



# Shamanism and Confucianism Interaction in Ancient Society from the Perspective of Intrinsic Control

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**How to cite this paper:** Ye, Z. (2023) Shamanism and Confucianism Interaction in Ancient Society from the Perspective of Intrinsic Control. *Open Access Library Journal*, 10: e9619.  
<https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1109619>

**Received:** November 26, 2022

**Accepted:** April 20, 2023

**Published:** April 23, 2023

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## Abstract

Intrinsic control, as a form of social control, played an important role in the integration of ancient society, embodying the Confucian “ethics” and the primitive “witchcraft”. “Ethics” affects all aspects of people’s lives in civilized areas. “Witchcraft”, on the other hand, is to maintain the normal functioning of society by integrating into people’s lives in a place where it is free from imperial power. The two ideologies, mutually reinforcing each other, have been crucial for intrinsic control, showing a trend of etiquette and custom interaction and injecting vitality into the continuous development of Chinese culture.

## Subject Areas

Culture, Sociology

## Keywords

Intrinsic Control, Ethics, Witchcraft

## 1. Introduction

Being a form of social control, intrinsic control refers to the control mechanism that social culture establishes in its members through various influences. ([1], p. 232) In the pre-industrial society or the society with strong religious consciousness, intrinsic control achieves the purpose of social governance with the help of the belief in supernatural forces. Intrinsic control can not only resort to the power of religion but also be internalized into people’s psychological world through ethical and moral standards, thus, restraining people’s behavior.

Since modern times, the definition of culture has been controversial in aca-

democratic circles. At the very beginning, Tylor defined culture in the following way: culture is a complex whole, which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. [2] Subsequently, many scholars have enriched the definition of culture. Some anthropologists simply regarded culture as the thinking, behavior, organizational mode, and products that people practice and inherit in life. And it is an organic, orderly and dynamic complex whole. ([1], p. 24) There are roughly three perspectives in the understanding of the concept of culture in the domestic academic community. First, the definition of the classification of culture. For instance, the parallel dichotomy (material culture and spiritual culture), the trichotomy (material culture, spiritual culture and institutional culture), and so on. The second is the definition of the sum of cultural products in a broad sense. For example, “culture is humanization”, or “culture is the objectification of human nature”. The third is the definition of cultural concepts from a certain perspective. To be specific, culture is defined as “a framework” or “a set of behavioral systems”. [3]

Inspired by the theory of intrinsic control, the author regards the culture of “Confucianism” and “Shamanism in ancient Chinese society as an ideology of social governance from the perspective of functionalism. To be specific, “Confucianism” is represented by “ethics”, namely, “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” which is proposed and defended by the feudal ruling class in ancient dynasties. “Shamanism” specifically refers to “witchcraft”, that is, the science in primitive society. [4] Anthropologists have summarized “witchcraft” as a series of actions that people fantasize about exerting influence or control over objects by supernatural forces so as to achieve certain goals. In ancient Chinese society, “ethics” and “witchcraft”, as ideological means of social governance, play their roles in different regions. “Ethics” is applied for moral discipline in regions within the “imperial power”<sup>1</sup>, while “witchcraft” is applied in regions free from “imperial power”, specifically, the power of religious beliefs in the southern minority areas in this paper.

## 2. Intrinsic Control of “Ethics”

Chinese society has been an ethical society since ancient times, which is embodied in the fact that “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” has become the moral norm that regulates people’s life. “Three Cardinal Guides” refer to “ruler guides subject, father guides son and husband guides wife” and “Five Constant Virtues” refer to “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faith”. All this is the ethical and moral system of ancient Chinese agricultural society, and the products of the patriarchal clan system and patriarchal hierarchy. When dealing with the relationship between the monarch and the subjects, the subjects must respect and obey the monarch and serve him faithfully; when

<sup>1</sup>“Emperorization” or “imperial powering” refers to the moral governance and ideologization of the emperor, and the areas within “emperorization” targets the areas under the actual governance of imperial power.

dealing with the relationship between father and children, children must respect and obey their father and do their filial duty for him; when dealing with the relationship between husband and wife, the wife must respect and obey her husband and devote herself to him. “Three Cardinal Guides” teach people to conform to the requirements of loyalty, filial piety and obedience, that is, subjects respect the monarch, children serve relatives and wives obey their husbands. “Five Constant Virtues” teach people to adhere to the principles of “benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faith”, so as to possess these virtues and achieve the goals set forth in the “Three Cardinal Guides”. “Benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faith” are the core of Confucianism and the basic criterion for dealing with interpersonal relationships. Confucius regards “benevolence” as the highest criterion, standard and mode of social politics and ethics. [4] The above five virtues provide a complete moral system network for ancient Chinese society to achieve the purpose of loyalty, filial piety and obedience. In daily life, people identify and internalize the “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues”, and put them into practice.

Dong Zhongshu (179BC-164BC), a Confucian scholar in the Western Han Dynasty, on the basis of the theory of “Heaven-man Induction”, put forward “three cardinal guides can be found in heaven” in his work *ChunqiuFanluJiyi*, a Confucian classic. In accordance with *The Biography of Dong Zhongshu, The Book of Han*, “the way of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and faith should be learned by the monarch.” Later, at the Baihuguan Conference, the “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” were the most authoritative and universal ethics in feudal society for more than a thousand years. [5] It is true that its formation was not finished overnight, instead a long process of innovation and evolution. It was conceived in the Pre-Qin Dynasty and formed in the Han Dynasty. Then, the ethical and moral concepts of “affinity”, “respect” and “sages”, advocated by Confucius and Mencius, were influenced by the theory of Yin and Yang in the *Book of Changes*, together with Heaven, Taoism, and the utilitarian concept of Legalist School. It was continuously depressed in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties as well as Sui and Tang Dynasties, which is not only reflected in the theoretical research but also in the social, political and ethical life. It was strengthening, growing and flourishing in Song, Yuan and Ming Dynasties. [6] During this period, there was a structural transformation from “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” to “Si De Wu Lun” (four virtues and five ethics in ancient China). In Song Dynasty, “Si De” referred to “benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom” while “faith” was included in “Wu Lun”. “Loyalty, filial piety, integrity, fraternal love, and faith” were five practical domains of ethics. [7] Among them, Confucian Scholar Zhu Xi constructed the universe ontology with “Li” as the core, and believed that “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” should be the highest moral standards that the society abides by and that it is immortal. The essence is to ethicalize and popularize the traditional guides and virtues, thus, strengthening the imperial power. ([8], p. 184)

“Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues”, enjoying the moral dominance, has become the norm for ordinary scholars to regulate their own behaviors. After the Confucian classics became the main tool for rulers to recruit scholars, ordinary scholars pursued the study of the Confucian classics, eager to succeed in the imperial examination. In the process of “pursuing to be an official”, the Confucian classics were constantly internalized and manifested in the external behavior of those scholars, namely the pursuit of the ideal of “loyalty to the emperor” and “patriotism”. In this process, not only the scholars can be influenced by internalization, ordinary people are also inspired invisibly and it is especially true in the face of national peril. As Scholar Gu Yanwu said “the rise and fall of a nation rests with every one of its citizen”. Scholar Wen Tianxiang stated “Who can avert his death since time immemorial? Let my heart remain true to shine in the annals.” These examples are the best portrayal of “ruler guides subject”. To this day, “patriotism, honesty and friendship” among the core values of socialism are derived from “benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, faith”.

Throughout its evolution and development, “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” were in the phase of inheritance and promotion of the old theory from the Qin and Han Dynasties to the Song and Yuan Dynasties. To this day, being an indispensable part of the Chinese ethical system, “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” serve as moral norms that guide people to live in an orderly manner, behave courteously, and emphasize loyalty and filial piety. This weaves an invisible web of rules in a certain sense, that is, to regulate the basic values of people’s social life. At the same time, the Confucian classics corresponding to the “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” constitute the theoretical basis of its transcendence. In addition, they implement to the perfection of individual personality in the outlook on values and life. Together, they form an internalized control system that combines universality and particularity, metaphysics and metaphysics, group order and individual conceding, which closely conforms to the order of the autocratic monarchy hierarchical society based on the traditional Chinese family-based standard. In this sense, the “Three Cardinal Guides and Five Constant Virtues” establish the basic values of the society deep in people’s minds and further guide their daily life. Although “Three Cardinal Principles and Five Constant Virtues” face criticism, we should recognize its value, too.

### **3. Intrinsic Control of Shamanism**

Witchcraft stems from tribes of Shun Emperor in Pre-Qin period. At that time, there were shreds of evidence of witchcraft. Broadly, witchcraft includes methods for healing, cursing, divination, praying for rain, praying for blessings, avoiding disasters, clarifying taboos and so on. Narrowly, witchcraft refers to the Shaman’s séance especially being possessed so as to act in the role of immortals. In addition, in accordance with the nature of witchcraft, witchcraft can be di-

vided into two categories: black witchcraft and white witchcraft. What's more from the perspective of the means of witchcraft, witchcraft can be classified into two types, one is imitative magic or imitative witchcraft, the other is contagious magic or contagious witchcraft. The former one is to invoke good fortune or cause disaster with similar things as substitutes, while the latter refers to the use of a part of things or things associated with the thing to seek good fortune. ([9], p. 537) Wang Yi, a scholar in East Han Dynasty (25AD-220AD) wrote a preface to *The Nine Songs*, saying that in the south of Chu Kingdom, and between Yuan (today's Guizhou Province) and Xiang (today's Hunan Province), natives believed in ghosts and built numerous temples, indicating that in Southern Region and Chu Kingdom in particular worship shaman, the new ghosts and immortals. *Yue Jue Shu-Yue Jue Wai Zhuan Ji Di Zhuan* says "Wushan is where the Shamans buried" and "in Jiangdong (the Eastern Part of Yangtze River in ancient China), the decedents of locals are eagerly learning to be shamans." All this shows that Shamanism is booming there and that ghosts and immortals worship contributes to the prevalence of witchcraft. Zhu Xi (1130AD-1200AD), the Confucian scholar in Song Dynasty wrote in his book *Chu Ci Ji Zhu*, locals' sacrifice will be presided by Shaman, so ghosts and immortals are closely linked to Shaman.

In the southern ethnic minority areas away from imperial power, Shamanism is in a dominant position in terms of intrinsic control. "Worshiping shaman and believing in ghosts" has become a synonym for the religious beliefs of southern ethnic minorities. There is no shortage of shadows of "witchcraft" in the life of southern ethnic minorities. According to *The Biography of Liu Yuxi, Old Book of Tang*, Liu Yuxi (772AD-842AD), a poet in the Tang Dynasty saw "locals are all converted to Shamanism" in his ten-year-stay in Langzhou (a county in Hunan Province). Yuan Zhen (779AD-831AD), a poet in Tang Dynasty too, had recorded "There is a trend for worshiping spirits and immortals in those regions" And "locals are united for worshipping regardless of immortals and ghosts or shaman" in *Yuan Shi Chang Qing Ji: Volume III*. Influenced by shamanism, people would resort to witchcraft when they were sick. *The History of Song: Man Yi IV* recorded "people who suffered from diseases and had no access to medicine would hit the bronze drum and copper gong as sacrifice to worship immortals". Li Tiaoyuan, in *Nan Yue Bi Ji: Volume I*, recorded "worshiping shaman in Yong'an (a county in Henan Province) is common. When people are sick, they tell their Bazi or birthday horoscopes to shamans and seek help. When a shaman arrives, he would tap an egg and then look at the egg white and yogurt to figure out the patients' physical condition". Tan Cui (1725AD-1801AD), a scholar in Qing Dynasty said in his *Dian Hai Yu Heng Zhi* "White Yi (an ancient ethnic minority group) believes in ghosts and practices witchcraft. Female White Yi would measure their skirts with hands or throw wheat in the water to observe its floating and sinking as divination." The custom of begging immortals to expel diseases is common in the southern ethnic minority region ([10], p. 14223),

from which, it can be inferred that divination and witchcraft were significant at that time. There is an egg divining (there were two types of Ji Bu, or divinations, namely, cock-bone divining, and egg divining) in the funeral, ([11], p. 314) that is, to search the location of the grave. Fan Chengda, Hu Qiwang, and Qin Guangguang, three scholars of Song Dynasty (1127AD-1279AD) in their joint work *Gui Hai Yu Heng Zhi Ji Yi Jiao Zhu* described “Li (an ethnic minority group in today’s Hainan Province) moves forward and then throws an egg into the ground and if the egg is not cracked, then, it is the auspicious cave.” ([12], p. 220) Tian Wen (1635AD-1704AD), a scholar in Qing Dynasty, recorded in *The Qianshu: Volume I*, “Hmong searches for cave by throwing an egg into the ground, and if the egg doesn’t break, then, this place is an auspicious cave.”

Shamanism was prevalent in southern ethnic minority areas, so often those who practiced witchcraft had not only religious power but also a certain amount of secular power, usually two powers together. ([12], p. 202) According to *Gui Hai Yu Heng Zhi Ji Yi Jiao Zhu*, “the divination of Liao (an ethnic minority group in ancient China) at the beginning of a year proves that the custom indicates a chief is a person who gathers the power of administration and religion”. Huang Jianming, a professor of the Academy for Research on Chinese Ethnic Minority Languages at the Minzu University of China, mentioned, in the ancient Yi minority society (Yi was called Luoluo before Yuan Dynasty), only the person who has power in sacrifices can he master the tribal power. The man in charge of sacrifices is the “ghost sovereign”, the chief shall be a “ghost sovereign” ([13], p. 65). As a result, the combination of powers, together with the fact that witchcraft can control the mass, entitles the chief to have access to excessive powers, leading to a huge problem for the ancient dynasties to deal with ethnic relations. Take the Zhuohuangui, or Catch the Yellow Ghost (a ceremonious ritual in ancient to expel diseases, floods, and so on) as an example, written in *The History of Song: Man Yi I*, “In Jizhou (a county in today’s Jiangxi Province) shaman and his brothers all practiced the witchcraft, traveled to Changning (a county in today’s Hunan Province) and entered and exited streams and caves, luring hundreds of people to steal salt, kill officials and troops, and then escape to hide in caves”. ([10], p. 14183) In addition, the “Nuo opera”, which was prevalent in the southern region, is a religious ritual developed by Shaman on the basis of “saman dance”, which was originally used to eliminate epidemic ghosts, and then gradually developed into a popular opera. Lu You (1125AD-1210AD), a scholar and official in Song Dynasty recorded in his *Miscellaneous Notes from Laoxue Studio* “in Guilinfu (today’s Guilin City, Jiangxi Province) there was a group of people wearing masks. People, young and old, male or female all were wearing different masks. It’s beyond comparison even among other ethnic minority groups.” Therefore, it’s fair to say that Nuo opera has been famous nationwide since ancient times.

Many witchcrafts work through taboos, that is, some restrictions on social behavior and belief rituals in witchcraft to restrict people’s ideas and practices. Fraser argued “It is to be observed that the system of sympathetic magic is not

merely composed of positive precepts; it comprises a very large number of negative precepts, that is, prohibitions. It tells you not merely what to do, but also what to leave undone. The positive precepts are charms: the negative precepts are taboos.” ([14], p. 31) The basis of taboo is the uncertainty of people of the unknown fields of nature and spiritual world. Furthermore, people communicate through fantasy, prayer and other mysterious ways to invoke the gods or immortals to have a certain influence on the development process of specific people and things. It originates from the “almighty worship” and “polytheism” in our folk beliefs. It does not have a fixed organizational structure like religious churches, sects or complete ethical and philosophical system, and neither does it require believers to be equipped with religious consciousness like pious religious believers. However, it is so widespread in witchcraft that it regulates people’s behavior and social order.

Shamanism is a kind of primitive religion. ([15], p. 461) The emotional experiences aroused by religious beliefs and rituals enable believers to gain inner peace and liberation. After long-term accumulation, they have gradually penetrated and transformed into national emotions, psychological structures and folk customs, thus, being an integral part of national culture. ([15], p. 456) It is apparent that shamanism has become an unseparated part of the life of ethnic minorities in the south, subtly affecting their daily lives, behaviors, medicine, funeral customs, and other aspects. In regions free from imperial power, Shamanism has complemented ethics so as to constrain and guide people’s lives.

#### 4. Conclusions

In ancient Chinese society, different from Shamanism, Confucianism, yet, realizes the role of social governance with realistic rationality and moral power. However, its role was limited in certain regions or classes. In the civilized places where Confucianism prevails, Confucianism, in the form of “ethics”, has become an important means to realize the intrinsic control of the society and a means for the feudal ruling class to invisibly maintain the social order. In remote and underdeveloped ethnic minority areas, however, “witchcraft” has become an approach to realize social intrinsic control. This kind of primitive science and religion has gradually integrated into the daily life of local people, being an inseparable part of their lives. From the perspective of the ideology and its status quo, Confucianism has not become the only path for social governance. Confucians as well as Shamans in different genres have different roles, the former is elected to imperial officials to host large-scale ritual activities and the latter mostly performs witchcraft for the ordinary people to make a living. [16]

In general, “ethics” and “witchcraft” are both manifestations of culture. The former is based on social reality, while the latter focus on religious beliefs. Yet, the two are playing their roles in social governance. In accordance with Scholar Xu Shen’s definition of Confucianism, “Confucians, featuring with softness, are diviners” Softness is its major characteristic in terms of its form, namely, it is not

embedded in the society with rigid policies. On the contrary, it, as an important means of social governance, acts on the members of the society with ideological and cultural power. Therefore, from the perspective of intrinsic control, Confucianism and Shamanism, reinforcing each other, formed a joint mechanism. As a result, many important contents of Confucianism came from the folk or existed in folk ritual activities explicitly or implicitly. At the same time, various folk beliefs and customs have also been influenced by national etiquette norms. In this process of mutual integration, there is a trend of interaction between etiquette and customs, which is the reason why Chinese culture can achieve continuous development with constant innovations.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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