



Research on Chu His's "Five Ethics" Centered on *Four Books Chapters Annotation*

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Abstract. The concept of "Five Ethics" for more than two thousand years has had an immeasurable impact on the secular life and spiritual world of Chinese people. From the pre-Qin Dynasty to the Eastern Han Dynasty, its connotation was gradually expanded and shaped. As a master of Confucianism in the previous generation, Chu Hsi further explained and discussed the concept of "Five Ethics" in his *Four Books Chapters Annotation*. Combining with specific practice, he solidified or deepened the norms of behavior related to "Five Ethics", which has a profound impact on later generations.

Keywords: Five Ethics · Confucius · Mencius · Chu Hsi · *Four Books Chapters Annotation*

1 Introduction

For two thousand and five hundred years, Confucianism has been amazing in shaping Chinese society. It has continuously infiltrated into the country, society, family and individuals in a long time, and its influence can be easily seen in both material form and spiritual aspect. The most significant impact of Confucian culture is "human relations". In traditional Chinese society, the five most basic human relations are "monarch and minister, father and son, husband and wife, brother and brother, friend and friend", which are collectively called "Five Ethics". The academic circles have always paid attention to the concept of "Five Ethics" from the Qin Dynasty to Han Dynasty [1], but the research of it in the Song Dynasty, which created to the great revival of Confucianism and the concept of "Five Ethics", is not satisfactory [2]. Scholars pay more attention to Chu His's metaphysics, while less extended to this level. Centered on Chu His's *Four Books and Chapters Annotation*, this paper deeply analyzes Chu His's concept of "Five Ethics" and discuss its important effects.

2 The Presentation of "Five Ethics"

"Five Ethics" and the word "human relations" was first seen in *Mencius · Teng Wen Gong*: "When human have enough food, warm clothes, and live in seclusion without religion, which is close to animals. The saints are worried about this, so they sent the master

to educate the people with normal human relations -- between fathers and sons should be dear, between monarchs and ministers should be courteous, between husbands and wives should be different, between the elder brother and younger brother should have the order of superiority, between friends should be honest and loyal” [3].

Here Mencius clearly defined the difference between “human” and “animal” with whether they are “civilized”. This is the core of “human relations”. The “Five Ethics” as five important human relations constitute the basis of social organization.

Chu His’s *Four Books and Chapters* explained: “People all have the nature of Yi. However, if there is no education, the nature will be lost due to idleness. Therefore, the saints set up officials to teach human relations relying on the inherent nature of human” [4].

This is the very important view of Chu Hsi. Specifically, it was said in Chu His’s *DaXue ZhangJu Xu* that “Since the birth of human beings, has given the nature of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom” [4]. However, “there are differences in talents and intelligence of people, so not everyone knows this and tries to preserve it” [4]. This is the basis of Chu His’s view of “Five Ethics”, and restoring human’s good nature explains the purpose of “Five Ethics”.

Previously, Confucius had expressed similar views. He once said “A man who is a brother or a son should be filial to his parents when heat home, and obey his brother when he goes out. He should often behave cautiously, trustworthy and kindly. After the above points are all done, he can study” [5]. Confucius emphasized “filial piety” and “fraternal duty”. He regarded the ability to deal with these basic human relations as a prerequisite for a person to be qualified or able to learn. And he thought morality rather than talent as the important quality of human beings. This concept was strictly inherited by later generations.

In fact, there was a statement of “Shen Hui Wu Dian” in *Shang Shu Yao Dian*. According to the statement of *Zuo Zhuan · Wen Gong Eighteen Years*, “Wu Dian” was “father is righteousness, mother is kindness, elder brother is friendly, younger brother is obedient, son is filial”. This can be seen as the early statement of “Five Ethics”, which was only limited in “family”, and it did not go beyond the range of the country or the world advocated by later generations.

How did the relationship between the monarch and minister become one of “Five Ethics”? In fact, the “righteousness” of “monarch and minister” also originated from Confucius. Qi Jingong once asked Confucius how to govern the country, and Confucius said “As the monarch should abide by the norms of the monarch’s behavior, the minister should abide by the norms of the minister’s behavior. Both father and son should abide by their respective norms of behavior, and at the same time take their respective responsibilities and fulfill their respective obligations” [5]. Increasing the relationship between the monarch and the minister can be said as a major breakthrough in the requirements of personal ethics, which extends the human relations to a broader social space. This also provides the possibility for the realization of the traditional consistent ethical model from self to home, from home to country, and from country to world. Chu Hsi commented on this and said: “This great principle of humanity is also the foundation of politics” [4].

After Mencius putting forward the concept of "Five Ethics" by summarizing the previous morality and human relations, this concept had the far-reaching influence on later generations. In the Han Dynasty, in his *ChunQiu FanLu*, Dong Zhongshu put forward the theory of "three cardinal guides and five constant virtues", on this basis, which was later regarded as the basic ethical norms of traditional society. The three principles are "the minister must obey the monarch, the son must obey the father, the wife must obey the husband", and the five constant virtues are the five moral behavior norms of "benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and faith".

3 The Effects of "Five Ethics"

The concept of "Five Ethics" basically covers the important human relations of an individual person, so everyone is included, not only in their own five-ethics relationship network, but also in the five-ethics relationship network of others. That is similar to the double or multiple social roles we undertake today. The difficulty is that the requirements of each role are different. So the person who can handle these relationships well at the same time is considered an outstanding person, and may even be called a "saint". For example, Mencius directly said: "The Saint can handle human relations to the best" [3].

Specifically, in the "monarch and minister", the most classic saying is by Confucius, "the monarch treats his minister with etiquette, and the minister should serve the monarch with loyalty. [5]" This put forward requirements for both sides of human relations, while do not stipulated unilateral privileges. Chu Hsi explained, "Both of these are taken for granted, each of them do their own duty" [4].

In fact, the "father and son" is the closest relationship in personal life. Therefore, the norms of this are the most innate emotions, and it is necessary that "father should be righteousness, mother should be kindness, and son should be filial piety." The relationship between "husband and wife" focuses on "respect, obedience and endurance". It represents the harmony of Yin and Yang, and it is the foundation of kingcraft. "Brother and brother" is "brothers should care for each other". "Friend and friend" has some characteristics of "monarch and minister" and "brother and brother", but "friend and friend" emphasizes honesty and loyal.

As mentioned above, "Five Ethics" as the traditional ethical model has a characteristic from the individual to the world. From the perspective of sociology, it may be explained by social organization structure in China, which the world is composed by one family connected with blood and marriage. Therefore, on this basis, achieving both ethical and political goals of "self-cultivation, family management, country governance, and world peace" becomes a matter of course for many Confucian scholars.

4 Conclusions

Chu Hsi explained his views on "Five Ethics" put forward by Confucius and Mencius, and expressed his views on the effects of "Five Ethics". In Chu His's view, "Five Ethics" come from the "benevolence" of human nature, which is the starting point and the most fundamental core of traditional ethics. "Five Ethics" relying on "principle" and "restoring its nature", which are also the most prominent feature of Chu His's "Five Ethics" view.

Chu Hsi is not only an empty talker, he is above the ordinary Confucianism in his time. *The Family Rites* he compiled are extensive and subtle, deep and practical, affecting hundreds of years. Even in today, Japan and South Korea's family rites are also influenced by "Five Ethics". Adapting to the changes of times, how to understand and practice the traditional ethics modestly and deeply requires continued efforts on future research.

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