

Tao Te Ching and the Spiritual Characteristics of Xia Culture

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Abstract

Lao Tzu is the creator of Taoism and a prominent philosopher and thinker in ancient China. Tao Te Ching, widely known as Lao Tzu, is one of his most famous books in the world. His thoughts offer a wealth of philosophical and living wisdom that has influenced Chinese civilisation for hundreds of years. Any kind of idea, however, must have a starting point. Any kind of idea, however, must have a starting point. If Confucius' concept is a continuation of the Zhou Dynasty's culture, Lao Tzu's thought is a reflection of the Xia culture. We can learn more about the Xia dynasty's cultural ethos by delving into the literary meaning of the Tao Te Ching.

Keywords

Tao Te Ching; Lao Tzu; Xia culture.

1. Lao Tzu and Tao Te Ching

Lao Tzu was one of ancient China's most prominent intellectuals and philosophers, as well as the originator and primary exponent of Taoism. For over 2000 years, his philosophical concepts have had a tremendous impact on the development of traditional Chinese culture. Nonetheless, historical records of Lao Tzu's life and acts remain hazy. Lao Tzu was described as one of the most enigmatic figures in Chinese history by Joseph Needham, and he had a point. [1] Lao Tzu's birth and death dates are unknown, and his birthplace is likewise debatable. In Historical Records (Shi Ji), three representations of Lao Tzu from various periods are recorded. The most widely held view is that Lao Tzu was a historian who managed the books and archives of the Zhou Dynasty. He once met Confucius and responded to Confucius' inquiries on philosophical issues. In this meeting, He said to Confucius, "Abandon your arrogance and excessive demands, forsake your pretentious affectations and looks, discard your excessive aspirations; these are not beneficial for you." [2] This sentence is the embodiment of "Inaction" (Wu Wei). Besides him, Sima Qian also mentioned two other Lao Tzu in his book. However, Sima Qian does not give a definitive answer to the question of who is the real Lao Tzu. The question of who Lao Tzu is has been debated for ages. Liang Qichao, Hu Shi and others had set off a debate in the eleventh year of the Republic of China.

Lao Tzu's surviving work is Tao Te Ching, also known as Lao Tzu. The original text of Tao Te Ching is divided into two parts, the first part is De Ching and the second part is Tao Ching. It was later changed to Tao Ching in the first part and De Ching in the second part, with a total of 81 chapters. Tao Te Ching recorded Lao Tzu's philosophical thoughts. His thought contains extremely rich life philosophy and wisdom, deeply influenced thousands of years of Chinese culture. However, the formation of any kind of thought must have its origin. If Confucius thought is the successor of Zhou Dynasty's culture, then Lao Tzu thought is the reflection of Xia culture. By exploring the text connotation of Tao Te Ching, we can explore the spiritual characteristics of Xia culture in it.

2. Lao Tzu Inherited the Path of the Xia Dynasty

The concept of the "Three Kings" or "Three Generations" (Sandai) is often used in historical texts. "Three Generations" refers to the Xia, Shang and Zhou dynasties, which are the origins of human civilization. The Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods were marked by the flames of war and the contention of a hundred schools of thought. Their ideas often draw from three generations of civilization. Confucius once said, "How rich and complete are the rites of the Zhou dynasty, which were built on the basis of the rites of the Xia dynasty and those of the Shang dynasty, and evolved and developed on the basis of the rites of the Xia dynasty and those of the Shang dynasty. I am willing to follow the rituals of the Zhou Dynasty." [3] Confucius believed that the Zhou dynasty combined the essence of the Xia and Shang dynasties, and the rites and music were well developed, so he followed the path of the Xia Dynasty. Taoist thought also has its ancient origin, but neither Lao Tzu nor Zhuang Tzu clearly indicated which period of civilization Taoist culture was inherited. Through the analysis of the text of Tao Te Ching, we can find that Lao Tzu's thought accords with the spiritual characteristics of Xia culture to a great extent.

2.1. Comparison between Xia Yu and Sage Images in Tao Te Ching

The Spring and Autumn period and the Warring States period were times of great contention and cultural development. With the Zhou dynasty in decline and the feudal princes in turmoil, the sages and scholars competed to put forward their own ideas for ruling the country, hoping to assist the feudal princes in establishing a new era and making the ideal picture of society they had in mind a reality.

In the theories of Confucius and Lao Tzu, the concept of "sage" (Shengren) was proposed. The "sage" is the ruler of the ideal society with perfect personality. However, because of the different ruling doctrines of Confucianism and Taoism, the images of saints in their thoughts are also different. In Confucius' thought, there are few direct discussions of "sage". Once Zi Gong asked Confucius, "If there is a man who gives grace widely to the people, can he be called benevolent and righteous?" Confucius replied, "it's not just benevolent people, it's a saint! Even emperors Yao and Shun can't do it. As for benevolent people, if they want to stand in society, they should also help others stand together; if they want to live well, they should also help others live well together. Everything can treat others in the way of treating themselves is the way to implement benevolence and righteousness." [4] This shows that in Confucius' mind, a saint must not only have a benevolent heart, but also possess the virtue and ability to give generously to all. Lao Tzu, however, attacked the image of the "sage" in Confucianism:

Banish wisdom, discard knowledge,
And the people shall profit a hundredfold;
Banish "humanity", discard "justice",
And the people shall recover love of their kin;
Banish cunning, discard "utility",
And the thieves and brigands shall disappear. [5]

Lao Tzu advocated "obscurantist policy" (Yumin zhengzhi) and "not governing the country with wisdom" (Buyi zhi zhiguo). He created a sage image different from Confucianism in Tao Te Ching. Lao Tzu wrote the Tao Te Ching in eighty-one chapters, twenty-seven of which are devoted to the "sage". Lao Tzu elaborates on the image of the sage. First of all, in cultivating themselves, saints should possess the virtue of inner tranquillity, free from self-respect and pride:

He does not reveal himself,
And is therefore luminous.

He does not justify himself,
And is therefore far-famed.
He does not boast of himself,
And therefore people give him credit.
He does not pride himself,
And is therefore the chief among men.
Because of his incompatibility,
no one can compete with him all over the world. [6]

Ordinary people always like to show themselves off in front of others, boasting of their achievements and merits, which leads to countless strife and fights. The sages practise the way of "non-contention" (Buzheng), not competing or grabbing so that their achievements are not lost and therefore no one can compete with them.

In governing the country, the sage should rule by doing nothing that goes against nature and carry wordless teaching. In Chapter 57 of the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu said through the sage:

I do nothing and the people are reformed of themselves.
I love quietude and the people are righteous of themselves.
I deal in no business and the people grow rich by themselves.
I have no desires and the people are simple and honest by themselves. [7]

The core of Lao Tzu's thought is letting things take their own course. Holmes Welch believed that "Inaction" in Taoist thought did not mean to avoid all actions, but to avoid all hostile and aggressive behaviors. [8] Lao Tzu argues that if sages can follow the way of nature, follow the laws of heaven and earth, and do not interfere, disturb or force the people, then human nature can naturally return to simplicity and people's life can be peaceful. During the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period, the country was in turmoil and everyone wanted to make a difference in the chaotic times, to build up merit and change their status. The root cause of social disputes was the expansion of man's desire for private ownership. This is why Lao Tzu advocates the rule of inaction, which means no defeat and no loss due to inaction.

Yu was the first emperor of the Xia dynasty, also known to later generations as Xia Yu. He is a sage monarch who can be ranked with Yao and Shun of the Five Emperors of ancient China's legendary era. By comparing the images of Xia Yu in the history records with the saints in the Tao Te Ching, we can find that the two coincide to a great extent. In Shang Shu, it is written that Shun wanted to pass the throne to Yu, but Yu humbly refused to accept and wanted to put forward Gao Tao. Emperor Shun said to Yu, "When the flood came from heaven to warn me, you are the most wise and capable person who has been able to match words with deeds and have achieved great success in controlling the flood and established prestige among the people. You are not only diligent for the country, but also thrifty and not complacent. It is because you do not try to be brave, so no one in the world dare to contend with you. Because you do not take credit for yourself, no one in the world dares to claim credit with you.[9] After the death of Emperor Shun, Yu took refuge in Yangcheng and gave up his throne to Shang Jun, the son of Shun. All the feudal princes turned to worship Yu instead of Shang Jun. It was only then that Yu accepted the position of Son of Heaven and established the state as Xia. Yu made meritorious contributions to flood control, but he did not boast of his ability. He followed the path of quietness and inaction, and was humble enough not to compete for fame and fortune. Yu's actions were in line with the thoughts of Lao Tzu in the Tao Te Ching, and he actually had the virtues of a "sage".

In governing the country, Yu divided the country into nine states, which could be managed according to their customs and did not enforce the policies of the central court. Yu did not disturb the people, did not publicize his authority, did not impose heavy taxes on people, and

ruled in accordance with the nature of the people, but instead his reputation and teachings spread throughout the land, allowing the country to prosper. In Chapter 80 of the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu described the ideal society in his mind:

(Let there be) a small country with a small population, Where the supply of goods are tenfold or hundredfold, more than they can use. Let the people value their lives and not migrate far. Though there be boats and carriages, None be there to ride them. Though there be armor and weapons, No occasion to display them. Let the people again tie ropes for reckoning, Let them enjoy their food, Beautify their clothing, Be satisfied with their homes, Delight in their customs. The neighboring settlements overlook one another so that they can hear the barking of dogs and crowing of cocks of their neighbors, And the people till the end of their days shall never have been outside their country. [10]

On the surface, this might seem like a primitive, agrarian society, but it wasn't. In this society, there are boats and chariots but nowhere to use them, armour and soldiers but no battles to fight. It can be said that this is a society that knows civilization, but the people are willing to live a simple life. This society is very similar to the Xia Dynasty. There is a description of the Xia Dynasty in Huainan Zi:

Gun, the chieftain of the Xia tribe, used to build great walls to defend the nation and the people, but the people all wanted to leave him, and other tribes wanted to attack him. Yu later became chief, and when he discovered this, he tore down the city walls, filled up the moat, distributed property among the people, destroyed weapons, and taught virtue to the people. As a result, everyone completed their jobs, and other tribes were eager to join them. Tens of thousands of feudal princes came to deliver presents of silk, jade, and other items to Yu when he hosted a conference at Tushan. [11]

The Xia dynasty founded by Yu coincided with the ideal society conceived by Lao Tzu. And the image of Yu resembles the image of the sage in the Tao Te Ching. Chapter 14 of the Tao Te Ching says, "Grasp the laws of ancient times and understand everything that is happening around us today." [12] In the process of forming his thought, Lao Tzu absorbed elements of the culture of the Xia dynasty and thus took on the spiritual qualities of the Xia civilisation. On the other hand, the ideas were developed on the basis of inheritance, so that the ideal society constructed by Lao Tzu was higher than that of the Xia Dynasty. The Xia dynasty was a country that developed from a tribal alliance, and productivity was still very low, so people were able to maintain a simple life largely because of the limitations of productivity. In Lao Tzu's time, on the other hand, productivity had increased tremendously, agriculture was developing rapidly, and the people's standard of living was no longer the same as it was in the Xia Dynasty. So Lao Tzu believed that for civilisation in general, its ideal society was not one that could not be achieved for, but one that could but did not. This is not a civilizational regression, but a spiritual advance.

2.2. Lao Tzu's Worship of Yin and the Matriarchal Element in Xia Culture

Lao Tzu's philosophical system revolves around "Tao" and "Tao" is an ethereal philosophical concept. When Lao Tzu explained "Tao", he always uses the terms "beginning" (Shi), "mother" (Mu), "female" (Pin) to refer to it. In the Origin of Chinese Characters (Shuowen Jiezi), "Beginning" is interpreted as "the first birth of a woman". Lao Tzu used "mother" or "woman" to describe "Tao" because he thought some of the characteristics of "Tao" were more feminine.

In Chinese culture, Yin and Yang are the two parts of and female belongs to Yin. Lao Tzu repeatedly stressed the importance of "being soft and weak" (Rouruo chuxia). Women may seem to be in a weaker position in both sexes, but they are in line with Lao Tzu's "Tao". Lao Tzu once said, "The softest substance of the world can go through the hardest." In history, women and eunuchs were often in power. More importantly, female have the virtue of procreation. Lao Tzu once stated in the Tao Te Ching:

The Spirit of the Valley never dies.

It is called the Mystic Female.
The Door of the Mystic Female
Is the root of Heaven and Earth.
Continuously, continuously,
It seems to remain.
Draw upon it,
And it serves you with ease. [13]

The word "female" here refers to reproduction. Lao Tzu used "female" as a metaphor for "Tao", which can breed all things and grow endlessly. Women give birth to human beings, and "Tao" is the origin of all things in heaven and earth. Lao Tzu worshipped "Yin" because he worshipped "Tao". Lao Tzu's concept is inextricably linked with the ancient Xia Dynasty civilization.

According to Historical Records, Yu's surname was "Si", and he derived his surname from his mother. [14] In the legend, Yu's mother swallowed a pearl called "Yi Yi" and gave birth to Yu. In fact, in many ancient Chinese legends, saints were born as a result of their mothers receiving a heavenly calling, and they all had no fathers. [15] This is because the ancient clans were maintained through the matrilineal lineage, and by the time of the Xia Dynasty, women still had a high status and people worshipped their mothers because of their fertility function.

The Xia tribe originated in the loess Plateau region, where Nu Wa was the first creation god. According to some scholars, Nu Wa lived primarily on the Loess Plateau, and her tomb is located in Hou Village, east of Zhaocheng Town, Hongdong County, Linfen City, Shanxi Province. In the ancient legend, in addition to creating people out of loess, Nu Wa's main accomplishment was to repair the sky, and the purpose of repairing the sky was to control water. The legend of Nu Wa mending the sky is described in detail in Huainanzi:

In ancient times, the four heavenly pillars collapsed and the land fell apart. The heavens are broken, and cannot cover all things; the earth is broken, and cannot bear all things; The fire burns and does not go out; the flood floods and does not subside; Beasts devour men, and fierce birds prey on the weak and old. So Nu Wa made colored stones to mend the sky, cut off the four feet of the big turtle to serve as the four pillars to erect the sky, killed the black dragon to save Yi State, and piled up the ashes of reeds to ward off the flood. [16]

The giant turtle and the black dragon were believed to be water monsters that caused trouble and disaster for the people. Nu Wa cut turtle feet and killed the black dragon in order to make the flood recede. This is very similar to Yu's virtue of controlling the flood.

In many of the excavated portraits, Nuwa and Fu Xi always appear at the same moment, their upper bodies hugging each other and their lower bodies entangled with snake tails. We can suppose that the metaphor of the pictures is that only the female and male together, the yin and yang together, can give birth to all things if Nuwa and Fuxi are considered as a unity. A school of scholars, represented by Wen Yiduo, believes that the totem of the Xia tribe was the dragon, [17] and so Yu is a descendant of Fuxi. Luo Binji, on the other hand, believes that Fuxi and Yu are the same person. In this way, Yu is the male figure of Nuwa.

All Chinese culture began with mythology, and the goal of mythology was to solve cosmic's problems. When myth could no longer satisfy people, philosophy arose to fill the void. Philosophy and myth are inseparable, and philosophy is commonly formed with reference to myth. The characteristic of Yin worship in Lao Tzu's thought is largely because it has absorbed the spiritual culture of Xia nationality. In Huainan Zi, Nu Wa's virtue of healing water is praised. Nu Wa's virtue can benefit the whole world, but she never boasts of her achievements, never flaunts her fame, and follows the natural laws of heaven and earth. This approach is in line with Lao Tzu's "Tao". The Xia culture, which has inherited the spirit of Nuwa, is an important soil for

Lao Tzu's thought. The customs of worshipping Nu Wa, praying for fertility and revering women in Lao Tzu's hometown provide the best commentary on Lao Tzu's concept of worshipping Yin.

2.3. Lao Tzu's Thought and the Ritual Inheritance of the Xia Dynasty

The records of Yu in Historical Records are very brief. The fact that Sima Qian created a chronicle (Benji) of the Xia dynasty but not a separate one for Yu This is not due to the lack of status of Yu, but largely because of the lack of historical materials in the Xia Dynasty. During the Western Han Dynasty, most of the direct historical materials about the Xia Dynasty were lost, and there were few records about the rituals and customs of the Xia Dynasty in Historical Records. However, we can glean some of the content of Xia dynasty rituals from the early Confucian classic, The Book of Rites (Li Ji).

According to The Book of Rites, The rituals of the Xia dynasty mainly includes the veneration of black and water. The people of the Xia dynasty considered black to be the most honourable colour. It is recorded in The Book of Rites: "People in the Xia Dynasty worshipped black. they held funerals on dark nights, they used black horses for campaigns and black offerings for sacrifices." [18] Funerals, military events and rituals were three of the most important events in ancient society, and in these three events the Xia dynasty mostly used black, demonstrating their reverence for it. The erlitou cultural site discovered in 1959 unearthed a large number of black pottery. In legend, black pottery was created by Shun. Yu was the successor of Shun and was influenced by him, who also revered black in his clothing wares and other things. This ritual tradition of the Xia Dynasty is consistent with Lao Tzu's thought. In Chapter 41 of the Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu says, "Sheer white appears like tarnished." [19] "tarnished" (Ru) has the meaning of "black". In Tao Te Ching, Black is the Yin and white is the Yang of the Tai Chi Liang Yi. Black appears to be introverted, quiet and soft, but it can tarnish white. Lao Tzu often uses the word "Xuan" to modify the word "Tao", and "Xuan" also means black. Therefore, Lao Tzu's thought is the embodiment of a culture that reveres blackness, which is inseparable from the inheritance of the rituals of the Xia Dynasty.

According to Historical Records, Emperor Shun rewarded Yu with a piece of black jade in recognition of his success in controlling floods, showing that the reverence for black is inseparable from the reverence for water. The Book of Rites records that "Yu was given the throne because of his merit in healing water, so the Xia dynasty revered water. " [20] Yu succeeded in controlling the flood because he complied with the law of nature and channelled the water according to the nature of the water. In later times, the figure of Yu was deified and regarded as the god of water in the Wu-Yue region, and it can be said that Yu became the embodiment of water virtue. [21] Historical Records contains a delicate description of Yu's control of the flood:

Feeling sorry for his father Gun, who was punished for his failure to heal the water, Yu lived outside his home for thirteen years, not daring to enter even when he passed by several times. He scrimped on food and clothing and did his best to honour the gods. He lived in a modest house and spent the money he had accumulated on flood control. He walked on the ground in a chariot, on the water in a boat, in the mud in a wooden sledge, and on the mountain roads in shoes with iron teeth. In his left hand he held the compass and line, in his right hand he held the compass and the moment. He also carried instruments for measuring positions, developing the nine states of land, dreading nine rivers, repairing nine great lakes and surveying nine mountains. [22]

Yu endured difficult conditions, walking between mountains and rivers to control floods. After curing the flood, Shun wanted to pass on the throne to him, but he refused to accept it and took refuge in Yangcheng. He did what he could to benefit others, but not for fame and wealth. Just as Lao Tzu said, "Water benefits all things and does not compete with them." [23] Yu is the best embodiment of Lao Tzu's thought of water morality.

3. Conclusion

Lao Tzu's thought has many similarities with the spirit of Xia culture, but we can't just regard it as the inheritance of Xia culture. Lao Tzu developed xia culture while inheriting it, making it rise from a social custom to a systematic philosophy. Lao Tzu believed that the Xia society inherited the spirit of Nu Wa, with the leadership of the saint Yu and the virtues of advocating black and water, which was the prototype of the ideal society in his mind. The Xia Dynasty's prosperity was due to following the laws of the nature; the Xia Dynasty's decline and the rise of the Zhou Dynasty were due to the loss of "Tao." In Lao Tzu's view, the process from Xia to Shang to Zhou was a process of gradually losing "Tao". In the Zhou Dynasty, various laws and regulations were formulated, and human nature began to be restricted. By the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, rituals had become a tool for theft of power and prestige, and this was the beginning of chaos.

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