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# On Confucius's Ideology of Aesthetic Order

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## **Keywords**

Confucius, Aesthetics, Order, Connotation, Chinese culture

# On Confucius's Ideology of Aesthetic Order

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Advocating order, order for all things, and taking order as beauty is the core element of Confucius's aesthetic ideology. Confucius's thought of aesthetic order is different from others of the "hundred schools of thoughts" in the pre-Qin period, and is also diverse from the Western value of aesthetic order. Confucius's thought of aesthetic order has its own unique value system, which has become the mainstream value of aesthetic order in the Chinese society for 2000 years until today, after being integrated with the Chinese feudal imperial system in early Han Dynasty. This paper illustrates Confucius's ideology of aesthetic order from five its parts: The origin, meaning and connotation of "order" in Chinese characters; the connotation of Confucius's aesthetic thought of "order;" the causes for the formation of Confucius's thought of aesthetic order; differences between Chinese and Western thoughts of aesthetic order; as well as the influence of Confucius's thought of aesthetic order on the present.

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## **1. The origin, meaning and connotation of "order" in Chinese characters:**

Confucian thought of aesthetic order firstly is the cultural inheritance of China's ancient order, and a large part of China's ancient order culture is reflected in the two Chinese Characters "秩序(order)." Investigators of Chinese culture should not only pay attention to the voice appellation system of this cultural concept, but should pay more attention to its system of writing. The Chinese writing system usually records and contains more original meaning than the voice system. Because China's bone inscription, Oracle, bronze inscription, small seal script, and other early scripts are pictographic writings and hieroglyphics, writing and painting are isomorphic, and characters contain the reasons. The visual images of these characters often record and express the Chinese ancestors' profound understanding of this concept, conveying the deep cultural connotation of this concept in ancient China. Therefore, study of the aesthetic and cultural connotation of "order" in China should begin from its structure of writing, name origin, and meaning.

To begin consideration of the difference between Chinese square characters and Western alphabetic writing, we refer to the *Preface to Chapter Six of Course in General Linguistics*. De Saussure (2009) said, “Language and character are two completely different kinds of symbol systems, and the latter exists only to represent the former” (p. 29). This means that although the character symbol system is an independent symbolic system, it is completely attached to the language symbol system, and the significance for the character symbol system to generate and exist is to record and permanently preserve the language symbol system, which has sound but no shape and is audible but not visible. It does not have its own meaning. This judgment and conclusion of de Saussure is correct for Western language and character systems, but for the Chinese language and character system, it has flaws and omissions, and makes little sense.

The Chinese square character differs from Western alphabetic writing in that it has the role and function of voice recording. Its goal is not just for representing the former, and it has its own separate reasons to exist. For Chinese characters, writing and painting are isomorphic, and each character contains the reason. Its generation and early existence were not merely for showing and recording language, but rather it has its own independent meaning system, independent of the language system.

First of all, the Chinese square character is an independent visual system. It can express meanings with visual symbol system alone and does not need the participation of voice system. Through visual observation and shape analysis, more information and meanings become apparent, compared with listening to pronunciation (auditory system). The meaning of Chinese characters is often obtained by looking instead of listening; conversely, there are more homophones in Chinese characters than in any other national languages, which is some consider sufficient proof that the visual form of Chinese characters is more important than the auditory system.

If the meaning of Chinese characters only lies in the voice auditory system, then the homophones in the Chinese characters are too many, correspondingly the caused ambiguity is too much, and the character system is full of fallacies. Secondly, the Chinese square character is an independent meaning system, even though it originates from the Chinese language. Chinese character and Chinese language have their own independent development paths. The origin of Chinese square character does not develop along the track of the language system, not to record the language, but has its own independent onset and development path. Chinese characters are not derived from the records of language, but from note needs and note symbols. For example, the Chinese Oracles are words inscribed on tortoise shells or animal bones for the royal family to practice divination and record events in the late Shang dynasty, developing from the original carved symbols.

Recently unearthed Oracles reveal that Chinese character begins with the visual system. They are drawings or descriptions of the real world with the help of lines (symbols), and their meaning is reflected in people’s understanding and communication of visual graphics. That is, the formation of Chinese characters system is through

pictographs, associative compounds, meaning, and other formations of characters, instead of the speech formation method Chinese characters do not need to be attached to the voice system, and the visual form and structure alone can express the independent meaning of the text itself. In the Oracle bronze inscription and seal script, the visual and graphic meaning of characters are particularly significant. For instance, the character “旦



(dawn)” is written as 旦 respectively in Oracle, bronze

inscription, and small seal script. Just according to its shape and structure, its meaning can be seen. The upper part is “日(sun)”, and the bottom is a mountain (later simplified as the horizon), the sun rises from the horizon, which means that it is dawn, such as 通宵达旦(all night long). 秩 (rank) and 序 (order) did not show up in the early Oracle and bronze inscriptions in China; they both first appeared in seal script.

In seal script, 秩(rank) was written as 𠄎; the left side was 豐. This text graph or text symbol visually referred to the ancient Chinese description of images of special utensils (sacrificial and ritual utensils) when conducting sacrificial rites. Later, this graphic word evolved into the Chinese character “豐” (lì). *Er Ya* noted, “豐, tools for salute” (Deng, 2010, p. 58), from the graph 豐 evolving to the Chinese character 豐. Although it changed in pronunciation later, and can also be read as fēng, it still keeps the original meaning of 豐 (lì) (tools). The right side 𠄎, similarly, visually identified and interpreted the shape of 𠄎, and it could be found that it described a man carrying a bow and arrow.

Later, the graph 𠄎 evolved into the character 弔. 弔 is similar to 吊, which *Shuo Wen* interpreted as: “When ancient people died, their bodies were not buried, but covered with thick wood and laid in the wild, to prevent beasts from coming to eat the bodies, and relatives would carry a bow and arrow and sit beside to help ward off the animals” (Xu, 2006, p. 167).

In 𠄎, the left side is the sacrificial utensil for salute and sacrifice; the right side is a person who carries a bow and an arrow and is sacrificing facing the utensils. Analyzing and judging from the structure of the character, its original meaning is possibly sacrificing according to rites. In ancient China, rite was more important than sacrifice.

The core of 𠄎 is rite, and the core of rite is a set of standardized and solemn procedures and ceremonies. The content of salute does not need to be too important or meaningful, but the procedure of each process, the sequence of each worshiper during the salute does

not allow any reversal or chaos. Form is more important than content and should be in order. Change is not allowed in order to guarantee the absolute solemnity of rites; this is the beginning and original meaning of 藝. Later, in the evolutionary course of Chinese characters, 藝 on the left side of 藝 was replaced by 禾. 美 on the right side was replaced by 艹 and gradually developed into 秩(rank) today. *Yun Hui* noted the meaning of 秩(rank) as, the meaning of the word comes from ‘禾’; the sound comes from ‘失’. It originally refers to rice growing for the second time, when the ripe rice is reaped, new rice will come out. The latter succeeds the former, therefore, it takes the character of 秩序 (order).

It is obvious that 藝 referred to sacrificial etiquette in the original graphic symbol system, but when it comes to *Yun Hui* and *Shuo Wen Jie zi*, 藝 turned into 秩(rank), and the change from graphic symbol system to voice system occurred. Although it is farfetched that the meaning would have turned into “after the ripe rice is reaped, new rice will come out, appearing in order,” the original meaning of order was still preserved.

序(order) was written 序 in seal character, seen from the character structure, the top was 宀, read as (yǎn), related to houses: “Characters with the part ‘宀’ all represent houses, looking like the shape of opposite houses” (Xu, 2006, p. 192). The bottom was 予, the traditional form of 予, simplified as 予 when transitioning from Clerical script to Regular script, “passing down successively, like the object that passes on one by one” (Xu, 2006, p. 192). The original meaning of 序 (order) was “the arch of yard fence, the first door into the house.” In the Han dynasty, it was interpreted “the eastern and western wall” in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*. Thus, whether it is “the first door into the house” or “the eastern and western wall,” they both convey the original meaning of procedure, order, and sequence today.

According to the above character structure, from the origin and evolution of the words 秩(rank) and 序(order), it can be seen that: (1) 秩(rank) and 序(order) both have the meaning of sequence and order, combining into today’s word 秩序(order), and commonly carrying the connotation of “very organized, orderly.” However, in ancient China, 秩(rank) was obviously more important than 序(order) in the term of 秩序(order); the meaning of 秩(rank) was more abundant. In the evolution of the term 秩序(order), ancient culture paid more attention to 秩 (rank), but today’s language highlights 序 (order) more. (2) The appearance of 秩(rank) and 序 (order) both conveyed the idea of 秩(rank) and 序(order) first, and subsequently the records of the facts by 秩(rank) and

序(order). (3) The original meaning of 秩(rank) implied the emphasis on 豐(rites), especially the procedure of 豐(rites) and order of those worshipers. It is thus clear that the essence of ritual order in China's ancient civilization was not only methodical order, but more of the rank order, sequence in salute of people with different statuses in various religious, national, and social affairs regulated by the ritual system. Therefore, the original meaning of 秩(rank) was not civilian or equal, same as Chinese characters. "Chinese characters do not occur at the local grass-roots level, not the people, but the royal court, the authoritative" (Fei, 2007, p. 105). The character 秩 (rank) captured and conveyed the sequence and order in official standards on the basis of different status.

It is impossible that Confucius, as the great achiever of China's ancient culture, did not absorb or inherit the cultural meaning of 秩序 (order) in ancient China and integrate it into his ideology of aesthetic order.

## **2. The ideological connotation of Confucius's thought of aesthetic order:**

Confucius was the founder of Confucianism, and Confucian culture is the core of Chinese culture; therefore, Confucius's ideology of aesthetic order has a profound impact on the aspect of aesthetic order in Chinese culture. Praising order, order for all things, and taking order as beauty, comprises the core element of Confucius's aesthetic ideology. From *The Analects of Confucius*, *Shi Ji (Historical Records)*, and other literature, it is clear that Confucian thought of aesthetic order is mainly manifested in three aspects.

Appreciation of the natural and harmonious order in the universe is an important component of Confucius's aesthetic order. *The Analects of Confucius* show that Confucius was full of admiration towards the natural and harmonious order of the universe, sun, moon and stars. Confucius thought that the beauty of the universe lay in its stability, harmony, longevity, and order. This universal order and operating rule guarantees that, perpetually, "four seasons rotates, and all things grow naturally." By admiring the harmonious order of natural aesthetic order of the universe, Confucius hoped that human society could be like the nature, having a stable, harmonious, long, and orderly aesthetic order:

The chapter *Wei Zheng* in *The Analects of Confucius* records that Confucius said:

Governance should be based on the rule of virtue, like the Polaris, it sits on a certain position itself, the other stars will surround it (the ruler should govern the country like Polaris, retaining his own position and improving his moral character, ministers and the masses will surround the ruler just like stars revolving around the Polaris.

This is the law of harmonious order among celestial bodies that Confucius found from the astronomical phenomena. He considered it to be a pre-existent, harmonious, and natural aesthetic order that Polaris sits in the center, while other stars surround it and all have their own positions. Social order and astronomical order should have some

consistent similarities: If the universe is like so, so should be the social order.

The natural order of “grass bends as wind blows” was also an aesthetic order that Confucius appreciated. The chapter *Yan Yuan* records that Ji Kangzi asked Confucius for advice on national and government issues: “Killing the unrighteous to promote justice, how is that?” Confucius told him:

If you want to handle government affairs well, why use drastic measures such as killing? The manners and behaviors of rulers in superior position are like wind; in contrast, the manners and behaviors of people in inferior positions are like grass. Everyone knows the truth that grass bends as wind blows. If the rulers handle their morals well, won't the people who are in lower position and affected by them naturally become good?

Using the phenomenon and law of “grass bends as wind blows” in the natural world, Confucius metaphorized the order relationship between superior rulers and inferior people with the order relation between wind and grass in nature, emphasizing that the social and aesthetic order should refer to the pre-existent aesthetic order in nature.

Appreciating “grass bends as wind blows” in nature, and in upper and lower order relation in society, reflects a pattern of consistent aesthetic characteristics in many of Confucius's statements. The chapter *Zi Lu* records that Fan Chi asked about planting crops. Confucius said: “I am no better than farmers.” Then Fan Chi asked about growing vegetables. Confucius said: “I am no better than old vegetable growers.” After Fan Chi left, Confucius said:

Fan Xu is such a snob! If the upper rulers prefer rites, then no one dares to be disrespectful; if rulers are like righteousness, then no one dares to disobey; if rulers are like good faith, then no one dares to be dishonest. If they are able to achieve this, people from four directions will carry their children and come here for shelter, why do you need to grow crops yourself?

It is not difficult to see from this passage that, in the order relationship between rulers of the upper position and people of the lower position, Confucius thought that the inferior people would unconditionally obey and comply with the upper rulers, and that it was a stable and harmonious aesthetic order, such a stable and harmonious aesthetic order was as natural as “a myriad of stars surround the moon” in the universe and “grass bends as wind blows.”

There is great beauty in heaven and on the earth. Heaven and earth do not talk; the order remains. The vigorous and progressive Confucius also occasionally felt depressed because of dismay, helplessness, and frustration, and, on those occasions, said, “I don't want to say anything.” Zi Gong said: “If the teacher says nothing, how can we students continue to receive the teacher's instruction?” Confucius said: “What does Heaven say?”

Aren't the four seasons still running, and all things still growing? Heaven says nothing, right?" Facing the social reality of disorder, Confucius kept silent. Maybe it was an occasional impulsive act but Confucius still could find evidence from the law of motion in nature to support his beliefs. The heaven says nothing, but the four seasons change as usual; the heaven says nothing, but everything is still growing. For his entire life, Confucius admired this kind of stable, harmonious, long, and orderly rule of order in the universe and nature, no matter whether circumstances were favorable or adverse, in failure or success.

It is clear that appreciating the natural and harmonious order of the universe is an important aspect of Confucian thought of aesthetic order. By virtue of the stable harmonious, long, and orderly aesthetic order in nature, Confucius strove to construct and promote his aesthetic order of social class and family ethics.

### **3. Praising the social hierarchy of monarch-subject and parent-child:**

Praising the social hierarchy of monarch-subject and parent-child is the core part of Confucian thought of aesthetic order. Chapter *Yan Yuan* documents that the emperor Jing of Qi asked Confucius for advice on governance. Confucius replied: "The ruler behaves like as a ruler, servant behaves like a servant, father behaves like a father, and son behaves like a son." The emperor said: "Well said! If the ruler does not behave like as a ruler, servant does not behave like a servant, father does not behave like a father, son does not behave like a son, although there is food, how can I eat it?"

The general meaning is that Confucius emphasized that everyone had their own social roles, and each one must strictly obey. If the social order is disturbed, and the behavior norms of social roles are broken, it is bound to cause chaos. It can be seen from this passage that Confucius regarded social order as the core of his aesthetic order. In social order, Confucius advocated categorizing people into different kinds of role levels at first, and then everyone would act in accordance with the code of conducts required by different social roles, so as to achieve stable, harmonious, enduring, and orderly social order.

*Ba Yi* records that the emperor Ding asked: "What principles may be the basis of the decisions when the monarch assigns his officials and when subjects serve the monarch?" Confucius replied: "The monarch needs to be polite when assigning his officials, and the subjects need to be loyal when serving the monarch." In terms of maintaining the ruling order since the Zhou dynasty, Confucius emphasized all citizens' knowing their own place, minding their own business, and playing their own social roles. The monarch must treat his subjects using good manners, and the subjects must fulfill their duty of loyalty. They may not conduct acts that arrogate the rites, or go beyond their identity, status, or level.

*Xiang Dang* (fellow villagers) kept a detailed record on etiquette that subjects must follow under six circumstances: “The monarch grants food, the monarch grants meat, the monarch grants livestock, the monarch sacrifices, the monarch comes to visit, the monarch calls in,” solemn and serious. Subjects would not become casual just for tasting the food rewarded by the monarch privately at home. (They must set the seats straight and taste it first, must cook it and sacrifice to the ancestors). They would not neglect the meticulous and tedious rituals when the monarch came to visit just because of illness. (They must head towards the east, put the robe on top, and drag the ribbon.) When the monarch called, they would be active and anxious, “hurriedly walking there first before the cart arrived.”

The monarch also needed to set strict demands on himself. “The monarch should actively take responsibility for his own mistakes, and be more understanding and considerate towards others,” abiding by social norms and fulfilling duties of the monarch. “Politics is righteousness. If the monarch is righteous, who dares not to be?” “If the monarch is righteous, even though he does not give orders, people will follow; if the monarch is not righteous, even though he gives orders, people will not follow.” The ruler should absorb lessons from the death of the Shang dynasty, and should not roughly, brutally treat and persecute the people. “His own behaviors are dignified, taking care of people with kindness, and treating people with rules”.

It is clear that praising the social hierarchy that characterizes monarch-subject and parent-son is an important element of Confucius’s aesthetic order. Each person fulfills his own duties according to their respective social roles, and that is what Confucius appreciated to the utmost; otherwise, Confucius would strongly oppose.

In chapter *Ba Yi*, Confucius said, when talking about Ji Shi, “Ji Shi actually used the honor guards of Ba Yi in the courtyard. If we can stand that, then what else can we not tolerate?” Why did Confucius say so? Because the honor guards used by the monarch, feudal princes, senior officers, and officers had different standards in ancient China. The monarch used eight rows and eight columns of 64 people, that is Ba (eight) Yi; the feudal princes, senior officers, and officers used respectively Liu (six) Yi, Si (four) Yi, and Er (two) Yi. Confucius thought that Ji Shi, as a senior officer, should only have used the honor guards of Si (four) Yi according to rituals; instead he used Ba (eight) Yi, which was the specification of the emperor, and this kind of behavior that disturbed the social hierarchy of monarch-subject and parent-son was intolerable.

Coincidentally, *The Analects of Confucius* also recorded many of Confucius’s criticisms on phenomena that violated the hierarchy of monarch-subject and parent-child. The three families of Meng Sun, Shu Sun, and Ji Sun asked the musicians to sing the poetry of *Yong* (which could only be used when the emperor finished sacrificing in ancient China) when removing offerings after the sacrifice was over. Confucius said: “The feudal princes are just supporting the sacrifice, while the emperor is solemnly and seriously in charge of the sacrifice. How could you use this in your house?” This misuse was seriously against the rituals, against the principle of social order.

Therefore, Confucius also harshly criticized it.

Another portion of the *Analects* reports that Ji Shi wanted to worship on Mount Tai. Confucius asked Ran You: "Can you stop him?" Ran You replied: "I cannot." Confucius said: "Alas! Does the Mount Tai know fewer rituals than Li Fang?" According to the rites of Zhou dynasty, only the monarch was entitled to sacrifice in world-famous mountains, and feudal princes could only worship on mountains within their own fief. Ji Shi, as a senior officer, was not qualified to worship Mount Tai. So, Confucius thought that Ji had overstepped the rituals, and that the god of Mount Tai would not accept the Ji Shi's sacrifice.

Another example is when Confucius said: "For Di ritual (Di is a grant sacrifice of the emperor and feudal princes of Zhou dynasty.), after the first libation, I am not willing to watch anymore." In ancient sacrifices, the first ancestor would be worshiped first. After the first libation, ancestors would be worshiped based on the order of their status and relationships (Qian, 2007, p. 35). Thus, sacrificial rituals included strict orders; worship also had to comply with the rite, as the original meaning of 秩 (rank) mentioned before: worshiping according to rites. However, during the period of emperor Wen of Lu, his father emperor Xi was listed in front of emperor Min in Di sacrifice, although emperor Xi was the elder brother of emperor Min, but he inherited the throne of emperor Min to become the monarch, therefore putting emperor Xi before emperor Min was in violation the sacrificial ceremony.

Conversely, Confucius praised acting based on the rituals and according to orders passed down from the ancient times. Zi Zhang did not understand the meaning of "emperor Gao kept vigil beside the coffin, and did not talk about politics in three years." Confucius replied: "Why only the emperor Gao? The ancients were all like this. If the monarch passed away, officials would still perform their duties and listen to the prime minister for three years." The emperor Gao mourned and ignored politics for three years. He was not the only one who strictly followed rites; the ancient people were all like this.

Confucius thought, during the Spring and Autumn period, that the ritual between the emperor and subjects was disturbed. If the rites passed down from the Zhou dynasty were interrupted, then the society would lose the stable, harmonious, lasting, and orderly principle of aesthetic order. Therefore, in order to restore the rites of the Zhou dynasty and maintain the old social order, Confucius lay great emphasis on the rites that carried the meaning of order. His student, Zi Gong wanted to exempt the sheep used in the sacrifice to the ancestral temple on the first day of each month of the lunar calendar. Confucius said, "Ci, you cherish the sheep, but I cherish the rites." Then, the emperor did not go to the temple to sacrifice on the first day of each month of the lunar calendar anymore, and Zi Gong considered the sacrifice to be a mere formality and pitied the sheep to be sacrificed. However, Confucius still insisted that the rites had to be performed, and the sacrifice should not be exempt, because this form represented the solemn rites, the solemn principle of order. Abolishing sacrificial offerings and waiving the sacrificial rituals would cause the gradual disappearance of the rites of the Zhou

dynasty from people's life, and social order would become even more chaotic. To restore the social order of Zhou dynasty, pity could not be afforded the sheep.

#### **4. Advocating the family ethical order of seniority rules:**

The aesthetic order in family relations is also an important part of Confucian thought.. People, in the eyes of Confucius, are not the people in the universal sense, but who those who take different social roles and are in different family and ethical relationships.

Many of Confucius's concepts of aesthetic order in family ethics came from his inheritance of the kinship culture and family politics of being close to relatives and being respectful to higher levels in ancient China. In the ancient culture of China, people took on different social roles, because society had different requirements for people with diverse statuses, identities, and careers on rights, obligations, behavior patterns, an individual's behavior was predetermined. His priority and severity was also preordained in social order; similarly, people who played different roles in the family ethic relationship also needed to find their own location and role behavior specification in the relationship. As depicted in *The Book of Rites*, "father is loving, son is filial, elder brother is kind, younger brother is respectful, husband is righteous, wife is obedient, the elders are helpful, the youth are docile, the monarch is benevolent, and the subjects are loyal" (*The Book of Rites, Li Yun*). Apparently, father, elder brother, husband, and monarch, as the strong group members, had behavior norms of loving, kind, helpful, and benevolent, but these did not constitute behavior requirements, and there was no real content. However, son, younger brother, youth, and subjects, as the vulnerable group members, had behavior norms of filial, respectful, docile, and loyal, and these were the real content that must be vigorously implemented. As in the explanation of rite by Fan Shuzhi in *An Outline of National History*:

the nature or exact meaning of 'rite' is 'difference,' which is used to determine the special behavior specifications of each level in society---rich or poor, noble or humble, old or young, close or distant, so as to show the differences between rich and poor, noble and humble, old and young, close and distant.... In this way, rite decided the upper and lower, noble and humble relationship between monarch and subject, father and son, elder and younger brother, husband and wife, and friends, and could not go beyond it. (Fan, 2000, p. 40)

Confucius's ideological system of aesthetic order not only strictly distinguished the relationship between various family ethical roles, but also clarified the ethical order in which the strong had priority and the weak obeyed. The main means that Confucius used to promote this ethic order is filial education. "Disciples need to be filial at home, and obedient outside." Filial piety was the essence of benevolence; people who could be filial

to their parents and kind to brothers were less likely to commit sedition, and society, correspondingly, would tend to be stable and harmonious. Therefore, Confucius started from family ethic order and extended it to the stability and harmony of social order. “Serving the rulers outside, attending father and elder brother at home,” people must comply with the ethical order whether at home or in court.

Evaluated from the perspective of value orientation in terms of present-day aesthetic order, the family ethical order of seniority rules that Confucius advocated is clearly wrong. It does not conform to the core value system of liberty, equality, justice, and the rule of law in today's Chinese society. Yet, it is easy to understand that many societies would consider exhorting and educating the vulnerable groups to be content with the status quo and perform their own duties as the greatest political task. To Confucius, locating the situation in the family ethical order of seniority rules could help maintain a stable, harmonious, everlasting, and orderly country and society.

### **5. The reasons for the formation of Confucius's ideology of aesthetic order:**

During the Spring and Autumn period, due to The decline of Zhou dynasty during the Spring and Autumn period, was marked by various kingdoms' fighting for hegemony and an unprecedented liberation of thought. In fact, “a contention of a hundred schools of thought” appeared. Visionary people with ideas and ambitions expressed their political views, wanting to be appreciated and regarded and have their political ideas put into practice. Among many ideologists advocating reform and innovation, Confucius was trying to flaunt the era during which emperor of Zhou had governed the country by making rituals and music instead. Confucius was so obsessed with the rites of the Zhou dynasty that he exclaimed, “the rites of Zhou developed on the basis of Xia dynasty and Shang dynasty; they are so complete and rich. I follow the rites of Zhou.” Why did Confucius praise the rites of Zhou dynasty and follow the old system?

The rite system of the Zhou dynasty was a complete set of decrees, regulations, rules, and etiquette established during that time, and, “it has clear and strict regulation on upper and lower levels, noble and humble, old and young orders, etc.” (Li, 2008, p. 12). *The Analects of Confucius* recorded in detail the code of conduct for being a monarch, a subject, a father, and a son, and etiquette that should be complied with. This was in line with the rites of Zhou in all kinds of rituals, ceremonies, and occasions by Confucius. These all embodied the basis of the established hierarchy; rites and order were mutually inside and outside. Worship, funeral, presenting to the monarch, and other rites carried the substance of the systematically hierarchical order; the fact that all sectors of society followed their own code of conduct, fixed pattern, and rules reflected the spiritual direction of complying with rites.

Chapter *Zi Han* recorded that Confucius once expressed his comments on the change of rites in weaving hats and meeting the monarch:

Using linen to weave hats is the regulation of rites; today people use black wire, and it is thriftier than before. I am willing to change with the public. Conducting prostration under the court when visiting the monarch is also the regulation of rites, but now people all give a salute in the court, which is too arrogant. Although it is contrary to the popular trend, I insist on saluting under the court.

Thus it can be seen that Confucius adhered to rites and focused on the content of hierarchic order included in rites. The detailed provision on using whatever raw materials to weave hats in rites, he regarded as irrelevant and changeable.

Confucius dedicated his life to maintaining and restoring the rites of the Zhou dynasty, taking order as the ultimate standard to inspect social relations and behaviors. In other words, in the eyes of Confucius, statements and actions that complied with the rites of the Zhou dynasty were beautiful; conversely, deeds that overstepped their own identities, statuses contradictory to order could not create an aesthetic pleasure. Obviously, all of his aesthetics centered on the core of order.

*Shi Ji (Historical Records)* documented that Confucius was the “descendant of royalty.” His ancestors were nobles of Song, fled to Lu due to internal conflict, and the family declined from the time of Confucius. Old clans of nobility represented by Confucius were unable to keep their traditional hereditary positions. They either lived in poverty or became servants. In short they were all in decline and could not reverse the fate of decay. In contrast, the new emerging class abandoned stereotypes, recklessly occupied and annexed land, operated businesses, and rapidly developed and prospered. They were at the stage of rising, and had absolute advantages, whether in the military, the economic base, or development of ideas progressing with the times.

But, the decaying and conservative noble class could not agree with or tolerate the behaviors, cultural values, and other represented characteristics such as the self-confidence, personalization, and aggressiveness of the emerging class. Meanwhile, the change in the power of social classes would inevitably lead to conflicts among different interest groups. Confucius, as part of the declining noble element, precisely became the victim in the redistribution of interests, which even more catalyzed his longing for the old order and the rites of the Zhou dynasty.

Confucius tried to preserve the old system and order with his own efforts, knowing the impossibilities but persevering in search of a former glorious dream. The entire *Analects of Confucius* shows that Confucius, as part of the declining nobility, consistently maintained the noble spirit and personality even though he lacked materials and drifted from place to place.

The chapter of *Xian Wen* records the comments of Confucius and his disciples Zi Lu, and Zi Gong on Guan Zhong. Guan Zhong and Zhao Hu once followed Prince Jiu to refuge in Lu. The elder brother of Prince Jiu, who was later the emperor Huan of Qi, sent armies to suppress Lu after becoming the king, and forced Lu to kill his younger brother, Prince Jiu. Zhao Hu committed suicide to show his loyalty, but Guan Zhong paid

allegiance to emperor Huan of Qi, became his prime minister, and assisted him. Accordingly, Zi Lu thought that Guan Zhong was not benevolent, and Zi Gong evaluated him as “non-benevolence.” Disregarding Guan Zhong’s disloyalty to Prince Jiu and behavior against rites, and based only on his political performance, Confucius said, “Guan Zhong assisted the emperor Huan in seeking hegemony and unifying the word; people still benefit today.” If not for Guan Zhong, “we would become savages. Then how can we be like normal men and women who would hang themselves in the valley to protect their reputation, while nobody else knows?” Further, “the emperor Huan had united the dukes for several times, but he never used violence. Wasn’t that Guan Zhong’s credit?” Then how could we call Guan Zhong not benevolent? Since Guan Zhong made the people under the rule of Qi live and work in peace and contentment and be exempted from wars, Confucius considered him a “benevolent” person.

Confucius’s love of rites and maintenance of and adherence to the old order probably derives its rationale from the humanitarian ideal of benevolence. When the rites broke apart, music was damaged; social order was chaotic; dukes and officers violated rites; and people suffered from wars, disease, and displacement in the conflicts for hegemony of rulers. Confucius urgently hoped to resume the rites of Zhou dynasty and return to the state in which social order was stable and the people lived and worked in peace. So, even though Guan Zhong assisted Qi and betrayed Prince Jiu, Guan Zhong had achieved the great governance of ruling the land and comforting the people that Confucius ultimately hoped for. Therefore, Confucius praised him.

## **6. Differences in cultural traditions of Chinese and Western aesthetic order:**

People have an inborn need for a methodical order, whether for group social life or personal development. People also hope to establish reasonable, effective and stable rules of order to constrain and regulate human social life.

Loving order is a part of human nature. Maslow scientifically analyzed and summarized people’s psychological needs and suggested that a stabilized order was an important part of human’s security needs. The desire for stable order manifested most obviously on children. “Children have another performance in terms of safety, which is enjoying some kind of usual life rhythm. They seemingly want to have a predictable and orderly world.” Not only children: Adults also have the same needs. “In our society, for a healthy, normal, and lucky adult, his security needs are met. A peaceful, stable, and sound society often makes its members feel very safe” (Maslow, 1987, p. 165-166). There is no doubt that people’s psychological need for order is manifested in the exterior performance of their inner needs for security.

Meanwhile, human exploration of mysteries of nature--understanding and grasping natural laws of the universe and the change of four seasons--not only originates from passion about exploring the wonders of nature, but also from the need for research on

social science. It appears as though people hope to discover contained laws and hidden order in nature in the course of contact with it, so as to copy, adapt, and then build their own orderly and aesthetic social life.

China and ancient Greece were the two developed countries in early civilization and prioritized construction of an aesthetic culture of the orderly world. They longed to discover the law of nature and master its internal order, imitating the universe and nature in social life, and establishing sound order, so as to feel aesthetic pleasure. Undoubtedly, both Easterners and Westerners dream of establishing a set of scientific, rational, effective, and stable principles of aesthetic order to guide human's social life; this is a common human desire. The crux of the problem and the key difference is determining the best kind of aesthetic order to meet human needs for social development and aesthetic culture. This issue determines the differences between Chinese and Western culture in aesthetic order.

Culture is historical tradition. The differences between Chinese and Western historical tradition in aesthetic order determine the fundamental diversity in the principles of Chinese and Western aesthetic order today. In the "axial age" of human civilization, Chinese and Western philosophers brought up different cultural values respectively, creating and laying the foundation for different principles of aesthetic order in China and the West.

Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are the core of Chinese culture. Confucianism and Taoism that originated from local China had formed their own aesthetic order culture 2000 years ago. Lao-tze, Confucius's contemporary, founded the Taoist school and also the Taoist aesthetic order, which is that "human gets laws from earth, earth gets laws from heaven, heaven operates according to Tao, Tao follows the original laws of objects" (the chapter of *Dao Fa Zi Ran*). Lao-tze believed that people were small in the universe, and, to seek survival and development in the universe, it was necessary to comply with pre-existent laws and rules of the universe. Obviously, Lao-tze's ideology of aesthetic order was established within the framework of the natural universe, in the order relation of human, earth, heaven, Tao, and nature. The human being was at the end.

Confucius's ideology of aesthetic order was different because it was built within the framework of the human society. All natural revelation served to meet social needs. Within the framework of social order, in a variety of social relationships, the superior rulers, elders, men and strong groups occupied the mainstream and core position in order relations, in contrast to the inferior—youth, women and vulnerable groups. As the historian Huang Renyu (1997) said:

Confucian rulers determined the status of men was higher than women, the status of the elders was higher than the youth, and that of the educated was higher than that of the ignorant. When formulating laws, they thought all these coincided with natural rules. (p. 29)

In addition to clarifying in detail the order relations of various people with different identities, the *Analects of Confucius* also narrated the aesthetic order of emotion and reason. Chapter *Zi Lu* records that Mr. Ye said to Confucius: “We have a righteous man here: his father stole a sheep, and he certified that.” Confucius said: “Our righteous people are different: Father covers for the son, son covers for the father, and righteousness is behind that.” In other words, integrity was relative to Confucius. The father would cover the son when the son stole sheep, the son would cover for the father if the father stole sheep, and that was right. In the choice of the order and priority between emotion and reason, Confucius selected the order principle that prioritized emotion over reason and emphasized more on emotion than on reason.

This kind of aesthetic order established and developed the ethics-focused aesthetic order in Chinese society. The working definition of ethics in this case is the relationship between people and others. Fei Xiaotong said, “our Confucians cared about ethics the most, what is ethics? My explanation is rounds of rippled differences taking place from ourselves to a group of people who have social relations with us. ‘Shiming’ explained “伦” also as ‘ethics, between ripples.’ Pan Guangdan once said: “Those who have ‘仑’ have the same meaning, ‘commonly means sequence, category, and order’” (Fei, 2007, p. 26). Liang Shuming also said, “The ethical relationship means a relationship of obligation; a man seemingly does not exist for his own, but exists for each other.”

Aesthetic order of this type, which prioritizes human sentiment over legal principles, was not initiated by Confucius. Confucius's principle of aesthetic order was the inheritance of the kinship culture of being close to relatives, being respectful to higher levels in ancient China. It has had a long-term effect on Chinese society after Confucius praised and advocated it. Today, many Chinese still cannot prioritize and are still in conflict, struggling in the selection of emotion and reason, sentiment and law.

Western aesthetic order culture differs from that in China, which has been writing the civilized and historical process by adhering to the prioritizing principles of science and truth. Early ancient Greeks had already set up the aesthetic principles of “symmetry, ratio, scale, harmony, equality, order, etc.” (Ling, 2004, p. 7). These principles are mostly established from the exploration of natural and scientific laws. Pythagorean school thought, music, architecture, sculpture and other arts were considered beautiful and in harmonious order that depended on numbers. This law existed in nature and all things in the universe. “The distance between various celestial bodies in the universe also follows a certain mathematical proportion; thus it is also as harmonious and orderly as music” (Wu, 2000, p. 14). Different notes are arranged according to a certain law and order and rendered as harmonious and beautiful music; notes against law and order may become ear-piercing noise.

Similarly, the philosopher Aristotle in the axial age of ancient Greece also encountered the same problem as Confucius. When asked to choose between his teacher Plato and scientific truth, he replied, “Plato is dear to me, but dearer still is truth.”

Between emotion and reason, Aristotle explicitly chose truth, and truth took precedence over Division, which laid foundation for the Western cultural tradition that put scientific truth at the head of aesthetic order.

## **7. How to dialectically understand Confucius's thought of aesthetic order:**

Confucius's advocacy for the stable, harmonious, long, and orderly principle of aesthetic order opposed the increasingly frequent and expanded annexation wars during the spring and autumn period. He praised the rites of the Zhou dynasty and dreamed of recovering the ruling order of the ancient period when exploitation and oppression was relatively lighter and all social classes were content with their own status and behaved strictly according to the hierarchic order regulated by the rites of Zhou dynasty, so as to defuse wars, recover the harmony and peace of home and state, and guarantee people's content and harmonious life. This stance undoubtedly had great practical significance.

Similarly, in the trend of rapid social change and hundreds of surging philosophers, Confucius made vigorous efforts to reverse these tendencies, and was doomed to have tragic results. But, precisely because of his original intention of benevolence, his compassionate humanity becomes more obvious. From a rational point of view, in any era or region, structured social order is the basic guarantee for stable development, economic prosperity, and people's content and peaceful life. Therefore, Confucius's advocacy for maintaining order is more transcendent, beyond time and region. It also has a humanitarian spirit and loving feeling.

In contrast, Confucius defended the rites of the Zhou dynasty, maintained the old order, and advocated an aesthetic order that prioritized the strong, which has deeply influenced the cultural psychology of the Chinese nation. One such influence is the formation of a differential pattern in Chinese social structure. In the *Book of Rites*, Da Zhuan notes: "Be close to relatives, be respectful to high levels, be obedient to the elders; men and women are different, and these cannot be changed" (Chen, 2006, p. 353). Strict hierarchy was not allowed to be broken, and the status of various individuals determined their position in the hierarchical order. Eventually, it became "self-centered, dropping into the water like a stone; social relationships formed by contacting others, and the differential pattern, like the ripples, ringing out, pushing farther away, and becoming thinner" (Fei, 2007, p. 25).

As a result, there was strict status difference between people; social stratification was clear, and hierarchy was rigid, lacking the Western democratic spirit of equality. Second is that Confucius stressed the difference in status and hierarchical order, which promoted the formation of characterized personality. As described in an earlier section, people's consciousness of social roles was strengthened. In any occasion, they would consider their own position, and be compelled to behave in accordance with their status, which unconsciously cemented their own social roles and caused characterized personalities to form.

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