

The Influence of Confucianism on Molding Zhang Jian's Cultural Character

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Summary: Confucianism is the core of the Chinese traditional culture. The major features of Zhang Jian's cultural character are “Zhong”, “Xin”, “Du”, “Jing”, “Ren”, “Yi”, “Li”, “Jian”, “Ren”, “Shen”. Having read a lot of Confucian classics during his years of imperial examinations, Zhang Jian was deeply influenced by the essence of Chinese traditional culture, the traditional thought pattern, the Confucian doctrines and the orthodox ethics in his world outlook, philosophy of life and values.

Key words: Confucianism, Zhang Jian, Cultural Character

“Culture” is a popular word with its frequent use, multiple explanations and high controversies. Generally speaking, “culture” may be explained in broad and narrow sense. In broad sense, it can be

understood everything that human being creates. In narrow sense, it is a meaning mode that hands down from one generation to another, and it embodies traditional conception in symbol form. Chinese traditional culture is a great one that comes from the long-term social life, and that is orientated by the dominators and aimed to instill into people. For hundreds of thousands of years, the influence of Chinese culture is so strong that it cannot be effaced from people's mind. Confucianism is the core in the Chinese traditional culture. In a certain sense, the Chinese traditional culture is Confucian culture. Zhang Jian's cultural character was deeply influenced by Confucianism.

Zhang Jian (1853-1926) was an illustrious person in the late Qing dynasty and early Republic of China. He was active on the stage of politics, economy and culture in China, and made grand

contribution to modern China. The Study for such a person is not only for boosting the research for Zhang Jian, but also for more understanding to the intellectuals lived in that era.

1. The core of Confucian culture

Confucianism has played an important role in the course of two-thousand-year Chinese history and even made great impact on the development of China.

Confucius is the Confucian ancestor. The Confucian classics include *Shi*, *Shu*, *Li*, *Yi*, *Yue*, *Chun Qiu*.

Confucianism underwent four phases: establishment, development, evolution and decline. During Zhan

Guo, Confucianism became popular school gradually for elaboration and development by Mencius and Xun Zi. Martial Emperor of Han Dynasty rejected all other schools but Confucianism. Thus Confucianism got the legitimate status. In Han Dynasty, Confucianism gradually trends to a study of Confucian classics. At

the age of Wei Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, Sui and Tang dynasties, the Confucian was adjusted and revised several times, especially while absorbing and digesting external foreign cultures. During Song and Ming dynasties, Cheng Zhu Li Xue gradually became the official ideology and a rationalistic Confucian philosophical school. However, since Qing dynasty, Confucianism began to decline. If we make a general review of the Confucian history which has lasted 2, 000 years, we can understand two points: On the one hand, the Confucian had been revised and transformed all the time during successive dynasties. In a certain sense, this change manifests a kind of spirit keeping pace with the times; otherwise, it is hard to explain why the Confucian can dominate people's mind for 2, 000 years. On the other hand, though the Confucian had been revised, supplemented and transformed, it always possesses a masterstroke,

the Confucian ethics, which turns to be self-consciousness and value pole of cultural elites.

The cores of Confucianism are “Ren” (kindness) and “Li” (righteousness), which can be regarded as a road of the personhood. In other words, it refers to how people should play their own roles in society. The emperor must be sovereign and wise, execute kind politics, value virtuous rule, love his people and order promise. But the minister should be a man with wisdom and virtues, cautiousness and conscience, self-restraint, and willing to devote to his country. The parents must manage their household with diligence and thrift, and teach their own children properly. But the children should be diligent, forbearing, filial, and bring honor to ancestors. The husband ought to take care of his family members and coordinate the relationship between family members. But the wife should comply with completely

traditional woman ethics, show filial obedience to parents-in-law, help her husband and teach her children. The businessman ought to observe the good faith and pay attention to loyalty more than profits. At the same time, the different roles aren't isolated but dual even multiple at the same time. Simultaneously, a real man should regard it as his own duty to practice moral culture, administer family, and rule a nation even the world. He ought never to be corrupted by richness, never to sway because of poverty, and never to surrender to power. If poor, he should make himself perfect; if rich, he ought to make the world better.

To some extent, for one thing, Confucianism is a reappearance of remaining consciousness from certain clan communes in primitive society that reflects the blood relationship of patriarchal society; for another, it is a kind of people's anticipation to

future society. The stage of oneness of heaven and man, and the Great Harmony ideal which the Confucian pursues are human common anticipation. Modern sages not only understand the historical significance of Confucianism in the foretime, but also understand its practical significance on today and profound influence to the future. No wonder we can easily feel typical Confucian cultural characteristics in Korea, Singapore, Japan, Taiwan area where are in the circle of the Confucian culture.

2. Zhang Jian's cultural character

Cultural character may be interpreted as a distinct way of thought and manner needed by people to survive and develop. Zhang Jian's Cultural character possesses main characteristics of Chinese traditional culture. His understanding, inheriting and promoting of the traditional culture made his cultural character embodied the essential nature of traditional

culture.

“Zhong” (Fealty). Fealty means loyal to the emperor and dutiful to the parents. It is the developing stage of all traditional scholars. The idea of devotion and filial piety is a part of Zhang Jian’s cultural character. As far as “devotion” is concerned, Zhang Jian’s thought was as the same as that of most traditional scholars. When it comes to “filial piety”, it was also impossible to be abandoned by Zhang Jian. He was generally recognized as the most dutiful person by the whole country at that time. Being loyal to the emperor and repaying the country are linked closely by Zhang Jian.

“Xin” (Faith). Faith means bona fides and honor which is the marrow of Chinese traditional culture. Zhang Jian was a loyal apologist of good faith. He said at his first speech showing great esteem for Confucius: if you were loyal, you would not have the

idea of betraying; if you had good faith, you would not cheat others. The motto of his first industry elementary school was just good faith. He believed no faith, no country. Zhang Jian stuck to honesty and faith all the time whenever he was an official, was making industry or setting up various enterprises.

“Du” (Honesty). It is one of the traditional characteristics of Confucian Culture. Honesty and sincerity is not only the standard of Zhang Jian’s own conducts, but his most important principle of employing people. He said those people must be honest whom he would like to protect and award a prize to. The first standard of his choosing talents was whether the person was honest, behaved properly and knew his place. Prudence respect modest

“Jing” (Courtesy). Courtesy is also one of traditional characteristics of Confucianism. Zhang Jian said: “if you are courteous, you will not be

arrogant.” In Zhang Jian’s mind, courtesy was not only modest and prudent on words and deeds, but also respectful and not supposed to be perfunctory and put off one’s own duties. It contained a kind of professional dedication. It was also the motto he wrote for his second industry elementary school, whose students were required to remember the motto all the times. Zhang Jian can be considered as the model of professionals because he did everything in person with cautiousness, conscience and without any complaint.

“Ren” (Benevolence). Benevolence equals to cherishing of others, the core of the Confucian culture. On benevolence, Zhang Jian did practical things more than empty talk. When he set up different companies and made great profits, he went in for public utility in a big way. He ran home for the elderly, foundling hospital, deaf-mute school,

rehabilitation center for prostitutes, place to give up drug taking, and roosting house. He undertook the responsibility of public utilities with his own and his companies' power and tried his best to take the responsibility that should be assumed by the whole society. He also aided and accepted the vulnerable group with his heart of love and lenience.

“Yi” (Humanity). Virtue and morality is the typical character of the Confucian culture which Zhang Jian canonized and acted magnanimously in all his life. He often helped the people in emergency or disaster by giving them money or other things needed. He helped the poor and the orphans and even took care of the unknown people already dead. He buried the wild corpse and built tombs for them. He would get off the high horse without any hesitation to sell his calligraphy for helping the orphan. During the course of establishing his industry he also processed

well between humanity and profits.

“Li” (Politeness). Self-restraint and good manner is the essential of the Confucian culture, which Zhang Jian also esteemed vigorously. To others, he was clement, beneficent and courteous; and to himself, he exacted demands and engaged in introspection.

“Jian” (Thrift). In the palace of Chinese traditional culture, thrifty is an old precept with strong power of inheritance. Zhang Jian said: “It was the only way of success to be diligent and thrifty, forbearing hardships and standing hard work”. Zhang Jian always mentioned thrift in his family letters. When he was dying, he asked his family members that the funeral should be as simple as possible.

“Ren” (Patience). Being patient is one traditional personality of all Chinese. If you yield temporarily you can get more and relieve the

misfortune. Patience is another Zhang Jian's important cultural personality. It is also Zhang Jian's important respect of behaving and doing things for forbearance and persistence. Even though he was often misunderstood, hurt and attacked intentionally by others and his summoning from his heart always could not get enough response, he could handle them well with his impartial and calm heart.

“Shen” (Circumspection). Circumspection, another important feature of the Confucian culture, was also an important aspect of Zhang Jian's cultural character. He originated many enterprises such as industry, education, public welfare and philanthropy. Instead of being hasty, he did each of them very earnestly based on thoughtful consideration and repeated investigation. Honesty, endurance and caution are the principle he conducted himself and things properly in the world.

3. The influence of Confucianism on Zhang Jian's cultural character

Engels said people create environment and environment also creates people. Their character is mainly shaped gradually in the social environment, and it has strong plasticity. So does the cultural character. Of course, there is no exception to Zhang Jian's Cultural character. His cultural character was influenced by many factors, among which the most important was Chinese traditional culture. However, it was through his reading and through his countless difficulties and hardships that he had experienced that the realization and intensification of this influence was obtained.

(1) Long reading days

Zhang Jian began to read "Thousand-character classic" at the age of 3. Before he was 12, he had read *LunYu*, *Shi Jing*, *Menciu*, *Shang Shu*, *Yi Jing*, *Er Ya*.

Then he began to learn how to write essays and poems. When he was 13, he read *Li Ji* and wrote eight-rhyme poems and essays. When he was 14, he read *Zuo Zhuan*, *Zhou Li*, *Yi Li*.

During the profession of reading for several decades of years, Zhang Jian had read many books such as *University*, *Zhong Yiong*, *Lun Yu*, *Mencius*, *Shi Jing*, *Shang Shu*, *Yi Jing*, *Eer Ya*, *Li Ji*, *Zuo Zhuan*, *Zhou Li*, *Yi Li*, *Strange Tales of a Lonely Studio*, *The History of the Three Kingdoms by Chen Shou*, *Shu Zhi*, *Yi Zhi Lu*, *Si Yi Tang Ji*, *Jin Shu*, *Min History*, *Famous Feudal Official Words and Deeds Record*, *Fishing Ocean Ten thousand Jueju poems*, *Li Sao*, *Outline Warning Selects Word*, *The Dongpo Collection*, *Fishing Ocean Essence Record*, *Taste Idle Hall Rhythmic prose-poem*, *National policy*, *Shihchi*, *Li Bai Collection*, *Book on Chinese Medicine after Reads*, *Lu Xuangong the Collection*, *Spring and*

Autumn Period, Filial piety classic, Nearly Thinks Record, Elegant Explanatory Notes and Commentaries, Righteousness Mountain Poem, Han History, The Shihchi Note, Xu Shi Shuo Wen, Donovan, the Entire Tang poem, Peaceful Records, Entire Donovan, Broadly, Date Knowledge Record, The Agricultural Politics Entire Book, Zhuang-zi, Dao De Jing, Zuo Zhuan, Song Shi, Wang Chuanshan Posthumous Writings, among which some such as Mencius, Shi Jing, Guan Zi, Shihchi, Han History, San Guo Zhi were read repeatedly.

All of the books that Zhang Jian had read were the essence of the Confucian culture. The essence and gist of Chinese traditional culture, the traditional thinking mode, Confucian mentality civilization and ethic essentials, embodied in imperial collection of four, had a profound effect on Zhang Jian's world view, philosophy and value idea deeply. Therefore,

Chinese traditional culture naturally impressed Zhang Jian's cultural personality.

(2) Frustrating imperial examinations

Zhang Jian began his imperial examinations when he was 15 years old. From then, he stepped on the endless road of imperial examinations. He didn't end them up until he got the honor of the Number one Scholar at the age of 42. Those examinations cost him nearly 27 years. During the 27 years, he experienced almost 30 examinations. Of course, there were happy moments, but he suffered a lot more pains, torments and frustrations. No one could understand and appreciate such experiences unless he had gone through the similar experiences with him. Thanks to nearly 40 years of reading life, Zhang Jian had read a lot of classics. He had established substantial groundwork of the study on national culture. Although nearly 30 years of examination life caused

him of bitter taste, crosses and misery, Zhang Jian disciplined his will well. And these anguished experiences fostered Zhang Jian's perseverance and intrepidity.

(3) Profuse life experiences

Zhang Jian had acted as an assistant to a high-rank officer for 12 years. At first, he was Sun Yunjin's secretary, and then he worked as a confidential secretary in Wu Changqing's army. At that time, Zhang Jian stayed in Pu Kou with Wu Changqing. Afterwards, he followed Wu Chang Jian to Deng Zhou. Though he worked with Sun Yunjin only two years, the experience of that period was very important to his future life. For one thing, he broadened his horizon. For another thing, he read many books earnestly. At the same time, he made friends with some men of insight. Especially, he got some helpful advice from several famous chiefs of

academy. The ten years when he was in Wu Changqin's office was the most important period to the formation of Zhang Jian's cultural character. First, he followed Wu Changqin to Deng Zhou, where he became able to understand the knowledge of hydrology and know the situation of watercourse of regulation through inspecting public sentiment and examining flood. This experience made him possess so much specialized knowledge and become the authority to speak on water conservation later. Second, the experience that he accompanied Wu Changqing to North Korea developed him the abilities of military strategy and raised his courage and wisdom. Last, he got to know more people, especially some famous political elites.

To people's surprise, after Zhang Jian got the honor of the Number one Scholar, he went back to his hometown to establish industry. At the beginning of

founding Dasheng Cotton Mill, he met enormous difficulties. The first difficulty was it was hard to attract businessman. The second was it was hard to rise from shares. The third difficulty was that money couldn't arrive after the operation of plant site. That the money was hard to turnover was the fourth difficulty. The fifth difficulty was that machine parts were hard to replace and maintain. When in the most difficult time of building factory, Zhang Jian didn't get supposed from others in a dilemma. He once paced back and forth at a bridge below electric lights every night, unable to find way out in the world. However, he conquered all the difficulties at last. Dasheng Cotton Mill began to get profits soon. Besides extending the scale of cotton mill, he also continued to invest new companys and went in for education, charity, social public welfare industry in a big way, which made Nantong a model county of

China in a short time. Therefore his dream of local self-government could be realized in Nantong. All the things mentioned above unceasingly strengthened Zhang Jian's culture character of tenaciousness and self-improvement.

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