

A TEACHER OF CIVILIZATION IN THE AGE OF GREAT CHANGE - CONFUCIUS AND SOCRATES

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Abstract:

The age of change is often a rich fertile ground for ideas. Both Confucius and Socrates lived in times of great change. Their thoughts are the product of the turbulent times, the response to the changing society, and the embodiment of the spirit of the times. Both Confucius and Socrates, as masters of Eastern and Western civilizations, have left behind valuable intellectual resources for posterity.

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German philosophers Karl Jaspers in <The Origin And Goal of History> that The 200 BC from 800 BC to ad was The “Axial Period” of human civilization, at that time, great thinkers came into being in ancient Greece, ancient China and ancient India, whose principles shaped different cultural traditions, and has been affecting human life. Confucius and Socrates are two of them.

Confucius (551-479 BC) , born into a declining aristocratic family in the spring and Autumn period of ancient China, was a well-known thinker, educator, politician and founder of Confucianism in ancient China, the most far-reaching thinker of ancient Chinese history. Socrates (circa 469-399 BC), Born into an Athenian family, Socrates was the most famous Greek thinker, philosopher and educator, and the founder of Western philosophy. Chinese Confucius and Ancient Greek Socrates lived in two different societies, the east and the west, but they both lived in roughly the same period of time, in roughly the same social environment, that is, in a society with a turbulent social environment and chaotic social thinking. Although there was almost no communication between the east and the West in ancient times, as the originators of their respective thoughts, their thoughts have many similarities, as the great thinkers in the history of political thought in the ancient world, as "Social conscience", they all put forward a lot of political views and thoughts according to



the actual social situation at that time, and all tried to solve the actual political problems that poisoned the society at that time, so as to improve the society, so that society into a benign operation and harmonious development. Therefore, their political thoughts have formed a complete ideological system, distinctive features.

First, to reflect on the changes of the times.

Confucius lived in the late spring and Autumn period, a period of great change in Chinese history. Social turbulence, patriarchal clan system new, etiquette collapse music bad. The era of "The conquest of rites and music by the emperor" in the Shang dynasty and the Western Zhou dynasty is gone forever. With the gradual disintegration of the clan community, the simple and clear social order in the past is facing the fate of collapse. Therefore, the stability of social order has become a topic of concern, to restore the peace and harmony of the past became the focus of many thinkers at that time. In the face of change and opportunity, Confucius, a scholar with a strong heart, has a long way to go, his political ethics ideas of "Resuming rites" and "Returning benevolence" appeared on the historical stage. He asked people to restrain themselves with "Propriety," "See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil, move no evil" (the Analects of Yan Hui), and created a moral evaluation system centered on "Benevolence.", to "Return benevolence" to "Return ceremony. In fact, Confucius's "Restoration of rites" was to restore the tradition of rites and music in the Western Zhou dynasty, in which the rulers and ministers had a clear hierarchy between father and son, so as to build a harmonious society with equal differences, stability and order.

Socrates lived at a time when the Greek Athenian city-state was facing a crisis of democracy. The city-state democracy of Ancient Greece is the cradle of philosophy and the Democratic political system praised by later political thinkers. But in Socrates's time, it was in decline. The Citizens' assembly, the basis of Athenian democracy, has failed, citizens have gone their own way, and politicians have taken advantage of this to seize power and become autocrats. The defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War 406 BC led to social injustice and the weakening of national power. The emergence of the Wise was the product of the corruption of democracy, the participation and influence of people in politics by sophistry alone, the view of philosophical reasoning as a practical skill, the destruction of the pursuit of truth, and the erosion of the social climate in Athens, the city-state democracy has completely lost its former positive role, and the social order has been destroyed. Faced with such a social background, as a patriot with a strong sense of social



responsibility, Socrates tried to save Athens through knowledge. In his view, the root cause of Athens's decline was a failure of democratic principles, a lack of expertise on the part of city-state administrators, so he compared himself to a “Gadfly” to stimulate people's thirst for knowledge, to participate actively in debates leading people to explore ethical issues such as what is justice and what is courage, in order to encourage people to learn, have virtue, and restore democracy and justice to the polis.

Second, the exploration of social order.

Both Socrates and Confucius were masters of “Speaking but not writing”, and their doctrines were passed down through the records of their disciples or subsequent disciples. Later generations learned about Socrates's life and thought mainly from his students' writings on Plato and Xenophanes, while Confucius's thoughts were concentrated in the Analects of Confucius compiled by his disciples.

1. Socrates's quest for a virtuous society

Socrates's philosophy is mainly about the ethical ideal of virtue knowledge, which is the theoretical basis of the ideal social order he is trying to explore. In his thought, he equated virtue with knowledge and established a virtue society full of justice and Democracy by seeking true knowledge. In his early years, Socrates devoted himself to the study of natural philosophy, “Wishing to know why things are, why they exist, why they are created, why they are destroyed.”, i am interested in the principle that the mind is the cause of all arrangements put forward by Anak Sagora, the predecessor of thought. But when he “Looked down, and found that the philosopher did not use the mind at all, nor did he regard it as a principle for arranging things, but rather as a recourse to qi, ether, water, and other curious things”, he was especially disappointed when he saw that the pretentious wise men, one by one, toyed with technique, indulged in sophistry, and gradually lost the positive role of philosophical exploration in opening up wisdom and liberating the mind. He believed that philosophy could not study nature without knowing useful human and social problems, but should study and explore universal and exact knowledge, such as piety, appropriateness, justice, wisdom, courage and other virtues of the definition, the principles of governance, the quality of rulers and so on.

In order to obtain true and reliable knowledge and save Athens, he determined that the object of knowledge is to know himself. “Know thyself” is the inscription of the Greek Temple of Delphi, which Socrates took as his philosophical principle, partly to confess his ignorance and to seek knowledge humbly; On the other hand, it is to



study nature and society by examining one's own mind. He argued that "It is better to turn to the heart, where the truth of existence is to be sought", and that "In any case, I first establish what I consider to be the most sound principle," which is the principle of virtue. In Socrates's mind, virtue is the art of doing good, the noblest of all arts, and the principle that everyone should know. Therefore, he equates virtue with knowledge, and regards the pursuit of virtue as his own right. On the one hand, he tries to seek concrete and reliable knowledge of virtue, such as what is courage, what is temperance, what is justice, and on the other hand, he talks with others in a sincere manner, help others "Produce" knowledge by performing midwifery. "Money does not bring virtue," he said. "Virtue brings money, and all the other good things of the individual and the state. That is my doctrine." Socrates's moral practice is the best explanation of the doctrine that virtue is knowledge. After his arrest for defending the interests of the polis, he was able to stand by his principles and obey the truth. He would rather suffer unjust punishment than do unjust things, with his integrity to defend the order of the polis, and paid the price of his life.

"There is no safety in the life of a man who stands upright and tries to prevent his country from doing many unjust and illegal things, and who really wants to fight for justice, and if he wants to live, even for a short period of time, he must be a man of the people and must never hold public office." This is his plea from prison. His plea was both an indictment of the decline of the Athenian people's livelihood and a desire for a just and just moral society in the future. Socrates's quest for a virtuous society was beautiful, but it was impossible in a time of change. But "He expends his life to try to ignite the spark of goodness in everyone's heart and make it become a flame", illuminating the bright road of exploring truth bravely and pursuing reason persistently for posterity.

2. Confucius's vision of a harmonious society

Confucius is the founder of the Chinese Confucian school. In the late spring and Autumn period, as a man with a strong sense of social responsibility, the starting point of his theory is naturally the construction of social order as a starting point. So Confucius's philosophy, like Socrates's, is largely based on the idea of political ethics over personal morality. From the Analects of Confucius, we can see that he advocated and moralized his ideas and propositions in people's daily behaviors through the rational behaviors of "Returning rites" and "Returning benevolence", to build a "Harmonious but different" harmonious society. The rites developed from the rituals of family sacrifice, family harmony and disciple education since the Yin and



Zhou dynasties. This kind of expression in external etiquette rules, in fact, is to rectify the Order of human society. Therefore, facing the phenomenon of “Li collapse”, Confucius attached great importance to “Li” as an important means to maintain the old patriarchal hierarchy. He yearned for the perfection of Zhou Li. “Fu Li,” he said, “The late king treated people according to the rule of heaven. Those who have lost will die, those who have gained will live... so the world can be reaped and the country can be redeemed.” (《 Li Ji · Li Yun 》) the essence of his “Resuming Li” is to resume Zhou Li, to rectify the changed social reality by Zhou Li, and realize the social order of “Monarch, subject, father, son”. Confucius advocated propriety, but he paid more attention to benevolence, “People and not benevolence, how is the propriety?” “Self-restraint and restoration of propriety for Benevolence.”

He believed that propriety was based on the “Benevolence” of the monarch, that is, the personal moral cultivation, so he established the moral evaluation system of “Benevolence”, regard “For benevolence” as the basis of adjusting social relations and the means of “Resuming rites”. He defined the moral meaning of benevolence in many ways. Benevolence can cultivate self: “The teacher's way, loyalty and forgiveness”, “Persevering in benevolence, no evil also”; benevolence can help people: “The husband benevolence, they want to stand, they want to reach and reach people”, “Bo Shi in the people and can help people”; Benevolence can stabilize the society: “It is also filial piety, and good offenders, rare; not good offenders, but good troublemakers, not also”; Benevolence can also achieve the highest state of life “Die”: “People with lofty ideals, no life to harm people, have killed to die”. In this way, “Benevolence” has become the highest category of Moral Ethics in Confucius's mind, and has become the criterion for judging value. He also stipulated “Benevolence” from the negative aspect, “Skillful words and color, few carry benevolence”, emphasizing that “Benevolence” is not an external form of decoration, but rational internalization and cohesion. At the same time, “Benevolence” should also be regulated by “Courtesy”, “Respectful and rude is labor, cautious and rude is anthill, brave and rude is disorderly, straight and rude is hanged. Regarding the essence of benevolence, Confucius thought that filial piety was the root of benevolence, so Confucius not only explained the meaning of benevolence, but also strengthened people's identification with the patriarchal clan ties, to construct the moral emotion based on the family affection, so as to find the psychological basis of order and rules.



It can be said that the whole analects of Confucius is mainly for the “Benevolence” for the notes, and Confucius put the implementation of “Benevolence” into the daily routine of the practice, advocated “Learning while learning.”. He also personally opened schools, recruit students, spread his “Benevolence” concept and “Fu Li” idea, for his heart the formation of an ideal society active exploration. However, Confucius's description of differential, stable and orderly, the ideal society is “Harmonious” and not “Harmonious.”. Because of the social “Don't”, it is difficult to “Orderly”, especially in the turbulent era of change, it is more likely to lead to “Ceremony collapse music bad”. In order to resolve this contradiction, Confucius put forward the idea of “Harmony but difference”, which still has practical significance. He holds that “Harmony is the most important part of propriety” and regards “Harmony” as the guiding principle of “Resuming propriety”, then Carry On the adjustment to these differences, causes each to get its own place, finally achieves the overall harmony. At this point, Confucius “Benevolence and propriety” equal emphasis, “Harmonious but different” harmonious society will be completed.

Third, the conception of human civilization.

From Socrates and Confucius's time to modern times, how to maintain the stability, survival and continuity of the society, and maintain the harmonious development of the society, has been a big social problem, and is also a question that many philosophers are keen to explore. From the above analysis of the homogeneity of the two thinkers, we can see that the pursuit of a better and harmonious society embodied in their thoughts, now seems to have more practical significance.

In Socrates's virtuous society, every citizen had virtue. With virtue comes expertise adapted to their job. What he emphasized was the formation of a virtuous society based on knowledge, that is, the construction of a society with knowledge and morality oriented by democracy and justice, this is the meaning of the construction of “Harmonious Society” that we are still exploring today. And Socrates himself for the pursuit of virtue, personal practice of the charm of the personality is precisely the modern people should have a noble character.

In Confucius's quest for a harmonious society, people had their place and each had his place. What he emphasized was the formation of a harmonious society based on individual moral ethics, which was also the essence of his restoration of rites. This “Equal difference” concept and today's “Everyone is equal” legal society is out of place. However, his “Benevolence” as the core of the ethical and moral thought, emphasizing their own moral cultivation, as well as the humanistic care of others,



this kind of thought is an important spiritual resource to perfect personality and harmonious society in modern society. And the “Harmony is precious” that he loves most embodies the value idea of Chinese traditional culture. This concept emphasizes “Harmony” and “Neutralization” in dealing with non-essential contradictions, and “Harmony” and “Coordination” in the process of social development, these are reflected in the current “Scientific Outlook on Development” and “Harmonious Society”. In particular, the idea of “Harmony but difference” in dealing with today's complex international affairs, building a “Harmonious world” more positive reality enlightenment.

Tang Yijie, a professor of Peking University and the chief expert of the Confucian Collection Project, put forward the idea of “Harmony but difference” to seek the principle of “Global Ethics”. In his view, “Global Ethics” should be based on the recognition and acceptance of multiculturalism, fully understand and respect the diversity of human civilization, and promote the development of human civilization on the principle of “Harmony but difference”, to achieve peaceful coexistence. If so, this would be Confucius's contribution to humanity.

Of course, Socrates and Confucius's ethical ideas about social order have their limits. Socrates's thought was confined to ethical inquiry, as he overemphasized the search for knowledge as the pursuit of certainty, while equating knowledge with virtuous behaviour and neglecting the discussion of the sociality of such behaviour, that is, how to do it, but lacks in the broader scope theory construction and the moral ethics practice. Confucius put too much emphasis on the relationship between people in society, that is, the hierarchical orientation and adjustment between people, emphasizing the orientation of individuals from the perspective of social stability, and pay little attention to the freedom and reality of individual existence. So much so that from the Han to the Qing Ruling class were misused as the ideological basis for despotism, to some extent suppressing human development and hindering the overall progress of society. Moreover, Confucius's construction of a harmonious society only focuses on the one-way harmony of the ruling environment, which is quite different from the comprehensive and multi-directional harmony of “Man, society and nature” currently being constructed. In fact, if we combine the ideals of SU and Kong, a stable, orderly and harmonious society full of democracy and justice will emerge, isn't this the “Harmonious Society” we are trying to build today? I think the key reason why their thoughts are still of practical significance after more than



2000 years lies in the human pursuit of eternal values, namely, good harmony and just democracy.

However, the contradiction between ideal and reality is the eternal paradox of philosophers. However, their explorations and pursuits have provided valuable ideological wealth for the construction of a harmonious society and a harmonious world, for the development of human civilization into the eternal spiritual power.

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