

On the Natural Law Literature of Pre-Qin Period

Liguo Cui

College of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, China

Keywords: The natural law literature, Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism

Abstract: Based on Paul Tillich's theory of Ultimate Concern, this paper proposes that the natural law literature should be a branch in the research of pre-Qin literature. It also gives the natural law literature an overview of the research content, current situation and research significance. Although Chinese culture focuses on the human level from the origin, and has the rational factors developed in later generations, as creatures, Chinese people also has anxiety in the sense of survival and tension in the face of transcendence. Because of this, Confucianism, Taoism, Mohism, and literature appear focusing on the relationship between man and man, man and nature, man and god. The study of the natural law literature considers the uniqueness of Chinese traditional culture and the universality of the entire human spiritual civilization. At the same time, it is helpful to unify the scattered research of pre-Qin literature and opens up a new field for the research of pre-Qin literature.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the research of Chinese pre-Qin literature has shown a rising momentum, the number of the institutions and scholars has increased, and there have been many breakthroughs and progress in the breadth and depth of the research. Especially the newly unearthed numerous literature materials bring new academic growth points to the academic community. The use of interdisciplinary research theories and methods has also opened up some new prospects for pre-Qin literary research, broadening the scope and field of ancient literary research. The "natural law literature" described in this paper is a new attempt to adopt new materials and methods.

2. The Concept of the "Natural Law Literature"

At present, in the Chinese academic community, the research of the natural law thought is mainly concentrated in the fields of ancient Chinese history, thought, philosophy, and religion. The content is the exploration of transcendental entities represented by "god" and "rule" in the concepts of ancient Chinese. Although the research of pre-Qin literature belongs to ancient Chinese literature in terms of category. The content of the research is mainly the formation and change of the literary style, literary thought and its origin, literary theory and historical research, cultural composition and social form, chronological verification and text collation and annotate, foreign literature and excavated documents. There are very few monographs that combine pre-Qin literature with the natural law thought. So far, no scholar has specifically proposed the concept of the "natural law literature". However, in fact, the natural law thought and its transformation plays an extremely important and even decisive role in all aspects of pre-Qin literature. This is determined by the importance of the natural law thought itself. Therefore, it is necessary to separate the "natural law literature" from pre-Qin literature, and see it as an independent branch of pre-Qin literature, in order to highlight its importance and unique value.

In terms of the content in the natural law literature, since it deals with the issue of transcendent beings, it has some overlaps with the traditional concept of god and man, and also has some differences. The traditional view of god and man mainly studies the interaction between god and humans. Meanwhile, the natural law literature highlights the important influence of the natural law thought on literature, as well as the thinking and exploration of the ancient people's thoughts on the natural law in literature. From the perspective of the importance of the natural law literature, the

natural law thought involves the ultimate destination of a person's life and ideal. It is also the ultimate concern of what he cares and the meaning of his thoughts and actions. As the theologian Tillich said: "Faith is the attitude of the Ultimate Concern. Its content is of infinite importance to the life of the believers."^[1] The natural law thought is about the most fundamental problem, and it is the fundamental criterion of a person's thinking and way of act. This is true for a person, and it is the same for a nation and culture.

Just as most modern subjects are separated from philosophy, ancient Chinese literature and ideas are also separated from religious forms. Religious thinking and sacrificial etiquette are the matrix of literature, thought and philosophy in later generations. Like what Yingshi Yu commented on the system of rites and music, "Rites and music originated from fete, and fete was developed from the religious belief of witchcraft. Therefore, we may say that the early rites and music and witchcraft interact with each other; Rites and music is the appearance of witchcraft, and witchcraft is the internal motivation of the ritual music."^[2] This shows the influence of religion on literature.

3. The Research Content and the Current Situation of Natural Law Literature

3.1 Research Content

As the origin of Chinese literature, pre-Qin literature lasts more than eight hundred years, from the establishment of Shang Dynasty (BC 1046) to the fall of Qin Dynasty (BC 207). The natural law thought is obviously the most clear and coherent theme in such a long period of time with different literature forms and contents. It can be said that it has been throughout the history of pre-Qin literature, especially during the critical period of the change of historical events and the change of ideas in the pre-Qin period, the transformation of the natural law thought is particularly prominent and obvious in pre-Qin literature.

In Shang Dynasty, the oracle bone inscription as the earliest known writing in China had appeared in a relatively mature form. Accompanied by divination activities, the divination literature had also been created recorded by using the writing. There is no doubt that religious sacrifice activities and the influence of god on the present world are the only concerns. The importance of the natural law thought is self-evident. In the early Western Zhou Dynasty, the new destiny concept brought by the dynasty's replacement began to attach importance to the cultivation of the ruler's virtue. The rites and music system freed from the sacrificial etiquette laid a unique humanistic thought for Zhou Dynasty and even later China. The simple and solemn Jijin literature inscribed in bronze wine vases and the earliest Chinese classic Five Confucian Classics gradually formed in Zhou Dynasty also reflect this accordingly. During the Spring and Autumn Period(770-476bc), the traditional concept of the natural law thought was greatly weakened, and the situation of rites and music was getting worse, which prompted Confucius and Lao-zi to establish their respective ideological systems from the ethical and philosophical perspectives, which to some extent was the renewal and response to the old idea of the natural law thought. This formed the Confucian gentleman's personality and great sense of mission, and Taoists' aphorism style and sentence. The Warring States Period was famous for the contention of different schools of thought. Confucianism, Taoism and Mohism either emerged or further developed their views. The natural law thought formed its own distinctive literary texts and stylistic features. The Songs of Chu wrote by Qu Yuan was one of the most glorious chapters.

3.2 Current Situation

Moruo Guo 's Progress in Natural Law Thought in Pre-Qin^[3] that republished in 1935 is the earliest article to systematically discuss the pre-Qin natural law thought. This puts the study of the natural law thought into the eyes of modern scholars. Youlan Feng's History of Chinese Philosophy^[4] for the first time divided the god into five types: the god of nature, the god of dominance, the god of fate, the god of material, and the god of justice. According to the connotation of western theology, Peirong Fu 's The Theory of Nature in Confucianism and Taoism^[5] sets "god"

as five types: the god of domination, the god of creation, the god of execution, the god of revelation, and the god of judgment.

In terms of the word meaning, Sinian Fu's *Differentiation of the Ancient Precepts of Character and Fate* ^[6] counts and analyzes the words “character” and “fate” from the ancient oracle bone inscriptions of Shang and Zhou Dynasties to the pre-Qin literature, and discusses the ideas of pre-Qin from the perspective of their origins and evolution. From the three angles which are “man and god”, “man and man”, and “man and nature”, Xiang Liu's *Historical Hermeneutics of Chinese Traditional Values* ^[7] examines oracle bone inscriptions, inscriptions on ancient bronze objects of Shang and Zhou Dynasties, and other ancient writing materials, selects core vocabularies that represent traditional Chinese culture value concept, and analyzes the trajectory of the development and evolution of the word sources and meanings.

In terms of ideology, Fuguan Xu's *History of Chinese Humanity Theory · Pre-Qin* ^[8] uses inductive methods to explore the internal connection between thoughts. It believes that the Zhou culture developed from the Yin culture. The humane century in the spring and Autumn Period was centered on rites, which has no religious meanings. Fulin Chao's *Fate and Ethics: A Study of Pre-Qin Social Thought* ^[9] focuses on the three main issues in pre-Qin social thoughts: the development of fate thought, human norms, and the development of ideological spirit. It highlights the content of god and human, human and human, human nature and other aspects. Du Li's *Theory of Ancient Chinese Natural Law Thought* ^[10] uses Tillich's concept of “Ultimate Concern” to discuss the Confucian view of the natural law thought. It thinks the religious aspect is the most important characteristic of the natural law with divine meaning in Song Dynasty and the natural law with virtue meaning in Ming Dynasty. It is also the fundamental need of humans. Yingshi Yu's *On the Relationship of God and Man-The Exploration of the Origin of Ancient Chinese Thought* ^[11] uses Karl Theodor Jaspers's theory of Axial Age to study the origin of ancient Chinese thought, thinking that the breakthrough of the axis seems to be carried out in rites and music. In fact, the object is the witch culture behind it. Priests occupies a central position in the witch culture. The philosophers after the breakthrough is similar to the function and role of the priests. The philosophers beg for their own hearts and connect with the god, thus opening the way of China's introverted transcendence, and Yu called it the new nature and man in one.

In terms of themes, Shunhui Zhang's *Discussion on the Law of Zhou and Qin Dynasties* ^[12] expresses that the “law” in Zhou, Qin and Han Dynasties is the ruler's ways to strengthen the country and the way to govern the country. Zehou Li's *Tradition of the Witch History* ^[13] puts forward that the biggest secret of the ancient Chinese ideological history is that the basic characteristics of witches are directly rationalized through the “unity of witch and monarch” and “integration of politics and religion” and become the fundamental characteristics of the great tradition of Chinese thought. Lai Chen's *Ancient Religion and Ethics: Roots of Confucianism* ^[14] divides ancient Chinese thoughts and cultures into three stages: witching culture, sacrificial culture, and rites and music culture. *The World of Ancient Ideology and Culture-Religion, Ethics, and Social Thought in the spring and Autumn Period* ^[15] focuses on the continuity of culture and thought. On the one hand, the ideas of the spring and Autumn Period are regarded as the development of the Western Zhou rites and music system; On the other hand, this period is used as the background and forerunner of the numerous philosophers' era, which prepares the conditions for the emergence of numerous philosophers and hundred schools of thoughts.

In addition, there are many masterpieces focus on the natural law literature from different levels, such as Kai Zheng 's *Between Virtues and Rites-History of Thoughts of the Pre-Numerous Philosophers' Era and Taoist Metaphysics Research*, Delong Li 's *Textual Research on the Origin of the Concept of “Virtue” in the Pre-Qin Period*, Chun Wu 's *The Origin of Chinese Philosophy-The History of the Development and Formation of Ideas, Concepts, and Thoughts of the Pre-Numerous Philosophers' Era*, Weiming Du 's *On the Religiousness of Confucianism-A Modern Interpretation of The Doctrine of the Mean*, Schwartz 's *The World of Thought in Ancient China*, Fingarette's *Confucius-The Secular as Sacred*, Fuli Mou 's *The Origin of Chinese Thought*, Qingkun Yang 's *The*

Religion in Chinese Society-A Study of the Modern Social Function of Religion and Its Historical Factors and Zhuoyun Xu 's Spirit of Chinese Culture.

4. The Significance of the Study of the Natural Law Literature

4.1 It Helps to Understand the Origin, Formation and Development of Chinese Civilization More Clearly and Grasp the Thinking Characteristics and Spiritual Characteristics of the Entire Nation

Humans have started religious activities since the birth of the ancient times, and by the time of civilization, the entire society has revolved around sacrifices and worship. For example, the sacrifices of Shang Dynasty were held almost every day, which confirmed the truth of the saying “the most important thing for the country is sacrifice and military”. Although the transcendent beings in Chinese culture is different from the creator of the world in Western religions, anxiety about eternity and existence at the level of Ultimate Concern has become the subject in both cultures. The difference is that each nationality and culture have its own characteristics for the understanding of the transcendent beings, which determines the cultural and spiritual characteristics of the entire nationality from the origin.

4.2 It Provides a Main Line and Perspective for the Study of the History of Pre-Qin Literature, and Understands the Occurrence Process of Pre-Qin Literature

At present, pre-Qin literary studies have achieved remarkable achievements in various specific fields, but the entire research situation is in a state of scattered distribution. Scholars are still struggling to find a consistent way to penetrate the history of pre-Qin literature. Scholar Shan Li said: “When I read the pre-Qin documents, I have the feeling that there was only ‘local history’ but no ‘overall history’”^[16]. The perspective and approach adopted by the research of the natural law literature may be a possible attempt to provide another direction for the pre-Qin literature to seek a new narrative model that is expected to continue to expand and extend.

4.3 It Advances the Study of Oracle Inscription Literature which is the Source of Chinese Literature

In recent years, the call for rewriting the history of literature has become higher and higher. Many scholars in the academic community believe that the oracle bone inscription literature should be the source of Chinese literature^[17]. As the oracle inscription literature is dependent on the divination activities of Shang Dynasty, the religious belief component is the most important part. This is reflected in a series of aspects such as the purpose, significance, procedures, and recording methods of this activity. It can be said that it has been integrated with religious activities. This aspect of the study can only be returned to the scene of religious sacrifice activities during Shang Dynasty period, to restore the basic thinking and belief characteristics of the people at that time. To a certain extent, to study its literary status is to study its belief status.

4.4 It is Helpful to Expand the Research Path and Scope of the Study of Enormous Philosophers

The Confucianism, Taoism, and Mohism in the study of enormous philosophers not only appear earlier in time, but also represent three different levels of “law”: morality, metaphysics, and religion. They involve the relationship between men, the relationship between man and nature, and the relationship between man and transcendence. Among them, the relationship between man and god in the vertical dimension occupies the first place, which is also caused by the primacy of the problem dealt with by the relationship between man and god itself. Regardless of which relationship the study of enormous philosophers is talking about, the relationship between man and god is the most important part.

4.5 It is of Great Practical Significance to Re-Understand and Reposition Chinese Culture At the Present Stage

From the perspective of the entire community of human civilization, the study of the natural law literature helps to understand the situation, positioning and prospects of Chinese civilization in the current globalization; From the perspective of the rise and fall of Chinese traditional culture over the past 100 years, it is more conducive to pinpointing the current status of national culture. In the early 20th century, traditional culture became an obstacle that hindered China's acceptance of science and democracy. At the beginning of the 21st century, Chinese culture was welcomed and sought after both at home and abroad. The two different attitudes people were holding at the beginning of the two centuries reflects the different knowledge of traditional culture in the entire intellectual community. At this time, it has more favorable conditions and advantages than before to reconsider and evaluate Chinese culture from the source of culture again.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, the pre-Qin natural law literature is based on Tillich's "Ultimate Concern" and Jaspers's "Axial Period" theory, and it has clear research directions, topics and goals on the history of the natural law literature during the periods from Yin Shang to Qin Dynasty. The current research is not sufficient, and it is expected to continue to deepen and expand in the areas of pre-Qin literary science of origination, oracle inscription literature, and the study of enormous philosophers. In addition, the research has more important practical significance and value. It not only helps to trace the unique form of Chinese civilization in the beginning, but also helps to accurately grasp the current and future trends of Chinese culture.

References

- [1] Tillich, P., Cheng, Q. Dynamics of Faith, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2019, pp. 4.
- [2] Yu, Y.S. On the Occasion of God and Man: An Exploration of the Origin of Ancient Chinese Thought, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2014, pp.26.
- [3] Guo, M.R. The Complete Works of Moruo Guo Volume I · Research on Ancient Chinese Society, Bronze Age, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1982, pp. 121.
- [4] Feng, Y.L. History of Chinese Philosophy, Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2000, pp. 37.
- [5] Fu, P.R. The Theory of Nature in Confucianism and Taoism, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2010, pp. 25.
- [6] Fu, S.N. Differentiation of the Ancient Precepts of Character and Fate, Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2016, pp. 131.
- [7] Liu, X. Historical Hermeneutics of Chinese Traditional Values, Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2010, pp. 78.
- [8] Xu, F.G. History of Chinese Humanity Theory · Pre-Qin, Wuhan: Hubei People's Press, 2002, pp. 13.
- [9] Chao, F.L. Fate and Ethics: A Study of Pre-Qin Social Thought, Beijing: Beijing Normal University Publishing House, 2012, pp. 59.
- [10] Li, D. Theory of Ancient Chinese Natural Law Thought, Taipei: Blue Lamp Culture Business, 1992, pp. 211.
- [11] Yu, Y.S. On the Relationship of God and Man-The Exploration of the Origin of Ancient Chinese Thought, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2014, pp. 103.

- [12] Zhang, S.H. Discussion on the Law of Zhou and Qin Dynasties, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1982, pp.54.
- [13] Li, Z.H. Tradition of the Witch History, Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2012, pp. 271.
- [14] Chen, L. Ancient Religion and Ethics: Roots of Confucianism, First Version, Beijing: Peking University Press, 2017, pp. 95.
- [15] Chen, L. The World of Ancient Thought and Culture: Religion, Ethics and Social Thought in the Spring and Autumn Period (First Version), Beijing: Peking University Press, 2017, pp. 13.
- [16] Li, S. Achievements and Problems of the Research on the History of Literature of Pre-Qin Dynasty. Journal of Hubei University (Philosophy and Social Science). no.6, pp.4, 2001.
- [17] Zhan, F.R. Pre-Qin Literature Should be Repositioned. Guangming Daily, vol.11, no. 25, pp.7, 2016.