legal system that reigns supreme. The ruler is endowed with political rights by the legal system but must also assume the corresponding legal obligations (An & Ren, 2007: 1). But China is an ethical type of politics. In this case, the power of the ruler is not bound by any rules. Whether or not the monarch fulfills his moral obligations does not directly affect the gain or loss of his power. This separates the political rights and moral obligations of the autocratic monarch. In a jurisprudential society, if a ruler is unwilling to fulfill his obligations under the law and infringes on the power of the people, the law will give people the power to deprive him of his right to rule. But in the Chinese monarchy, the power of the ruler is always vested in private individuals. Thus, whether or not the ruler fulfills his moral obligations is a matter of his personal moral character. Such obligations are not bound by the ruled. The disconnect between the political rights and moral obligations of the autocratic ruler provides greater potential for a split between the inner saint and the outer king, and ultimately leads to the loss of control of the entire ethical politics. This insurmountable inner contradiction also proved the inevitable collapse of the ideal political model of the unity of saints and kings (He, 1993: 5).

## **7.23 The counter-cultural nature of Inner Saint and Outer King**

For thousands of years, Confucian scholars seem to have recognized the dangers of despotic monarchs. Confucian scholars denounced the greed and corruption of rulers. They soberly recognized that the seizure of political power by an outer king was itself a violation of

the moral imperative of the inner saint. It was the split between saint and king that led to fierce criticism of the monarch. However, the critics were using the values and norms of traditional politics to oppose the despot (Dai, 2002: 5). And the despot itself is a product of traditional politics. This contradiction dictated that the critics would never take a negative view of the monarchy. The purpose of their critique was merely to stitch together the divisive model of inner saint and outer king. Thus, no matter how strongly they criticize, they always affirm monarchy. Confucianism strives to defend the monarchical system. This can be found in the Confucian doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven, in which Confucian scholars believed that the power of the monarch was granted by Heaven and could not be resisted (Analects).

Thus, ancient Chinese thinkers were caught in a strange circle from which they could not break free. On the one hand, they saw a split between the inner sage and the outer king. On the other hand, they could find no other form of polity to lift this dilemma. They could only hope that in the future there would be a monarch who could combine the inner sage and the outer king (He, 2019: 2). If it can be guaranteed that the outer king is necessarily the inner sage, then ethical politics must function properly. But the unity of the inner sage and the outer king is an ideal that has never been realized by political thinkers, a purely theoretical fiction (Dai, 2002: 5). This ideal and fiction can only ever guarantee its conceptual perfection, but cannot be transformed into a viable social reality. The root of the problem lies in the fact that the inner saint and the outer king are essentially incompatible things, with an inherent contradiction and an insurmountable conflict between them (He, 2019: 2).

## Conclusion

Confucianism, founded by Confucius and developed and expanded by thinkers such as Mencius and Xunzi, has a unique position in the field of traditional Chinese politics and culture. Based on the patriarchal ritual system inherited from the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties, Confucian political culture has evolved and accumulated over a long period, becoming a firm spiritual pillar and cultural soil for the authoritarian political system and political life in ancient China. Based on the Small-scale Peasant Economy of feudal society and with feudal ethics and hierarchy as its core, Confucianism formed a complete system of political rules and behavioral norms. It plays a tenacious role in all levels of people's thoughts, consciousness, beliefs, emotions, psychology, and behavior.

Through the analysis of the economic, political, and cultural background of Confucianism, we find that the emergence of Confucian culture perfectly fits the traditional Small-scale Peasant Economy, political situation, and ethical concepts of China at that time, and it has occupied a dominant position with a strong posture.

From the perspective of Confucian political philosophy values, Confucianism takes the Way of Heaven as the ontology of political life, so that Confucian political philosophy, when translated into the practical activities of political behavior, requires rulers to always pay attention to their moral manners. From the Mandate of Heaven, pre-Qin Confucian scholars found a basis for attaching importance to the establishment of morality. They determined from the depth of their thought that the standard of morality in the world came from the Mandate of Heaven and established an inseparable link between morality and Heaven. Confucius regarded benevolence and virtue as fundamental to the Mandate of Heaven and tied the building of a gentleman's character to the Mandate of Heaven. Mencius, like Confucius, advocated the salvation of society through the improvement of moral cultivation and suggested that the honor and disgrace of each person are given by the mandate of Heaven according to morality. Xunzi's greatest contribution is to put forward the principle of the Mandate of Heaven and give full play to the subjective initiative of man to benefit mankind. He affirmed the role of human beings but, limited by the limited knowledge of the time, still believed that the dominant social actors were the sages and the gentlemen. Although Confucius, Mencius, and Xunzi held different views on human nature, they all recognized that human nature was endowed by heaven and affirmed that it would develop in the direction of goodness.

Influenced by Confucianism, ancient China built a solid centralized monarchical state that lasted for thousands of years. Traditional Chinese politics has its distinctive features but also has insurmountable conflicts, which are manifested as follows.

First, traditional Chinese blood-based patriarchal politics is conducive to social harmony and unity, but clearly not conducive to the building of a democratic society. The clan, which is maintained by blood ties, becomes a tribe, a nation, and a state as blood ties

expand. The nation is the network and the clan is the cell. No individual can exist alone without the clan and the state. Traditional society values the group over the individual and emphasizes that individual values need to be dependent on the collective to be realized. The strong sense of clan laid a deep cultural and social background for the centralized monarchy in ancient China.

Second, the socially-oriented culture of traditional Chinese politics laid the personality foundation for the strengthening and continuation of the monarchical dictatorship. Confucianism emphasized filial piety and loyalty, requiring people to respect their elders, revere authority, and obey the monarch. The concepts of loyalty and filial piety were the same in ancient China, requiring people to treat the ruler with the same respect as they did their elders. Ancient Chinese people's intellectual activities and even their outlook on life were confined to the cage set by bureaucratic politics (Wang, 1981, 39).

Third, the ethical culture of traditional Chinese politics has made China a civilized and ceremonial country and has also accompanied the concept of hierarchy. Confucianism has theorized and systematized the concept of hierarchy. According to Confucianism, each person should act according to his rank and assume the responsibilities of the corresponding rank. The Rites of Confucian culture are, to a large extent, a hierarchy. And the ideal society of Confucianism is a hierarchical society. Regardless of the changes in the criteria of class division, the denial of equality, the reinforcement of status differences, and the protection of hierarchical privileges through laws and other measures were common features of ancient Chinese hierarchy.

Fourth, the Inner Saint and Outer King culture of traditional Chinese politics promotes the rule of the state by virtue and establishes the political system of rule by man. In this social structure, people's sense of individuality was lost, and there was a lack of awareness of rights and equality. Ancient Chinese society was ruled by Confucian ethics and morality, which gradually formed a political system of rule by man that was diametrically opposed to the rule of law. The ideal of Inner Saint and Outer King advocated by Confucianism could only become a beautiful ideal that could not be realized in practice due to its inevitable contradictions.

For today's world, the multiploidization of the world and economic globalization have inevitably become the mainstream direction of future development. Cultural exchanges and collisions between East and West are more frequent than ever before. A rational view of Confucianism and traditional Chinese politics, and learning from their excellent achievements, can further promote the prosperity of world politics and culture, and promote the diversity of the world.

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