

The Spiritual Core of Pre-Qin Confucian Thought on Rites and Music and Its Contemporary Value

Yanping Wang*

Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou, 571126, China

*Corresponding author: 13518073234wang@sina.com.

Abstract: In recent years, society has faced many problems in terms of cultural identity, ethical foundation and spiritual life. Therefore, returning to the classical resources of rites and music in Pre-Qin Confucian thought has gained considerable attention in recent years. The purpose of this paper is to systematically present the general structure, spiritual content and long-term value of Pre-Qin Confucian thought on Rites and Music beyond the historical context. First, the paper investigates the constitutive features of the system of rites and music and finds that it is the result of the philosophical integration of previous civilizations. It can be seen that the normative function of "rites" (li) and the emotionally regulating function of "music" (yue) work together in "mutual necessity" to achieve the ideal of order and harmony, integrating reason with emotion. Next, this paper will explore the spiritual basis of these ideas, clarify how moral subjectivity and external norms are integrated in the "oneness of ren and li", explain the path of emotional cultivation and character building represented by the "beauty of the mean and harmony" (zhong he zhi mei), reveal the connection between humans and the universe achieved through "extending from the human to the cosmos", and finally, put forward new ideas for the modern renovation of the spirit of rites and music, explore its intellectual resources for reconstructing contemporary ethical identity, strengthen community emotional ties, and promote the creative transformation of humanistic education. Based on the method of philosophical hermeneutics, this paper aims to present some profound theoretical discussions on the changes in traditional thought in recent years.

Keywords: Pre-Qin Confucianism; Thought on Rites and Music; Spiritual Core; Oneness of Ren and Li; The Mean and Harmony (Zhonghe); Contemporary Value

Introduction

The Pre-Qin Confucian ideas on rites and music are one of the first expressions of classical Chinese culture. It is not only a group of old institutions for ceremonies and arts, but rather a whole system of meaning that is deeply rooted in the foundation of Chinese culture, covering the establishment of social order, moral education, and comprehension of the universe. In the current era of globalisation and modernisation, society has faced many problems in its culture, such as value diversity, identity confusion and a decline in the sense of spirit. Only the new ways can not be used to solve the problems of lack of human depth and social cohesion. Thus, an organised investigation and revision of Pre-Qin Confucian ideas on rites and music have significant academic values and needs. From an academic standpoint, it is necessary to go beyond a superficial historical overview of the rites and music system and investigate its deep philosophical structure and value logic to grasp the essence of the Confucian civilizational tradition. Intellectual Dialogue: The special ideas in this ancient wisdom—that norms and emotions are unified, that the individual and the community are one, and that humanity is aligned with the Way of Heaven—offer an indispensable classical frame of reference for considering the problems of modernity. Strengthen the spiritual foundation and reconsider the significance of it in modern times to offer new theoretical ideas that can help address the main problems of our society today.

1. Composition and Characteristics of Pre-Qin Confucian Thought on Rites and Music

1.1 The Historical Origins and Ideational Integration of the System of Rites and Music

The formation of the system of rites and music is the result of the systematic organisation and reinterpretation of the cultural inheritance by the Pre-Qin Confucians from the Xia, Shang and Zhou

dynasties, especially the ritual and musical civilisation of the Western Zhou. This process was not merely a review of history but a type of idea integration that "transmitted but did not create, trusted in and loved the ancients". On the one hand, the Confucians believed that "rites" (li) originated from the ritual protocols, customs and conventions of high antiquity and had a deep historical and cultural foundation. At the same time, they also strived to remove the possibly strong early shamanistic connotations and purely external ceremonial character. The Confucians traced the origin and rationality of "rites" back to the inherent needs of human society and the rhythmic patterns of heaven and earth's operations, and this is reflected in the idea that "the foundation of rites is Heaven's order and the people's constant norms" (Li Zhi Ben, Chu Yu Tian Zhi Min Yi). Confucius's command to "follow the Zhou" was in fact a reasonable continuation of the spirit of rites and music in the Western Zhou, aiming to "align Heaven with virtue" and "exemplify virtue and be lenient in punishment"; thus, the focus of value construction shifted to "ren" (humanity/benevolence). Although Xunzi asked, "What is the Origin of Rites?" He said that people are born with desires, explained the origin of rites from the perspective of social function, and his ultimate goal was to "transform one's nature and arouse conscious effort" (hua xing qi wei) and to establish the way of "achieving unity and harmony in community life" (qun ju he yi). Therefore, the Pre-Qin Confucian system of rites and music was the result of the philosophical and ethical refinement of the cultural heritage in the previous era. At the core of the ideological integration was to give the external normative form an inner moral rationality and a foundation in human nature^[1].

1.2 The Normative Function of Rites and the Emotionally Regulative Function of Music

In the composite structure of rites and music, "rites" (li) and "music" (yue) have different but complementary functions. "Rites" are mainly a differentiating normative function. According to the detailed system of protocols, specific regulations and rules have been set for names and objects involved in all areas of social life, such as capping ceremonies, weddings, funerals, sacrifices, court audiences and diplomatic missions, to differentiate and indicate differences among individuals based on kinship, political status and social relationships; this includes proximity and distance, superiority and inferiority, and seniority and juniority. This is summarised in the idiom "to determine closeness and distance, to resolve doubts, to distinguish similarities and differences, and to clarify right and wrong." The function of "differentiating" (bie yi) is to build an ordered society and provide rules of conduct for the people, thus preventing chaos and conflict in the country. The practice of rites has a very external form and is restrictive.

"Music" (yue) is mainly used to help people manage their emotions and improve themselves. Confucians believed that "music is produced by sound, and its origin lies in the human mind being moved by external stimuli". Music starts with the external world providing stimulation for the human mind, and its forms (such as rhythm, melody and harmony) are naturally able to touch emotions and integrate life energy. The function of "music" is "unification" (tong tong); that is to say, through artistic emotional resonance, it can reduce the psychological alienation and tension caused by the differentiation of "rites", thus promoting harmony and unity in the community. The "Record of Music" (Yue Ji) says, Music unifies, and rites differentiate. Unification is based on love; differentiation is based on respect, so they serve different purposes. Music takes "harmony" as its highest aesthetic and ethical norm; thus, it aims not only to bring joy to the emotions but also to cultivate the qualities of order, peace, and self-discipline in the people through aesthetic experience, enabling them to subtly absorb and internalise the spirit of order.

1.3 The Ideal of Order and Harmony Created by the Interaction of Rites and Music

"Rites" (li) and "music" (yue) are not independent but work together to create the ideal society and personality that Pre-Qin Confucianism seeks to achieve; "Rites" alone may become too formalistic and lead to apathetic people, while "music" alone is likely to result in excessive emotional indulgence. Only when there is a "mutual need for rites and music in their function" (li yue xiang xu yi wei yong) can a good combination of reason and emotion be achieved. The order created by the combination of rites and music is an ethical system that spreads emotional identification and aesthetic connotations, and the harmony it seeks is a dynamic harmony based on orderly differentiation.

The above relationship can be seen in the following ways: Rites provide a norm and moral basis for music, and emotional expression should remain within the bounds of propriety. This is shown in the words, "Too much music leads to immorality; too many ceremonies lead to alienation" (Yue Sheng Ze Liu, Li Sheng Ze Li). Music can also give life and emotional expression to the rituals, helping people

feel the spirit of the culture and making the rules more palatable to them. The highest state of their integration is the world where "beauty and goodness are in harmony and mutually delightful" (mei shan xiang le); moral conduct has formal beauty (wen) because it is in accordance with ritual, and artistic expression embodies substantive quality (zhi) through its inherent goodness. In the process of progressing in the cultivation of the self, which is "inspired by poetry, regulated by rites, and perfected through music" (xing yu shi, li yu li, cheng yu yue), one can ultimately achieve harmony between external standards of conduct and internal feelings, and regulate social order in line with one's own will. Therefore, what the thought of rites and music specifies is not only the design for social institutions but also a type of civilisation that carries humanism and aesthetic ideals. Its main feature is to transform the normative order of society into an individual's inner world of consciousness and emotions through cultural cultivation, that is to say, "refining with rites and music" (wen zhi yi li yue)^[2].

2. The Spiritual Core and Value Orientation of the Thought on Rites and Music

2.1 The Oneness of Ren and Li: The Unity of Moral Subjectivity and External Norms

The reason why the idea of rites and music is not merely about form is that "ren" (humanity and benevolence) has been established as the fundamental spiritual basis for "li" (rites). Confucius's rhetorical question is: If a person lacks Ren, then what is the purpose of Rites? If a man is not concerned with ren, what purpose does he have for music? Essentially, the lifeblood of rites and music is moral feeling and self-awareness; "ren" is a universal moral possibility originating in the human heart (as shown by the saying "practising ren depends on oneself"), and it provides the value basis and motivating force for external standards in rites and music. Thus, "rites" are no longer coercive social demands but rather a way for individuals to achieve self-actualisation; that is to say, "to conquer oneself and return to the rites constitutes ren". The so-called "oneness of ren and li" is to say that external normativity (rites) and internal moral subjectivity (ren) are in a dialectical relationship and work together. The practice of rites is the essential area where the heart of ren is expressed, objectified and concretised; conversely, the cultivation and expansion of the heart of ren can give rites true life and meaning and prevent them from becoming empty formalities. Although Xunzi stressed that the purpose of rituals is to "change one's nature and inspire conscious effort" (hua xing qi wei), he also believed that "rituals provide sustenance for life" (li zhe, yang ye); thus, ritual forms aim to regulate and uplift people's emotions and needs. Therefore, the spiritual core of the idea for rites and music is mainly this model of ethical construction, which goes from the inside out and integrates both, aiming to achieve the unity of social order and the moral life of the individual^[3].

2.2 The Beauty of the Mean and Harmony: Emotional Cultivation and Character Formation through the Edification of Rites and Music

The specific process of edification through rites and music, as well as the formation of the ideal personality, takes "the Mean and Harmony" (zhong he) as its basic idea and final goal. "The Mean" (zhong) refers to a suitable limit and avoids both too much and too little; "Harmony" (he) means the harmonious unity of various components. Within the system of rites and music, "rites" (li) are mainly responsible for "regulation" (jie) to set boundaries for emotions and behaviour and prevent them from becoming excessive or biased. This is reflected in the idea that "harmony should be achieved in the practice of rites", but "one cannot know harmony or pursue it for its own sake without regulation by rites". "Music" (yue) is mainly responsible for "harmonisation" (he), guiding and reconciling emotions so that they can attain a state of smoothness and balance through immersion in art. This is to say that "music is the harmony of heaven and earth"; rites and music together affect the world of human emotions. The goal is not to suppress emotions, but rather, in the course of cultivation, "attaining the Mean and Harmony" (zhi zhong he) helps to transform natural emotions into "virtuous emotions" (de xing zhi qing) that are both moral and beautiful.

The goal of moral education is to foster the qualities of a gentleman, known as "cultivated in character and knowledge" (junzi binjun). A person's innate nature (zhi) needs to be embellished and shaped by rituals and music (wen) so that it is not too coarse; at the same time, the embellishment of rituals and music must be based on virtue (ren) and should not become mere outward show. Personality is formed by continuously cultivating "being established by rites and perfected by music" (li yu li, cheng yu yue), so external norms are internalised as life instincts and emotional expressions are all in accordance with proper measure. Thus it is that freedom and harmony can be achieved in accordance with one's true feelings, without violating the rules (cong xin suo yu bu yu ju). Thus, the "Beauty of the

Mean and Harmony" (zhong he zhi mei) is also a standard for judging art and an ideal of virtue and freedom of the spirit. It is the cultivation goal that rites and music aim to help people achieve; it is a deep integration of emotion and reason, nature and culture^[4].

2.3 Extending from Humanity to the Cosmos: Integration of the Order of Rites and Music with Cosmic Ethics

The final foundation and value system of Pre-Qin Confucianism in the study of Rites and Music were not limited to human society and ethics. Metaphysical construction was used to connect the principles of order with the cosmic substance, thus giving them a sense of the sacred and universality. The Doctrine of the Mean is: Before the feelings of pleasure, anger, sorrow and joy are aroused, it is called the Mean (zhong). When they are aroused and each reaches its proper extent and degree, it is called Harmony (he). The Mean is the foundation of all things in the world, and Harmony is the universal way that everything in the world should pursue. Thus, the state of "the Mean and Harmony" for people is elevated to the fundamental principle and the path for realizing the existence of all things in heaven and earth. Therefore, the order (differentiation) and harmony (unification) of rites and music are regarded as the expression and application of the natural cosmic order (known as "Heaven's order" or "tian zhi" and "Heaven's sequence" or "tian xu") in the human world.

The "Record of Music" (Yue Ji) also presents this cosmological idea of "harmony between heaven and humanity" (tian ren xiang xie) in an organised way: "Music is the harmony of heaven and earth; rites are the order of heaven and earth." Thus, both rites and music have the mediating function of communicating with heaven and humanity. In short, the human activities of making music and holding ceremonies are, in fact, ways to imitate and harmonize with the yin-yang rhythm of heaven and earth. Conversely, if the ideal order of rites and music is realised, it will also bring about harmony in the universe. It is therefore believed that "the sages created music to respond to heaven and established rites in harmony with the earth". Thus, Confucianism's ideas on rites and music are not merely social ethical theories but have been elevated to a cosmic ethical system that extends from humanity to the universe. The cultivation of rites and music by individuals and their application in society are of great importance for the moral education of people and are also included in the overall story of participation in and maintenance of the grand transformation process of the cosmos. The highest expression of the spiritual core of rites and music is exactly this integrated mode of thinking that embeds the human way (ren dao) in the cosmic way (tian dao), thus giving the human order a foundation of transcendental value. Its value orientation is to achieve the highest good in a harmonious relationship among heaven, earth and people.

3. Modern Reassessment of the Pre-Qin Spirit of Rites and Music

3.1 The Idea of Rites and Music and the Possibility of Reconstructing Contemporary Ethical Identity

At present, the ethical problems are in the form of the spread of instrumental rationality and the fragmentation of identity under value pluralism. The Pre-Qin philosophy of rites and music has the basic idea of the unity of ren and li (ren li yi ti) and provides rich theoretical support for the study of ethical identity and its future reconstruction. The above framework can help people form their own character by integrating their inner sense of right and wrong (ren) with external rules and norms (li), and thus avoid being controlled by external power or abstract ideas. The norm system of rites provides an organised and symbolic public sphere for social interaction, establishes stable social norms and a clear sense of one's place in society; this is the objective, formal aspect of "identity". At the same time, Ren promotes moral subjectivity and empathetic concern, as shown in the maxim: "He who wishes to establish himself seeks to establish others; he who desires success helps others achieve success". Therefore, according to general rules, people are expected to constantly reflect on their values from within and be sensitive to others; this is the subjective, motivating part of "identity". Therefore, a good and lasting ethical life should create a constructive tension between the general forms of civilisation and individual moral freedom. In line with the tradition of rite-music, the long-lost ideal of "becoming well-rounded in virtue and learning" can be taken as a remedy for the problems of modern society; otherwise, it will be either a formalisation of ethics without corresponding knowledge and skills or a reduction of them to mere subjective feelings and private matters. It is very likely that this way will eventually lead to a new idea of selfhood that is formed through continuous contact with culture and society.

3.2 Emotional Governance and the Resources of Rites and Music for a Communal Spirit

Modern public life and the maintenance of communities often have problems of emotional isolation and a lack of shared values. The concept of rites and music, as well as its component of "music" (yue) and the mechanism of "mutual necessity of rites and music", are rich resources for "emotional governance" (qing gan zhi li) and provide a typical case study for the study of the affective foundation of communal spirit. The system of rites and music believes that emotions are the natural state of people (as shown in the saying "Music comes from within"). It is to guide and lead, not to control. Music has a "unifying" function (he tong); that is to say, it can create an emotional world that is felt by all people, and through aestheticised expression of emotions and shared experiences, it promotes a sense of affinity and unity among the people. The type of harmony (He) is based on emotional integration and is not the result of rational contracts or interest calculations; rather, it adds a gentle but lasting sense of emotional connection to the community^[5].

At the same time, the function of "regulating and refining" (jie wen) for "rites" (li) is to ensure that public expression of emotion takes a proper form and respects necessary boundaries, avoiding emotional indulgence from becoming irrational excess or disrupting public order. The combination of Rites and Music is to create a public emotional culture that "originates from emotion but is bound by ritual propriety" (fa hu qing, zhi hu li yi); this is where reason and emotion are harmonised. According to the culture, for the good health of the community, people need to have mutual respect and clear rights in accordance with norms (rites), as well as mutual care and a sense of belonging based on emotional connection (music). In recent years, the ideas of rites and music have shown that, in building a community, we need to pay attention not only to the construction of institutions and the balance of interests but also to the cultivation of shared emotions and cultural forms that can promote public reason and foster social cohesion. It will help to build a harmonious society with all the different kinds of people living together in our society today.

3.3 Pathways for the Creative Transformation of the Culture of Rites and Music in Light of Humanistic Edification

In fact, the idea of Rites and Music is a complete system of humanistic education (ren xue jiao xu). The reason it is still relevant today is that it does not need to rely on the pattern of restoring the material culture of the past; instead, it explores the creative transformation of its spirit from the perspective of "humanistic education". At the core of this change is the extraction of the wisdom in the thought of rites and music—that is to say, the idea of "transforming people through culture" (yi wen hua ren)—from its specific historical form and applying it to the cultivation of the spiritual world and all-round development of modern individuals^[6].

The first way to change is to rethink the modern significance of "rites" (li) as a type of civilisation and behavioural aesthetics. It is not to revive the old rituals, but rather to draw out the spirit of "rites" - that is to say, a sense of propriety in social interaction, respect for ceremony, and reverence for things and others - and integrate it with modern civic virtues and the aesthetics of daily life to counteract the coarsening of life and the anomie of behaviour. The second way is to spread the idea of "music education" (yue jiao) and promote the idea that art is closely related to moral education. Promote all kinds of arts education to move beyond the transmission of skills or entertainment, give more weight to their moral education effect in character building and mind harmony, and thus enrich life. Now it is in line with the concept of all-round education. The purpose of the above creative transformation is to advance a new form of "humanistic culture" (renwen xiuyang). Therefore, many people in modern times are eager to learn how to integrate rational standards with emotional and aesthetic cultivation in their spiritual life. Given the busy and fragmented pace of modern life, it hopes to help people find a state of harmony and equanimity known as "the Mean and Harmony of Emotion and Reason" (qing li zhong he) and integrate "refined substance and cultivation" (wen zhi jian bei). It is not an application of the old system directly, but rather an exploration and inheritance of its spiritual essence in light of the cultural demands of modern society.

Conclusion

Based on the levels of compositional features, we have examined the spiritual core and contemporary relevance of Pre-Qin Confucianism on Rites and Music, and it has been determined that this ideological system has many facets. At the foundation is "ren" (humanity/benevolence); "li yue"

(rites and music) are used as means to achieve this goal; the ideal state is "zhong he" (the Mean and Harmony); and finally, the hope is "tian ren he xie" (harmony between humanity and nature). Now it is no longer about reviving specific old ceremonies; rather, the profound structure of this wisdom should be cherished forever—that is to say, the harmony of reason and emotion, moderation in norms and freedom, and the integration of individual identity with the spirit of the community. The ideas of rites and music suggest that a healthy civilized life should be based on institutions, and at the same time, attention must be paid to cultivating emotional culture and harmonious relations among the people. It can also be seen that for a person's full development in society, both introversion and the pursuit of ideals should be pursued together. Based on the above, future research can carry out further cross-cultural comparisons of philosophy and investigate the similarities and differences in concepts such as the relational self and emotional rationality in the thought of rites and music with those in other civilizational traditions. It can also explore some specific areas of society and culture to see how its spirit can be more subtly incorporated into modern educational design, the cultivation of public culture, and reflections on life. Therefore, the goal is to build a new and creative application based on this traditional intellectual resource through critical inheritance, and expand the scope of its contribution to the construction of the future spiritual world for all people.

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