



A Study of the Core Ideology of *Chuan Xi Lu* and the Contemporary Communication of Wang Yangming's Media Image

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Abstract. The emergence of "Yangming Fever" has drawn attention and research to the core ideas of *Chuan Xi Lu* and Wang Yangming. This paper analyzes the three core ideas of *Chuan Xi Lu*: "The unity of knowledge and action," "Mind is Principle," and "Extension of innate knowledge." It explores the significance of Wang Yangming's media image in contemporary communication. The dissemination of *Chuan Xi Lu*'s core ideology and Wang Yangming's media image has a certain guiding significance for modern life and helps to promote traditional Chinese culture, enhance national pride and cultural self-confidence.

Keywords: *Chuan Xi Lu*; Wang Yangming; *China in Classics*; media image communication

1 Introduction

Chuan Xi Lu, the last episode of the first season of *China in Classics*, tells the story of the legendary life of Ming Dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming and his important core ideas, which has aroused a lot of discussions. *China in Classics* is an innovative cultural program of CCTV, focusing on outstanding Chinese cultural texts, selecting the most worthwhile traditional cultural works, and using "cultural program + drama + film and television" to tell the book, the core ideas, and the shining stories in the flow of the texts, to make the words written in the texts "come alive," and to show the Chinese wisdom, Chinese spirit and Chinese values embedded in the texts. *Chuan Xi Lu* demonstrates several important points in the life of Ming Dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming through scenarios. Through experts' interpretation of *Chuan Xi Lu*'s core ideas as well as its cultural and historical values, the audience can realize the wisdom of the sages: "Knowledge is the beginning of action, and action is the completion of knowledge." With the emergence of "Yangming Fever," Wang Yangming and the core ideas of *Chuan Xi Lu* have once again attracted attention and research. *Chuan Xi Lu*, like *The Analects of Confucius* in Chinese Confucian classics, is a collection of quotations from Wang Yangming. *The Analects of Confucius* is a collection of quotations compiled to record the sayings of thinker and educator Confucius and his disciples during the Spring and Autumn Period, while *Chuan Xi Lu* is a collection of quotations and

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letters of philosopher Wang Yangming in the Ming Dynasty, also recorded and compiled by his disciples. *Chuan Xi Lu* not only recorded Wang Yangming's thoughts and remarks but also witnessed the important moments of Wang Yangming's life. *Chuan Xi Lu* is the core material for studying the development of Wang Yangming's thoughts and mind science.

2 Core Ideas in *Chuan Xi Lu*

Chuan Xi Lu is divided into three volumes, recording Wang Yangming's main ideas and opinions at different times in the form of dialogues, discourses, and letters. Wang Yangming's core ideas and views can be roughly divided into three parts: "The Unity of Knowledge and Action," "Mind is Principle," and "The Extension of Innate Knowledge.

2.1 The Unity of Knowledge and Action

The methodology of "the unity of knowledge and action" is the most important idea put forward by Wang Yangming and the one that has had the greatest impact on modern times. In the traditional thought before Wang Yangming, knowledge and action were regarded as two aspects. In the *Book of Documents*, it was said that "knowing is easy and doing is difficult," and Zhu Xi put forward the saying "knowing before doing," which believed that one must first recognize the truth of everything before practicing it or else the practice would become groundless. In the era of Zhu Xi's philosophy, Wang Yangming first put forward "The unity of knowledge and action" as an important and systematic philosophical proposition, which is a very remarkable breakthrough and innovation in the history of Chinese philosophy. "the unity of knowledge and action" answers the question of the innate source of moral knowledge and the fundamental motivation of moral behavior, which is still of great practical significance in contemporary society.[1]

On the relationship between knowledge and action, Wang Yangming also emphasizes that: it is necessary to know, it is more necessary to act, there is action in knowledge, and there is knowledge in action; the unity of knowledge and action is mutual and inseparable; Whether a person has "knowledge" or not must be manifested as "action," without "action," it cannot be considered true "knowledge." The unity of knowledge and action are mutually exclusive and inseparable; whether a person has "knowledge" or not must be manifested in "action"; without "action," one cannot be regarded as truly "knowing." [2]

Wang Yangming has been practicing "the unity of knowledge and action" all his life. In his life experience, knowledge and action are inseparable. After reading Zhu Xi's book, he immediately went to the bamboo in the yard of the "Ge Wu Zhi Zhi." In the battle to capture King Ning alive, Wang Yangming chose to take the initiative and said, "If you have the intention to serve the country, you should act according to what you want in your heart and what you know in your heart, knowing and doing should be one, knowing and doing is true knowledge."

Wang Yangming practiced "the unity of knowledge and action" throughout his life and influenced many people, one of whom was his student Xu Ai. In *China in Classics*, it was his student Xu Ai who suggested compiling Wang Yangming's thoughts. Xu Ai thought his teacher's thoughts were important and wanted to carry them forward and put them into practice, so he went to record and summarize them, which is Xu Ai's "the unity of knowledge and action." In real life, many people do not match their words and deeds, make false statements, and cannot be strict with themselves in moral behavior. Therefore, "the unity of knowledge and action" still applies to guide people's real life.[3]

2.2 Mind is Principle

"Mind is Principle" is one of the core ideas put forward by Wang Yangming in *Chuan Xi Lu*, who believes that the Tao is in the human heart, and everyone has a conscience in his heart, so you should do what you should do according to your conscience. The idea of "Mind is Principle" is mainly inherited from Lu Jiuyuan's teleology in the Southern Song Dynasty, which emphasizes the subjective initiative of the individual and advocates that the human heart is before the heavenly principle and that "the highest good is the essence of the heart," "Mind is Principle. Wang Yangming believes that reason exists in the heart; there is no reason outside the heart, and there is no need to seek outside as long as the inquiry into their own heart will be able to get the reason of heaven.

Regarding the relationship between "the Unity of Knowledge and Action" and "Mind is Principle," some scholars believe that "Mind is Principle" is the theoretical basis of "the unity of knowledge and action," but more importantly, "the Unity of Knowledge and Action" is a theoretical form of "Mind is Principle," and "Mind is Principle" as a form of "knowledge"—a way of realizing "knowledge" in action.

Regarding the relationship between "the unity of knowledge and action" and "Mind is Principle," some scholars believe that "Mind is Principle" is the theoretical basis of "the unity of knowledge and action." But more importantly, "the unity of knowledge and action" is a form of theoretical development of "Mind is Principle" and "Mind is Principle" as a kind of "knowledge." It is a way of realizing "Mind is Principle" as a kind of "knowledge" in action.[4] In his Reply to the Book of Gu Dongqiao, Wang Yangming explains this in two directions. One way to explain this is that seeking the original mind does not leave out physics. If the mind "leaves out" physics, then the mind that leaves out physics must not be the original mind; in other words, if the mind and physics become opposites, the mind is not the original mind. From this, it is natural to explain the other direction, that is, the essence behind the mind, and the mind embodied in this essence is the original mind, the essence of the mind. It is "nature" and "principle". The "unity of knowledge and action" becomes an indispensable theoretical element for establishing "Mind is Principle."

2.3 The Extension of Innate Knowledge

"The Extension of Innate Knowledge" marks the finalization of Wang Yangming's system of teleology and is a reflection of the perfection and maturity of Wang Yangming's teleological thought. "Knowledge is the essence of the heart, and the heart naturally knows. Seeing a father, one naturally knows filial piety; seeing a brother, one naturally knows brotherhood; seeing a child enter a well, one naturally knows compassion; this is conscience, and it is not to be sought externally."

The concept of "conscience" was first mentioned in *The Works of Mencius*. According to Mencius, conscience is an innate moral consciousness and moral feeling that is not dependent on education or social environment. Wang Yangming developed Mencius's idea of "conscience" in an innovative way. Based on the idea of "Mind is Principle," and through his difficult life experience, he proposed that "conscience is only the mind of right and wrong, and right and wrong are only good and evil; if one has good and evil, one has all right and wrong; if one has right and wrong, one has all changes." As to how to "develop a conscience," for everyone, the ability to judge right and wrong and to distinguish good and evil is the "conscience" in the human heart; to rely on the conscience and act on it to achieve "contentment of heart" and "peace of mind." "This is the mechanism of conscience to judge right and wrong and to guide actions. However, this judgment mechanism is not always effective, and conscience can be influenced and obscured by selfish desires such as fame and fortune, thus making improper choices and judgments. [5]

Wang Yangming's idea of "The extension of innate knowledge" has important moral value. "The extension of innate knowledge" is to "legislate" for oneself, thus manifesting the subject's moral self-awareness and strong moral self-confidence. At the same time, "The extension of innate knowledge" also embodies the spirit of the unity of knowledge and action, which is the complement of "the unity of knowledge and action." [6] Wang Yangming's life is a life of constantly improving the moral realm and learning to be a sage. Moral pursuit is the most fundamental and important pursuit of his life, and learning to become a sage is his ultimate goal and destination. Although we cannot advocate that everyone should learn from sages like Wang Yangming, respecting moral values and improving the moral realm is necessary for us to pursue a better life.

3 Media Image Communication of Wang Yangming

Wang Yangming, a great scholar of the Ming Dynasty, has a rich biography because of the legendary nature of his own experience. Wang Yangming has been recorded in various official and private history books, literati collections, and local histories. The novel written by Feng Menglong, a writer in Ming Dynasty, is a biographical novel that truly completes the image shaping of Wang Yangming. [7]. Since the beginning of the new century, many novels and literary biographies about Wang Yangming have appeared one after another. For example, Prof. Shu Jingnan's *The Great Biography of Wang Yangming* and Japanese scholar Takehiko Okada's *The Great Biography of Wang Yangming: The Unity of Knowledge and Action of mental wisdom*. With the emergence of

"Yangming Fever" in modern times and the development of modern video technology, the number of programs and films about the image of Wang Yangming has gradually increased, making Wang Yangming, who had previously appeared only in literary works, show a richer and more three-dimensional image through the media, and making it more convenient for the audience to know and understand Wang Yangming's thoughts and ideas. It is also easier for the audience to recognize and understand Wang Yangming's thoughts and experiences.

"*China in Classics*" is a good example of Wang Yangming's media image. The program innovates the program presentation form, changes the usual didactic discourse presentation ecology of TV cultural programs, and adopts the multi-media presentation method of cross-border mix and match of "cultural interviews + drama + film and television," making it easier for viewers to understand Wang Yangming's thoughts and experiences through the medium of communication.[8] The program's innovative presentation format changes the usual didactic discourse presentation ecology of TV cultural programs in the past and adopts a multi-media presentation format of "cultural interview, drama, and visualization," which makes viewers feel more immersed in *Chuan Xi Lu* and Wang Yangming and helps them understand the thoughts of the characters who are hundreds of years away from them.

In addition to *China in Classics*, there have been many video works about Wang Yangming in recent years, and the combination of these works forms a cross-media narrative of Wang Yangming's image, which achieves a better communication effect by spreading his image and ideas through cross-media narrative. In *Lecture Room*, three scholars talk about Wang Yangming in different ways, complementing each other so that Wang Yangming's image is presented to the audience in a more full and vivid way. Prof. Dong Ping chose the legendary events of Wang Yangming's life, Prof. Li Bo took the time as a clue to comprehensively sort out Wang Yangming's legendary life experience, and Prof. Fang Zhiyuan told the story of Wang Yangming without adding any title, returning the original appearance of Wang Yangming.

Aired in 2021, the five-episode documentary *Wang Yangming* is China's first documentary to systematically present the legendary life and teleological thoughts of Wang Yangming, a great scholar of the Ming Dynasty. The documentary adopts the narrative technique of crossing reality and history, recreating historical scenes, restoring the major events of Wang Yangming's life, and revealing his achievements through storytelling and plotting.[9]

The narration of Wang Yangming in *Lecture Room*, the presentation of the documentary film *Wang Yangming*, and the interpretation and dissemination of *Chuan Xi Lu* in *China in Classics* all of these films together form a cross-media narrative dissemination, and each media can utilize their respective advantages to play a good role in the dissemination of Wang Yangming's media image. Each of these media can utilize its own advantages to create a good communication effect for Wang Yangming's media image.

Under the background of media integration, the media image of Wang Yangming has been innovatively disseminated through the addition of new media technology. In this cross-media narrative dissemination process, the image that used to be displayed only in a single text becomes a more diversified and three-dimensional image presented

in front of the audience, and the way of narrative is interactive and visualized. Through the dissemination of these programs, the character of Wang Yangming also comes to us from the depths of history, letting the audience deeply feel his charisma and his wisdom.[10]

4 Conclusion

Wang Yangming has a sense of family and country with the world in mind, a spirit of commitment regardless of personal safety and danger, a practical and realistic attitude towards learning, and a sense of responsibility, and he always maintains an optimistic and open-minded attitude in the face of life's difficulties. He advocated the ideas of "The unity of knowledge and action," "Mind is Principle," and "The extension of innate knowledge." Wang Yangming's strong subjective initiative is also worth learning. And the dissemination of *Chuan Xi Lu's* core ideology and Wang Yangming's media image can help to promote traditional Chinese culture and enhance cultural self-confidence and national pride.

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